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Summary

Report on community resilience to radicalisation and violent extremism

The purpose of the report is to explore the resources and efforts of selected Danish local communities to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism. The report raises the following questions: Which local actors contribute to preventing, containing, and countering radicalisation and violent extremism, and how? How can community resilience be strengthened?

The report combines key findings from the empirically based literature on radicalisation and extremism in a Danish context with key findings from literature on community resilience. Based on the literature review, qualitative interviews focusing on resilience were conducted in selected local communities, which have been affected by radical and/or militant Islamism. Furthermore, a small number of interviews with a focus on the resilience to right-wing extremism were carried out.

Radicalisation and violent extremism

Radicalisation is generally understood as an individual and complex process towards extremist ideology or actions, whereby a person increasingly come to accept undemocratic methods or violent means to achieve social change. There is not, however, one agreed definition, nor is there a definite answer to the question of why individuals or groups become radicalised or of specific causal relationships between factors leading to radicalisation.

As the literature shows, it is essential to differentiate between radical thinking (ideology) and radical actions (violent radicalisation). There is not always a link between extremist thinking and extremist behaviour, and even though ideological radicalisation may have a polarising effect and create insecurity in local communities, it does not necessarily in itself constitute a security threat.

The literature *does* highlight certain general patterns and categories that affect upon radicalisation. These patterns and categories have, in this report, been divided into two subcategories; background factors that may create a fertile ground for radicalisation and

extremism, and catalysts that can trigger or reinforce an extremist involvement. In addition, the literature provides some indications as to how and where the process of radicalisation may occur.

The most significant background factor for radical and/or militant Islamist groups identified in the literature is the sense of marginalisation. The public debate on immigration and foreign policy issues as well as international events and conflicts abroad also seem to play important parts in motivating and legitimising radicalisation and extremism. This follows a widespread notion among radicalised groups and individuals that Islam and Muslims are oppressed, marginalised, and targeted in and by Western countries.

In relation to right-wing and left-wing extremism, the literature identifies the sense of political injustice as the most significant background factor leading to radicalisation.

The literature further indicates that ideology and religion do not typically in themselves cause radicalisation and extremism, but are used in the way that extremist groups rationalise their cause and actions. Extremism is explained as a desire to distance oneself from society or to do something about a situation that is perceived as being unfair.

Following on from this, in terms of catalysts, the most striking finding is that radicalisation frequently begins with a fascination with violence or a quest for thrills and excitement. The literature also shows that one of the dominant factors and catalysts of radicalisation processes is a search for group identity and a sense of community and belonging.

The literature further indicates that although top-down recruitment may occur, radicalisation more often occurs through bottom-up processes, where individuals seek out extremist ideologies and communities or are introduced to extremism through their social networks.

Community resilience

Radicalisation and violent extremism are international phenomena that unfold across national borders and in social fora on the Internet. However, the negative consequences in the shape of, for instance, polarisation, insecurity, and violence manifest themselves locally. Local communities are not simply passive arenas or victims of extremism. Even communities that, in the public debate, are portrayed as deprived contain skills and social resources that are valuable in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the concept of community resilience as a way for modern society to counter complex and dynamic threats. Local communities have in this context, by many, been identified as key players in the creation of safety and security. International research has explored the conditions under which communities show resilience to natural and man-made disasters, poverty, and crime.

However, the potential of community resilience in countering radicalisation is currently an under-researched topic. Studying the ways in which communities can assist in addressing the growing complexity of the challenges related to radicalisation and violent extremism is therefore opportune. It is essential to focus on the social resources available in local communities where authorities, such as law enforcement agencies, neither can nor shall always show a strong presence. Central authorities are not necessarily the best placed to handle all the complex and dynamic threats and definitely not to set in place individually tailored solutions on the local level. Local communities are assumed to have a better chance to capture, understand, and respond to the kind of challenges and problems that are most prominent in that specific community.

Drawing upon relevant literature on the topic, this report describes how a local community, in this context, should be understood as a distinct, interdependent group of interacting and intertwined human, natural, social, and economic structures, including actors such as families, voluntary associations, religious communities, local businesses, and local authorities. At the same time, the local community's resilience to radicalisation and extremism is seen as reliant on the actors' common capital and resources, public for a, and processes, as well as common ability and capacity, contributing to prevent, contain, and counter radicalisation and extremism, or to their potential to do so.

According to the report, the potential of community resilience to radicalisation is based on the degree to which the following factors are present:

Capital and common resources	Fora and processes	Ability and capacity
Economic capital Human capital Social capital Trust Common values Common identity	Existence and degree of involvement in voluntary associations Closeness and reciprocity of interaction in networks Communication channels and streams Discussion, negotiation, and decision-making fora	The ability to build a common understanding of problems The ability to achieve consensus and to act collectively The ability of critical reflection and proactive actions Creativity

Building upon the report’s research findings, community resilience to radicalisation and violent extremism ideally looks as follows:

Community resilience to radicalisation and violent extremism:
<i>The actors of a resilient community are willing and able to engage in discussions about issues that may be perceived as sensitive, including extremism, radicalisation, international conflicts, crime, and the experience of social deprivation.</i>
<i>Local authorities are sensitive to local circumstances by adopting a non-discriminatory approach to people and problems, rather than acting in a way that confirms the extremist narrative that separates people into "us" vs. "them".</i>
<i>The actors of a resilient community are able to identify common interests, for example young people's well-being, in spite of the presence of political, ideological, and religious differences.</i>
<i>Resilient communities organise various charity and fundraising activities, in addition to debates and awareness events to, for instance, respond to and assist the victims of international conflicts. These activities and events stand in contrast to radical and</i>

extremist voices that maintain that violent responses to the world's problems are the only option.

The actors of a strong local community demonstrate the ability and willingness to acknowledge, understand, and approach individuals who are vulnerable to radicalisation, and to provide them with alternatives to violent extremism.

Resilient communities distance themselves from extremist actions and views without distancing themselves from the people who hold these views – because otherwise, they might be pushed further into extremism.

Resilient communities devise and implement new and alternative solutions aimed at keeping violent extremists in check and at preventing young people from being drawn towards extremist circles, if existing solutions prove inadequate.

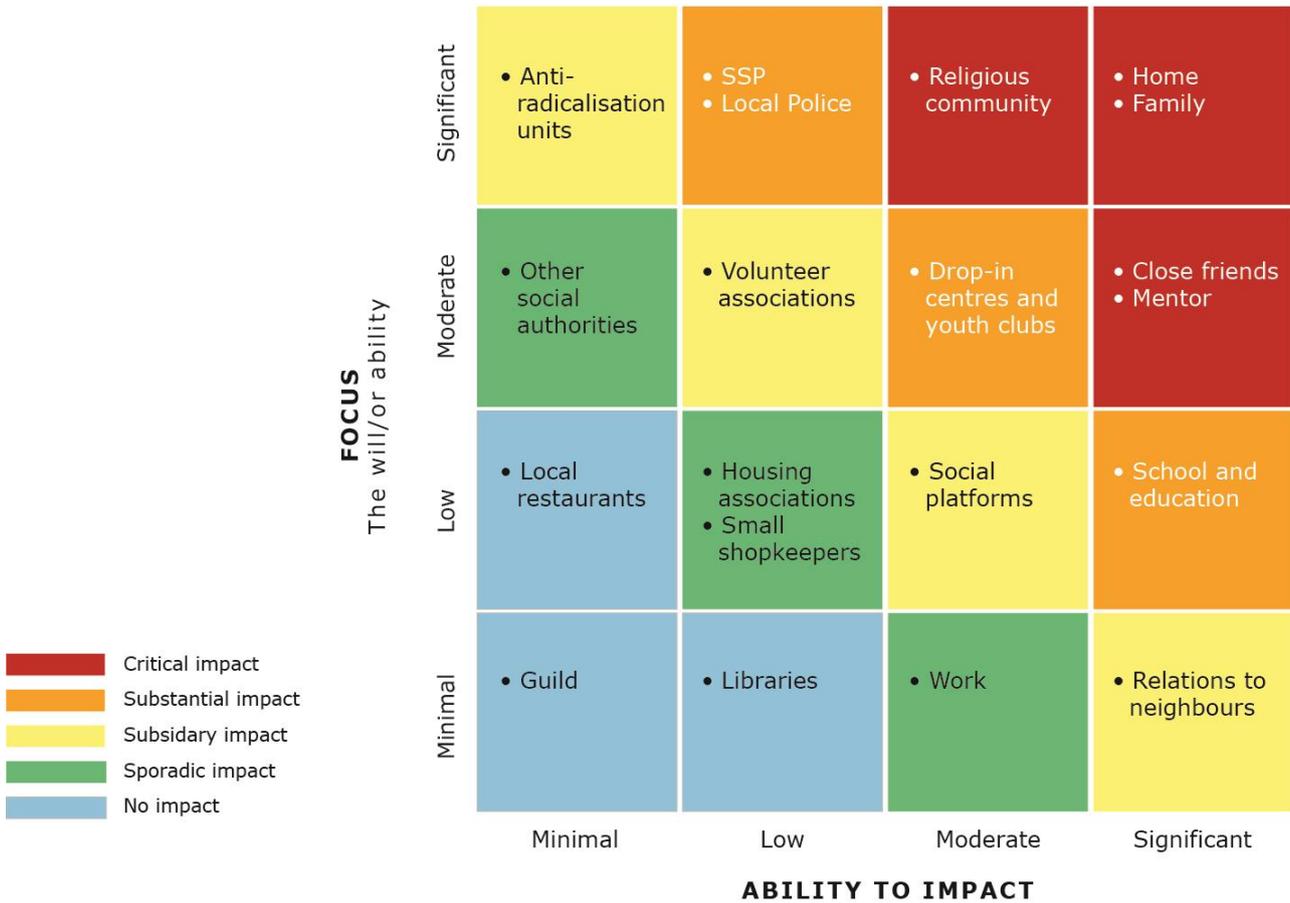
The ideals above have been formulated by comparing themes from the literature on community resilience with knowledge on radicalisation and extremism. It is not a scientific or final model, but rather a framework that can inspire concrete initiatives and form the basis for further research.

Interviews and Analysis

39 interviews conducted for the purpose of this report have explored which local community actors currently play important roles in relation to preventing, containing, and countering radicalisation, in addition to exploring who could potentially contribute further.

Based on the data from the interviews, a tentative resilience model has been established. The model illustrates the actors' focus as well as their willingness and ability to handle issues related to radicalisation and violent extremism, in conjunction with how great an impact they appear to have on individuals and groups, who are attracted to extremist ideologies and networks.

Resilience model:



Overall, as illustrated in the resilience model, the report highlights that a multiplicity of actors, fora, processes, and activities contribute (or potentially could contribute) to community resilience to radicalisation and violent extremism. There is every reason to think in broader terms than simply focusing on actors such as authorities and religious communities – actors who are otherwise typically at the centre of public debates about preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism.

The fact that there is a great variety of actors in the resilience model illustrates the potential that a diverse and engaged local community holds. When one part of the local community fails, another part may be able to follow up and handle the issue, provided that the necessary trust and local cohesion is present in the local community. The fact that Denmark, despite the massive presence of extremist propaganda and extremist fora on the Internet and in the social media, has experienced relatively few acts of terrorism, can hardly be attributed solely to solid intelligence work, but also to local preventive efforts.

The data from the interviews particularly reveal that strong families are important for resilience to radicalisation. However, in cases where the social resources of the family are insufficient, mutual trust and community networks can, to some extent, compensate – if there is enough trust and mutual confidence for people to reach out and ask for help. An active civil society with wide participation in various associations is important for the development of trust and strong social networks.

The actors marked in red in the resilience model appear to play a crucial role to community resilience. The question of whether, when, why, and how they contribute to preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism should be at the centre of national and local discussions and debates. The actors and factors – for instance school and education as well as informal local relations - which have significant impact but minimal or low focus on issues surrounding radicalisation are of particular interest as they represent a potential that could contribute to stronger local resilience to radicalisation and violent extremism.

A key finding is that the contribution of local authorities to resilience is dependent upon whether they manage to build ties and work closely with members of the communities and thereby establish trust and create opportunities for influence. Local knowledge, (cultural) sensitivity, continuity, and creative problem solving are also found to be essential contributions to resilience.

The main emphasis of the report is on resilience to radical and/or militant Islamism, but the report also looks at resilience to other forms of extremism. A smaller number of interviews were conducted with a focus on resilience to right-wing extremism. The interviews indicate that although there are variations when you look at both radicalisation and at the actors and factors that contribute most to resilience, there is also a great deal of overlap. For instance, actors including families, local networks, and government representatives with “a human face” are seen as vital to the resilience to both radical and/or militant Islamism and to right-wing extremism.

Conclusions and recommendations

The report explores local community resilience through a literature review and analysis as well as through exploratory interviews. It provides a new perspective on resilience and prevention with a focus on local actors. It provides an insight into who and what contribute to preventing, containing, and countering radicalisation and violent extremism in local Danish communities. That does not, however, mean that it is possible to draw firm conclusions with clear and unambiguous causality between problem and solution, cause, and effect. One should also be cautious about generalising from the local communities in the study to other local communities.

There are no simple solutions to create community resilience. It is not something that can just be implemented from above through government action plans or policy initiatives. Rather, networks, trust, and confidence grow through continuous positive interaction and support. Thus, the report does not come with a quick-fix on how to achieve community resilience to radicalisation and extremism. The report contains insights that can serve to refine national and local debates on radicalisation and violent extremism, and which can inspire new practices and initiatives to create proactive problem solving towards safety and security in Denmark.

The main recommendations are:

That the anti-radicalisation efforts in Denmark to a greater extent support and involve actors and activities from the civil society and local communities.

That the focus in national debates about radicalisation and violent extremism to a greater extent is put on existing local resources and initiatives. This would promote a more positive discourse in relation to so-called "deprived" areas and it would mean that local communities across the country could be inspired by each other.

That efforts are made locally to make it easier and more legitimate to talk about difficult and sensitive topics, like radicalisation, so that they are no longer taboo and individuals increasingly feel that they can ask for help when faced with difficult situations. Local actors with status and influence should take the lead in this process, so that the collective social resources can be brought into play and to some extent compensate where individual resources are insufficient or absent.

That the knowledge and expertise of local authorities and law enforcement on, for instance, warning signs/indications and preventive measures are more widely shared with the civil society and local community actors for whom they are relevant.

That there is focus on the inclusion of young people in positive community relations and social groups, particularly in schools, youth clubs, and associations. When young people deviate from the social norm and cause problems or overstep boundaries, it is essential that their actions are properly addressed and dealt with, but that the person him/herself is not marginalised or excluded.

That research is undertaken to explore why people involved in extremist networks typically neither are nor have been active in voluntary associations, which could otherwise very well serve as a positive social frame and network and as a bulwark against extremism.

That a focus is maintained on how and when mentors most effectively manage to prevent that young people come under the influence of extremist ideas or networks.

That research is undertaken to explore how the use of the Internet and social platforms potentially could contribute to resilience in a local community context.

That the moderate Islamic religious communities and Imams do not remain inside the mosques, but more proactively inform about Islam in order to create a qualified alternative to extremist voices. However, it is also essential that religion is not "pushed" upon people who are not searching for religious belonging or insight.

That authorities, organisations, and institutions in direct contact with local citizens on issues related to radicalisation and extremism, strengthen their effort to be more present and visible in their local communities, so that mutual trust and understanding can gradually develop.

That local authorities and politicians together with civil society and the media work to establish and increase communication and dialogue about issues related to

radicalisation and extremism and to strengthen local fora and processes in that context.

That national policies, laws, and regulations leave room for local actors to think innovatively, based upon the understanding that there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution to radicalization and extremism. There can be great variety in cases, and it is essential that there is room for case by case navigation.

Way ahead

The report has revealed both challenges and problems, but it has also uncovered positive and constructive local activities and resources that have a significant impact upon community resilience to radicalisation and violent extremism. A stronger focus on these resources and initiatives in a national debate that is otherwise largely problem-oriented would be likely to create an exchange of experiences between local communities as well as contribute to a more balanced perception of both the potential and actual resources of so-called "deprived" areas.

Radicalisation and violent extremism are complex and dynamic phenomena and so are their effects on the sense of safety and security in local communities as well as the potential that these local communities hold for preventing, containing, and countering radicalisation and extremism. This report has identified a number of areas that require further attention.

One of these areas is online radicalisation. While there is a general perception that the Internet plays a significant role in relation to radicalisation, the report has not identified the existence of a focus on how resilience to radicalisation on the Internet can be strengthened. Using the Internet in a positive way to create resilience is particularly acute because terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State, use the Internet very proactively for their propaganda. While community resilience typically largely depends on the ability to detect changes in behaviour, such as habits and acquaintances, online radicalisation may not necessarily result in any obvious behavioural change. Because of that, it is necessary that, for instance, that parents and teachers follow the young person's activities online as closely as possible, even though this is neither a simple nor an uncontroversial task. Furthermore, it should be considered how the Internet can be used

more proactively towards creating resilience to radicalisation, that is, how the Internet can be used to reach out to and communicate with young people.

Building upon this research, it may also be worth exploring the way in which local communities, in addition to creating resilience, may also proactively assist in the rehabilitation of young people who have been out of the local community because of, for example, psychiatric treatment, a prison stay, or a visit to a conflict zone for fighting. The rehabilitation of young people poses a number of challenges to a local community and to the young person who must redefine what it means to be part of everyday life and a member of a community.

Radicalisation may occur over a short or a long time span. The process may be particularly short for individuals who have already committed violent crime because violence is already part of their lives. This kind of "turbo radicalisation" entails a number of specific challenges to both authorities and civil society, as it can be difficult to identify signs of radicalisation in time. Early response and intervention may therefore be particularly essential – but hard – in these cases. Further research needs to be conducted into receptivity and indicators of "turbo radicalisation" in order to improve and inform preventive measures towards this kind of radicalisation.

Many initiatives have already been launched in order to strengthen preventive efforts, and more will undoubtedly follow in the coming years. In this regard, it would be useful to assess to which extent initiatives in other areas, such as crime prevention and social housing that are not specifically aimed at preventing radicalisation and violent extremism, may contribute to a strong common approach to creating local resilience.

The increased focus on the development and implementation of initiatives as part of the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism has also increased the need for knowledge about the successes and failures of prior and existing initiatives through either monitoring or evaluation. This is not an easy task, but it is important for the creation of trust and confidence in the actual effects of the initiatives. This is relevant for the people prioritising the resources to be spent on anti-radicalisation and related issues, for the people working with the issues on a daily basis, and for the residents in the local communities.

The challenges that Denmark currently faces in relation to radicalisation, violent extremism, and terrorism are complex, and they cannot be handled by law enforcement agencies alone. The mobilisation of the resources in civil society and local communities is crucial. Strong, robust, and

inclusive communities are capable of playing an important role in preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism and thereby creating the framework for safe local communities.