



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS



European Project MATES

Multi Agency Training Exit Strategies for Radicalized Youth

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL MIGRATION AND HOME AFFAIRS
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Training Guidelines for justice Executive Staff

1. Overview: The MATES Project

Europe is facing one of the most demanding challenges due to the need to defeat radicalization and terrorism: an increasing number of marginalized youth, with and without a migrant background, are increasingly targeted by, and sensitive to, terrorist speech and ideology and are exposed to the risk of active recruitment. In addition to prevention and intelligence activities that focus on arrest and sentencing, there is an increasing need to be more effective in implementing re-education programmes both in prison and on probation. Unfortunately, re-education programmes seem to be ineffective in ensuring positive social reintegration for these youth. Failure in reintegrating radicalised youth not only exposes the youth themselves to the risk of being re-recruited, but also diminishes the efficiency of the entire preventive system as it proves incapable of ensuring the youth’s cooperation in identifying recruiters and offering input fundamental to responding to radicalised speech and strategies.

In accordance with the latest “Revised EU Strategy for Combating Radicalization and Recruitment to Terrorism” (EU Council, 19 May 2014) and OSCE guidebook 2014 (“Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Leads to Terrorism: A



Community-Policing Approach”), the MATES project has responded to the need to improve the efficiency of the re-education system by developing a Common Curricula/Training Toolkit that comprises scientifically grounded learning material covering exit strategies and de-sensitization programmes.

In order to achieve this, MATES developed a multi-agency and multi-disciplinary approach, which combines psychological, legal, criminological and sociological skills, to enable professionals with different backgrounds to learn how to work together based on a coherent strategy, thus improving the chances of full reintegration for radicalized youth in society. Besides fostering the social integration of youth with a terrorist background, the programme is designed to reduce the risk of re-recruitment of youth to terrorist activity as a way of stopping people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism.

The Curricula are intended to provide practitioners with an understanding of the key issues, sensitize them to cultural, religious and other ideological issues, as well as provide them with the knowledge necessary to better understand how to address the problem of Islamic radicalization amongst young probationers through the adoption of a multi-agency approach.

These Guidelines provide an overview of the training material in order to inform decisions about the utilization of the Common Curriculum developed as part of the MATES project.

2. Training Material Development

MATES involves a series of activities designed to support the development of the key project output – the common curricula – while supporting the development and/or strengthening of multi-agency and multi-professional cooperation amongst probation officers and other frontline practitioners and community members (e.g., civil society groups) that work with young offenders in an effort to prevent Islamic radicalization amongst youth and support disengagement and/or deradicalisation.

Project activities include the creation of local networks, development of a common curricula/training toolkit, toolkit testing and transnational validation, and dissemination. Activities intended to support toolkit development include:

- the transnational exchange of good practices;
- state of the art literature review including national and EU literature
- inclusion of prosecutors, intelligence experts and other stakeholders to exploit existing knowledge and expertise;
- collection of information about the specific training needs of probation officers, frontline practitioners, representatives of Islamic communities and other community representatives, and youth on probation; and
- collection of life stories of persons who have joined radical Islam in order to develop counternarratives.

These actions, undertaken in a cooperative manner by all partners, led to the cooperative development of a common curricula/toolkit (see Section 3.b below) to which all partners



contributed and worked in cooperation with subject experts that was then tested with the relevant practitioners in each partner country as well as at CEPOL in Rome. Feedback from the test trainings led to refinements and creation of the final Common Curricula, now available for use across EU Member States.

Curricula development required the partnership to address numerous challenges encountered within the project (see Section 2.a below), consulting with experts on Islam and developing training material that *does not* provide an interpretative response, but rather aims to offer stimuli and cultural argumentation that take into consideration the richness of Islam in relation to written texts, images, terminology and contents.

3. Training Material

a) Objectives and Challenges Encountered During Curricula Development

Objectives

MATES aimed to fight radicalisation and terrorism by viewing the justice system as an open, multi-actor context capable of opening itself to cooperation with other actors and involving members of civil society, including moderate Islam. This included the development of training material for multi-agency, multi-professional cooperation amongst professionals working with radicalized youth sentenced to probation/alternatives to incarceration. The training material covers exit strategies, disengagement programmes, multi-actor cooperation, and counternarratives.

More specifically, MATES sought to provide justice practitioners and other frontline practitioners who work with young offenders on probation or in a community setting with the possibility to:

- Participate in the development of rehabilitation programmes based on a multi-agency approach;
- Cooperate with local communities to ensure programme success and the reintegration of radicalized youth;
- De-sensitize radicalized youth via the use of counternarratives and support their social reintegration;
- Help prevent the risk of youth enrollment in terrorist groups; and
- Monitor online activity.

Challenges

The primary challenges encountered relate to the choice of focusing on Islamic radicalization in response to which three primary challenges emerged:

- The view that other radical movements posed more problems for society in a given area/country (e.g., right wing extremists).
- The risk of increasing prejudice or labelling by bringing more attention to the issue and focusing specifically on Muslims.



- Doubts about the appropriateness of the utilization of specialized approaches (defined by cultural or religious characteristics) to interventions within the justice system.
- Doubts on the involvement of moderate Islam as part of the intervention network stemming from:
 - the lack of evidence that moderate Imams have easier access to radicalized individuals,
 - the tendency for radicalized individuals to view moderate Imams as enemies (potentially even more so than non-Islamic individuals),
 - and a radicalization processes where religion does not play a central role (young radicalized individuals have a very superficial knowledge about Islam)
- Difficulty in relation to the development of counternarratives due to worries associated with:
 - inserting oneself in a debate with very significant religious/theological elements and
 - the multiple forms of distress experienced by young people that led to their radicalization that do not necessarily match up with or respond to a common approach that focuses extensively on ideological issues.
- Difficulties in dealing with Islam-related images, labeling (notably for Salafiti and Wahabiti movements) and contents such as the potential for the Sufi movement to be a vessel of moderate Islamic values.

4. Common Curriculum

Common curricula are intended to develop courses and modules with a European dimension. Curriculum development is characterised by the following steps: Training needs analysis; formulation of objectives; selection and organisation of content; selection and organisation of learning experiences, and determination of evaluation procedures.

MATES' Common Curricula fall within this general framework and are intended for probation officers and other frontline professionals who work with young offenders in a community setting.

The Curricula has been tested both nationally with relevant probation staff and other professionals.

5. Didactic Unit Themes and Course Structure

The Common Curricula comprises five didactic units, each of which addresses a distinct area of interest and can serve as a standalone unit although they are intended to build upon each other in the order indicated as each unit provides background and other information that aid comprehension in subsequent units. The units include:

- Unit 1: Exit Strategies – Ways of Out of Radicalisation



- Unit 2: Multiagency Approach – Coordinated Strategies for Disengagement During Probation
- Unit 3: Ethical Issues – Professional Ethics and Deradicalisation Programmes
- Unit 4: Countering Violent Extremism – The Case of Jihadi Radicalisation
- Unit 5: Profiling Young Jihadists.

Each didactic unit includes a unit overview, topic-based sections (see below) with a “summing up”, that includes questions for reflection, after each section. The units conclude with a series of questions to reflect on and references.

More specifically, the units address the following topics:

- Unit 1 Exit Strategies – Ways of Out of Radicalisation discusses: the difference between deradicalization and disengagement programmes; current implementation of the various programmes in the EU; and relapse prevention, social reintegration and prosocial lifestyle.
- Unit 2 Multiagency Approach – Coordinated Strategies for Disengagement During Probation covers: prison and probation scenarios; the key elements to multiagency cooperation; and the multiagency approach to deradicalisation of individuals on probation.
- Unit 3 Ethical Issues – Professional Ethics and Deradicalisation Programmes covers: the need for an ethical approach to deradicalisation; potential conflicts between the personal right to confidentiality and public security needs; the harmonisation of ethical rules with deradicalisation activities; and how not to break the trust-based relationship.
- Unit 4 Countering Violent Extremism – The Case of Jihadi Radicalisation includes five sections: Islamic radicalism and its narrative; the terrorist narrative; media used to spread terrorist content; key man propaganda and inspiring figures; and the moderate reform movement.
- Unit 5 Profiling Young Jihadists is a supplementary unit that covers issues of: gender and race; psychopathology and personality; radicalization trajectories; and one-to-one narrative strategies.
- Units 1 to 4 are available in all partner languages (Italian, German, Estonian, Slovenian, Portuguese, Spanish) plus English with the exception of Unit 5 – Psychological Profiling, which is only available in English and represents an “extra” unit for those interested in exploring the material further.



Figure 1: Common Curricula Didactic Units

