

## Foreword

The National Coordinator for Protecting Democracy against Violent Extremism was appointed in June 2014. Prior to this, the law enforcement authorities bore the brunt of responsibility for preventing violent extremism in Sweden. Much has happened in the two years that have passed since the post was set up. Today Sweden takes broader responsibility for preventing violent extremism and promoting democracy.

It is now clear that preventive work cannot solely be limited to crime prevention initiatives carried out by law enforcement authorities. Today all of Sweden's municipalities are part of a nationwide network to combat violent extremism. More and more municipalities are adopting action plans, more are appointing local coordinators and more are recognising the opportunity to integrate the issue in existing structures. The Government has adopted a national counter-terrorism strategy and an action plan to safeguard democracy against violence-promoting extremism, and the Riksdag has tightened up the law against terrorism travel.

Today there is clearer legislation and preventive efforts take place largely on the ground at local level. It is municipal employees, local police officers and civil society that have the capacity to prevent violent extremism. Through meetings and conversations between adults and young people, we can make a difference.

Violent extremism in Sweden has three main focuses: left-wing, right-wing and Islamist extremism. There are many differences between them but there are also similarities. One of these similarities is violence as a method of social change.

Islamist extremism is more widespread today than has been seen in the past. So far, Sweden has been spared major attacks but Islamist extremism has a major impact on society thanks to its aggressive recruitment of jihadists to terrorist organisations. This recruitment mainly takes place in Sweden's cities.

Right-wing extremism is most active in small rural communities, where its recruits are mainly young men. It is making inroads into municipal decision-making assemblies and its emphasis on violence frightens local politicians and journalists, sometimes into silence and inactivity.

Activities by left-wing perpetrators of violence have reduced in number in the past two years.

The current status of violent extremism outlined above, and both the similarities and the differences, have guided the work of the Coordinator and are key to the National Strategy now being presented.

Sweden continues to need national coordination in work to prevent violent extremism. The National Strategy points the way while the most important work takes place at local level. It is of the utmost importance that we continue on the path on which we have set out, that we strive to unite and that we further develop cooperation between national and local level. In this way we will be able to take firm action to create a resilient society and prevent more young people being drawn into violent extremist environments.

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Principal Secretary and temporary coordinator

## Summary

The National Coordinator for Protecting Democracy against Violent Extremism was commissioned by the Government on 26 June 2014 to activate cooperation and develop preventive efforts in Sweden. Developing a national strategy to counter violent extremism is part of the role of the National Coordinator.

The strategy has three dimensions – promotion, prevention and preemption. The promotion dimension refers to inclusive work to strengthen democracy to create a resilient society.

The prevention dimension focuses on groups and individuals receptive to recruitment to violent extremism. The preemption dimension focuses on measures geared towards individuals in violent extremist environments and their relatives.

The Coordinator sets out the roadmap for continued work through 18 measures:

### Local level

- Democracy – cooperation between municipalities and civil society must be expanded
- Political will and responsibility
- Each municipality is to have a coordinator
- Status reports should be drawn up in cooperation with the actors involved.
- Cooperation is the responsibility of the municipality and knowledge hubs (kunskapshus) can serve as a role model.
- Action plans must be based on the status reports.
- Information sharing within the regulatory framework that is in place
- The municipalities should have the resources to provide support to relatives.
- Support for leaving violent extremism should be available in a municipality
- The non-profit sector must be a clear collaborative partner

### National level:

- National coordination
- A national network of experts is to develop specific initiatives
- Knowledge-based working methods must be made available
- Healthcare should be included in work to combat violent extremism
- Existing guidelines for sharing information should reach all operations involved
- Training for actors involved
- Propaganda and the media – knowledge must be developed for preventive work
- The initiatives put in place by the Coordinator must be evaluated

The strategy describes the most immediate challenges. Several of the measures have been initiated and are part of ongoing work.

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## Introduction

On 26 June 2014 the Government appointed a National Coordinator for Protecting Democracy against Violent Extremism (below referred to as the Coordinator). The Coordinator was tasked with improving coordination between agencies, municipalities and organisations and at national, regional and local level. In March 2015 the Coordinator was also tasked with producing and launching a national strategy to safeguard democracy against violent extremism. The work run by the Coordinator from June 2014 to June 2016 is documented in the Coordinator's account of their experience ("Samordnarens erfarenhetsberättelse"). The strategy, which is presented here, is based on processes, experiences and methods that have been successful and the challenges that have been identified over the course of the work carried out. The strategy has been drawn up following exchanges with several central government agencies, municipalities, organisations and researchers. The Coordinator's reference group has served as support to the Coordinator and has in many ways helped to develop preventive work against violent extremism.

Responsibility for preventive work has long solely rested with the law enforcement authorities. However, an individual may become radicalised for many reasons. The route to violent extremism is not always a linear one and does not always involve crime. The issue of combatting violent extremism is far too important to solely be left to a few agencies and it must not be reduced to reactive and repressive efforts alone.

National work to counter violent extremism has developed from solely involving security and repressive measures to increasingly incorporating promotion and prevention measures that reduce the desire and opportunity of individuals to become involved in environments that sanction violence. Above all, the opportunities of municipalities to prevent and combat violent extremism have become clearer cut. In working to strengthen democracy and prevent violent extremism, actors at local level are on firm ground. It is at local level that the actual tools for preventive efforts can be found.

During their period of office the Coordinator has constantly identified new needs and the Government has instructed the Coordinator and other agencies too to perform new tasks. Many actors are working intensively on the issue of violent extremism, and many good initiatives have been implemented in the past two years. New legislation, the Government's counter-terrorism strategy (Government Communication 2014/15:146) has seen Sweden come a good way along the path. The purpose of this strategy is to take that work further.

## Violent extremism in Sweden

The Government defines violent extremism as ideologies that recognise and legitimise violence as a means of realising extreme ideological opinions and ideas in which terrorism is a method used by violent extremist groupings and individuals. Safeguarding democracy against violent extremism is also about preempting recruitment to terrorist groups and terrorist crime in Sweden and abroad. Radicalisation is a process in which an individual or group is increasingly able to develop extreme attitudes and in the long run advocate illegal methods and the use of violence to further their ideas. Promoting violence may involve encouraging others to carry out violent acts and attacks, participating in attacks or otherwise supporting

illegal acts. Terrorism is a crime used by violent extremist groups and individuals as one method among many. Preventive work seeks to influence individuals such that they do not become involved in environments that advocate violence.

Violent extremism in Sweden mainly consists of three identified directions: far-right extremism, left-wing extremism and Islamist extremism. Extremism exists and often thrives in groups, but outside these environments that advocate violence there are individuals acting alone who may be inspired and encouraged to commit violent acts and terrorist attacks fired by the ideologies found within these environments.

When the Coordinator asked the municipalities which violent extremist environment they judged to be the most active in their particular municipality, the dominant response was that far-right extremism is the most common environment, followed by Islamist extremism and finally left-wing extremism. This picture also matches the impression gained by the Coordinator following visits to municipalities, knowledge gathering, conferences and collaboration carried out since June 2014.

According to the current assessment of the terror threat, actors in violent Islamist extremism are judged to constitute the most serious threat to Sweden and Swedish interests. Initially the threat from violent Islamist extremism mainly came from young men who travelled to Syria and Iraq to join and fight for Daesh and the risk that with their newly acquired knowledge and a lower threshold towards violence they might carry out terrorist acts on their return to Sweden. In addition to the threat of terrorist acts, those who travel to fight with a terrorist organisation are also a cause for concern in other ways. They can be seen as martyrs and lead to more people in their local community deciding to travel to engage in conflict abroad. They too may return to Sweden, traumatised by their experiences.

Finally there are those acting alone who are inspired by ideologies that advocate violence but who do not belong to any grouping. They may be radicalised on the internet by visiting websites that advocate violence, where they may also come into contact with other individuals who advocate or encourage violent acts motivated by an ideology.

The different violent extremist environments have many similarities with each other but also demonstrate major differences. This is significant in practical preventive work. What primarily unites them is the view of violence as a legitimate means of achieving change for a political or ideological purpose. The environments affect each other and are fed by increased polarisation in society, which can also influence those who are acting alone.

## National strategy to safeguard democracy against violent extremism

The need for a clear roadmap for preventive work against violent extremism has increased as the threat scenario has changed and as the number of actors involved in this work has grown in the past two years. The Government's action plan and the national counter-terrorism strategy, both from 2015, were steps on the way towards a roadmap for preventive efforts. The Coordinator's strategy seeks to supplement both of these Government Communications and make them more concrete in order to make it easier for municipalities to identify their role.

The section below describes the national strategy that the Coordinator has initiated as instructed, several elements of which have also been implemented. The strategy is divided into national level and local level but has different dimensions addressing measures to promote democracy and prevent and preempt violent extremism.

### Promotion

Promoting democracy refers to inclusive work to strengthen democracy to create a resilient society.

The *promotion* dimension involves boosting the development of social skills, critical thinking and awareness of democratic rights and obligations. An education system characterised by inclusion and relationships based on trust can combat young people being drawn into violent extremist environments. Promotion efforts are part of day to day work at schools, in after-school and holiday activities and in clubs and societies. This forms the foundation of a good environment and upbringing for children and young people and makes society resilient to attacks on democracy. Good relations between public institutions and civil society help to create a solid basis for active citizenship and participation in local society. Good cooperative relationships require mutual trust, transparency and a structure to ensure that collaboration is based on democratic principles. The aim is to create a safe and inclusive environment for all citizens by promoting democratic values. Schools, after-school and holiday activities and voluntary organisations, whether these be clubs and societies or religious communities, should be active and present in local communities. Presence and activity pave the way for social cohesion and combat polarisation. Points of view and a flourishing debate founded on freedom of opinion are components of increasing resistance to violent extremism.

### Prevention

The aim is for individuals not to affiliate themselves with a violent ideology.

The *prevention* dimension focuses on groups and individuals receptive to recruitment to violent extremism. These are found within a high-risk environment and have shown signs of behaviours that may lead to violent extremism. Examples of such behaviours

may be glorification of violence, derogatory attitudes or extolling anti-democratic acts and ideologies.

Teachers, youth workers and preschool teachers are examples of occupational groups that work closely with children and young people and may notice changes in health, attitudes, social relationships and activities. These types of changes do not necessarily have to be signs of an individual being about to enter an environment that advocates violent extremism but may be due to many different factors. Being aware of radicalisation and violent extremism enables the occupational groups above to prevent young people from becoming affiliated with a violent extremist environment by talking to them and paying them attention. They can also notify social services of concerns in order to highlight a need for further action on the part of social services.

In some cases, other types of measures may be required which fall within the remit of social services, such as support to relatives. Advice and home visits are additional examples of this kind of support. Cooperation may, for example, be between the municipality's operations and civil society organisations. Support may also take the form of a mentor who particularly supports a person judged to be vulnerable, for example by finding other meaningful ways to occupy their time, such as someone to talk to or extra support at school. Mentoring may also be part of a cooperative venture between the municipality and one or more organisations in civil society.

In order for officials and others working to combat violent extremism to be able to perform their duties safely, there should be procedures in place for how any threats or violent situations at work are to be handled.

The municipalities' coordinators against violent extremism play an important role in efforts to make sure that the preventive dimension works. The coordinators should ensure that awareness of violent extremism is spread within the municipality. They should also ensure that information reaches the right actor and actively provide support for these efforts. They should be extremely familiar with where and how information can be passed on, both to partners and to the media. Coordinators should also be familiar with the status report for the municipality and with the relationships forged with organisations and faith communities that are so important in this respect. The ambition must be for a reduction in the number of individuals recruited into and who find themselves in an environment that advocates violence.

## Preemption

The aim is to preempt individuals from committing ideologically motivated acts of violence and encouraging them to leave the environment that advocates violence.

The preemption dimension focuses on measures geared towards individuals in violent extremist environments and their relatives. The aim is for them to leave the environment that advocates violence. These individuals are mainly the focus of work by the law enforcement authorities but various municipal operations are also involved to a certain extent.

Relatives play an important role in the preemption dimension. It is important that support for relatives is in place at local level. It is often parents, siblings or other relatives that notice changes in an individual and have the opportunity to warn the authorities at an early stage.

Work at intervention level demands close cooperation, mainly in terms of exchanging information between law enforcement authorities and the municipalities.

The municipality plays a central role in work to encourage people to leave extremist movements. At the preemptive stage, offering people an alternative lifestyle and making it easier for them to leave an environment that advocates violence are important measures at local level. However, if an individual is to exit an environment that advocates violence and not return to it, relatives need to be available and supportive. The municipalities can work with civil society organisations to support relatives and increase opportunities for patience and perseverance in relinquishing environments that sanction violence.

Today wide-ranging expertise is available, partly through the research that the Coordinator has spearheaded into how to make it easier for individuals to leave environments that advocate violence. Knowledge should continue to be developed at national level to create opportunities for the local level to run effective activities to support those relinquishing extremist movements and support their families.

### Responsibility at local and national level

The municipalities need to take greater responsibility in work to combat violent extremism and the national level needs to make sure that there is access to support and knowledge and that work is evaluated.

The municipalities are vital to work to combat violent extremism. They have not previously taken sufficient responsibility for preventing violent extremism. There are several reasons for this low engagement and low capacity in preventive work at municipal level. One factor is a fear of doing the wrong thing. Many municipalities have chosen to avoid tackling difficult and complex questions for this reason. In this regard, another factor is a lack of information and a lack of clarity as to what the role of the municipalities actually is. Gradually, however, the quality of the work of the municipalities has improved, partly thanks to the local coordinators. The local level must continue on the path set out and recognise its role in preventive work – even when this involves different aspects of violent extremism. The national level must ensure that the local level receives adequate support.

The regional level should also play an active role in work against violent extremism, ideally through the county administrative boards and county councils.



The county administrative boards are extremely familiar with and are in contact with the municipalities in the county, making them well placed to support the municipalities in working with other actors. The county administrative boards have several active networks and knowledge relevant to this issue, mainly regarding violence, honour-based violence and social sustainability. Other types of regional collaboration, such as collaboration between a number of municipalities, may be one way of countering violent extremism. Once more, this involves drawing on existing networks and structures. In cases where there is no collaborative structure, this should be created.

## Measures to counter violent extremism

### Local level

#### *Democracy*

Robust and flourishing democracy relies on trust and confidence. Citizens' having faith in the state is the cornerstone of a democratic society. Trust is built up and grows in strength over time, through relationships that endure through good times and bad.

The municipalities that work in collaboration with civil society have found simple ways of incorporating the issue of violent extremism within this structure. On the other hand, those municipalities that do not have established collaborative networks find it considerably more difficult to reach out to civil society, and in the long run to their citizens. Establishing civil councils at local level boosts opportunities for mutual exchanges. The councils become a forum for the issues that are important for the local environment, with violent extremism possibly being one such issue. Cooperation with civil society must ensure that the municipality is aware of and has the means of contacting forces for good in civil society active within the municipality. If no structures for doing so have been developed, it may be an idea to set up what are known as civil councils for collaboration between civil society and the municipality. The councils must be networks with clear missions and goals, and they need to meet on an ongoing basis so as to develop local democracy together.

#### *Political will and responsibility*

The highest political level in the municipality has to give a clear mandate and put circumstances in place for municipal bodies to initiate, lead and develop promotion and prevention work regarding violent extremism. The decision-makers must ensure that the work takes a long-term view and that they are well informed about trends.

Work to combat violent extremism must not be isolated from other activities carried out by the municipality. It must be incorporated into other promotion and prevention work and it must be incorporated as part of existing democracy-boosting efforts. The highest political level in the municipality should set a clear mandate for the bodies beneath it to prevent violent extremism.

### *Coordinators*

Each municipality should have a specific function responsible for coordinating preventive work to combat violent extremism.

Efforts to counter violent extremism are far too important not to have a designated person responsible in each municipality. Without one person clearly responsible, there is a risk that no-one will consider that they have any responsibility. This would increase the risk of violent extremist environments growing stronger within a municipality without anyone being aware of this or, consequently, working to counteract it. In order to ensure that the work of the municipalities to safeguard democracy against violent extremism works in all the dimensions – promotion, prevention, preemption – it is essential that one function coordinates the work involved in partnership with the local and national level, civil society bodies and the private sector.

### *Status reports*

Effective work to combat violent extremism must be founded on knowledge of which extremist environments exist in or are operating within the municipality.

A status report seeks to make the challenges that the municipality faces explicit, initially at a general level. The status report must be based on local conditions and is updated on an ongoing basis as the situation changes. The action plan and the preventive work must be anchored in a local context that is summarised in a local status report together with the actors involved.

### *Cooperation*

The municipalities must be responsible for and lead cooperation with relevant actors capable of boosting local resilience to violent extremism. The experiences generated in the pilot projects with the knowledge hubs (kunskapshus) and good examples from other municipalities must benefit the local level.

The municipality is responsible for identifying important actors for local preventive work. Within the municipality it is mainly actors in the education, leisure and social services that are crucial to driving work forwards. Outside municipal services, the Swedish Police, the Prison and Probation Service (probation) and the health service are obvious collaborative partners that form part of work involving social intervention groups aimed at young people who risk being recruited into a criminal network or who need help leaving one (SIG), the education, social, police and leisure services (SSPF), or local crime prevention councils (BRÅ). These forms of collaboration all also provide a good starting point for work to prevent violent extremism. Where existing collaborative structures exist and work, these should be used in the first instance. However, many municipalities have no structured forms of collaboration and it is recommended that these create collaborative structures that also include work to prevent violent extremism.

Representatives of civil society organisations should be identified by the municipality and those who want to do so should be involved in the municipality's preventive efforts. Civil society actors may, for example, include faith communities and sports clubs.

Established collaborative relationships and structures should be in place for all issues that are important to the respective parties, not just violent extremism. Relationships require trust that is built up over time. Once trust and confidence are established, this can also boost preventive work to counter violent extremism.

Cooperation must be based on democratic principles, trust and transparency. Collaboration needs to take a long-term view and for this reason it is recommended that a cooperation agreement be used, similar to that used in collaboration between public authorities and NGOs (IOP). Private enterprise also has a bearing on work against violent extremism. Private actors such as housing companies, parking companies and security companies have a presence in the local community in which people live and spend time, and may constitute an important link between citizens and the municipality.

In November 2015 the Coordinator and the cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg, Örebro and Borlänge decided to launch a pilot project setting up municipal knowledge hubs to safeguard democracy against violent extremism. Together with the cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg, Örebro and Borlänge the Coordinator sought to increase society's resilience and capacity to prevent violent extremism and other forms of environment that use violence as a tool. The knowledge hubs – which are a coordination function rather than a physical building – are owned, run and organised by the municipality in question. The aim is for the experiences that the knowledge hubs generate to form the basis of the work of other municipalities against violent extremism.

### *Action plan*

A municipal action plan clearly allocates responsibility and imposes a structure on work at local level.

The municipality should draw up an action plan based on the status report and incorporating the collaborative actors that have been identified. The action plan is to have the backing of the highest political level in the municipality and it should be reviewed where necessary.

The action plan should clearly set out the boundary between the responsibility of the policy and that of the municipality itself. The work can also be carried out jointly with neighbouring municipalities, for example in regional collaboration.

Like many other issues handled by a municipality or other organisation or authority, work against violent extremism may encounter resistance and in rare cases attract threats and other forms of unlawful influence. It is important that the employer takes responsibility for people exposed to unlawful influence due to their duties at work. The organisation should have tailored support mechanisms in place to increase the level of safety felt by the individual and the organisation and their ability to resist attacks on democracy.

### *Sharing information*

Cooperating actors should safeguard opportunities, within existing legislation, to share information that is important to prevent and counteract violent extremism.

Access to information is vital in order to work efficiently against violent extremism. Some measures, such as support for relatives, may require information that the municipality does not always possess itself. Information sharing between the security service, the police and municipal bodies is vital for thorough prevention and preemption of violent extremism. The Swedish Security Service and the Swedish Police have entered into several agreements on how information is to be shared between them. Accordingly it is the task of the Swedish Police, within the bounds of current legislation and the Police's assessment that it is possible to pass on information, to ensure that the information reaches the functions within its own organisation and the municipal functions that may be in need of it.

Information must naturally also flow in the opposite direction – from the municipality to the police – in cases where the regulations permit. Drawing up a channel of contact and being clear as to what information is important to share makes this considerably easier.

Finally, sharing information between Sweden and other countries is important to limit the possibility of individuals wanting to travel and join organisations abroad deemed to be terrorist organisations. If the actors working together are given an opportunity at an early stage to obtain information that an individual is travelling with the aim of joining an organisation deemed to be terrorist, the country to which the individual is travelling to, or through in order to reach a third country, can ensure that the individual is denied entry and sent back to the country of origin. Sharing information between Swedish and foreign authorities is crucial to effective prevention and preemption.

### ***Support to relatives***

Relatives need to know where they can turn when they discover signs that someone close to them is on the verge of becoming involved in violent extremism.

It is often relatives who first discover signs of changes in behaviour. It is important that relatives have the courage to contact the authorities and that they trust the authorities. The municipality's contacts with organisations and faith communities are important as these often are naturally close to the relatives concerned. When relatives seek help because they are worried, the agencies need to react with expertise and respect so as to ensure successful cooperation with them. In many respects there is a stigma attached to radicalisation and violent extremism that prevents relatives from seeking help. Setting the bar lower makes it easier to forge contacts with relatives. Working with relatives is an established method that has proved effective in many European countries.

### ***Support in relinquishing violent extremism***

The municipality must have clear guidelines giving it the capacity to make it easier for individuals to leave violent extremism irrespective of which extremist environment the individual wants to leave. Support for relinquishing violent extremism and support for relatives have much in common, particularly in recognising the importance of the family, and must be developed.

As an external actor, such as a representative of a government agency, getting an individual to relinquish violent extremism can be difficult and may instead have the

opposite effect. Leaving an environment is closely linked to motivation. If the individual has not developed their own motivation to leave, it is rarely fruitful to attempt to force such motivation. The desire to leave often emerges due to other, more social and practical reasons. The interventions that seek to support individuals' process of leaving a violent environment should instead focus on individuals' social and practical needs linked to their desire to leave. It is necessary initially to make an assessment of the individual's situation, circumstances, needs and motivation for change. The environment that the individual wants to leave must also be defined in mutual cooperation between the municipality and the agencies affected to investigate which measures may make it easier in the specific case and to make sure that the measures are not entangled with, for example, a criminal investigation or obtaining intelligence.

Two overarching dimensions are essential if an individual is to relinquish an environment that advocates violence – social and practical. The social dimension may involve loving relationships with relatives, a partner and children, or the transition to adult life in which an individual begins working, studying or starts a family. The practical dimension is mainly about practical needs such as entering the world of work, psychiatric support, relocation due to a need for protection or relocation for other reasons. The chance of an individual not returning to an environment that advocates violence is further strengthened if their daily life has a structure and routines to latch on to.

A balance between the social and practical dimension is needed if the exit is to be lasting. When it comes to the practical dimension, the municipalities are the foremost actor as the majority of measures are ordinary operations carried out by the municipality, together with the police, healthcare sector and the employment office, for example. In the social dimension, a loving relationship and relatives are the most important factor. For this reason knowledge, capacity, mandate and detailed guidelines on how to coordinate the existing resources and operations to make it easier for individuals to relinquish violent extremism need to be in place at municipal level (or at umbrella level across municipalities if the municipalities are small).

Municipalities need to survey existing operations and draw up clear guidelines to ensure that the prerequisites are in place. People relinquishing violent extremism must be a target group in municipal guidelines.

To judge which initiatives and social measures are appropriate to assist exit, it is important to carry out an initial assessment of individuals. An individual action plan is important for surveying potential measures capable of supporting the process of exit that the individual has initiated. It is also in the individual action plan that an opportunity is given to investigate other problems, such as substance abuse, or start a neuropsychiatric investigation. Collaboration between the operations within the municipality, other agencies, civil society organisations and relatives is essential to facilitate, stabilise and stimulate the aim of individuals to leave an environment that advocates violence. Without cooperation, it is difficult to make an assessment that seeks to identify factors for successful exit.

The practical dimension must be tied in with the social dimension through cooperation between agencies, civil society and relatives in order to facilitate exit.

Finally, the operations that work with exit processes must constantly develop new methods and adapt to changes in the surrounding climate. A joint platform should be set up for coordination and developing knowledge about activities relating to those wishing to leave extremist environments. Because these issues are closely related to support to relatives, coordinating knowledge development in these areas should also be considered. This platform could, for example, be hosted by a county administrative board or another actor with experience of operational interventions.

### *The non-profit sector*

The municipality should bear special responsibility for strengthening and supporting organisations in the non-profit sector.

The municipalities should create or use existing forums for dialogue on how the non-profit and public sector can work together and create added value for long-term preventive work. Agreements within the remit of what are known as IOPs, collaboration between public authorities and NGOs, provide good opportunities for long-term preventive work.

There must never be any doubt that the work of all actors is based on fundamental democratic freedoms and rights and there must be clear guidelines for cases in which this can be called into question.

## **National level**

### *National coordination*

The Coordinator must continue to strengthen and support cooperation in efforts to safeguard democracy against violent extremism between agencies, municipalities and organisations at national, regional and local level.

Work to counter violent extremism is being structured in the majority of municipalities. Some have made significant progress, others have started work and in a large number much remains to be done. The job of the Coordinator is not yet complete, there is a great deal of work still to do and a joined-up approach continues to be needed on the issue of violent extremism.

The Coordinator must be a driving force and supportive of municipalities, agencies, faith communities, civil society actors and other actors in order to develop work to counter violent extremism. The Coordinator must assist the municipalities with advice to develop local work on initiatives for people at risk of becoming involved in or already involved in violent extremism. The Coordinator must also assist municipalities with identifying and expanding cooperation with non-profit organisations and developing initiatives for individuals looking to leave an environment that advocates violence. Furthermore, the Coordinator must develop support to relatives, continue to take responsibility for the Red Cross helpline pilot project, head up the national network of experts and initiate research in the field. There is also a need for a national status report on violent extremism in the municipalities and the measures being carried out. A large number of actors are now playing an active role in work in which the Swedish Security Service previously stood relatively alone. All the initiatives and measures provide new insights and lessons to be learned, and great value lies in taking these on board and

immediately translating them into action. The work of the municipalities offers an excellent opportunity to create a status report on the development of violent extremism across Sweden as a whole. The Coordinator has carried out a number of surveys and produced a number of reports to draw on work at local level and there remains a need for these kinds of overviews. A national status report also provides an opportunity to find out more about the measures being carried out and in the longer term provide a basis for evaluating the effect different initiatives have had. The work being carried out in the knowledge hubs and the experiences generated must be spread to other municipalities and regions.

Work to promote democracy, and prevent and preempt violent extremism transcends borders – operational and national – and several commissions with shared interfaces are running in parallel. Work that spans many areas of operation is essential and the Coordinator is a coordinating link in preventive efforts. Messages and travelling fighters move unhindered across borders. Extremism is becoming increasingly international. This dimension must also be reinforced in national and local initiatives. The challenges cross borders so the knowledge must too. International contacts should therefore be an integrated part of operations.

The national level must serve as support for the local level and enable a cohesive strategy, support for analysis, a variety of measures and an overview of the activities going on nationally and support for evaluation. The Coordinator must take on board international knowledge and experience and ensure that these are passed on and utilised at national and local level. The Coordinator is to be a knowledge bridge between municipalities and encourage cooperation at and between all levels of society.

Cooperation between national agencies has been necessary for joined-up preventive work and therefore needs to continue. The composition of the reference group must be adapted to the needs that exist, and the agencies with a responsibility for preventing violent extremism must be represented. The national reference group is to be chaired by the Coordinator.

### *National network of experts*

The Coordinator is to continue to lead and develop the national network of experts and so help to strengthen and develop actual initiatives and research into violent extremism. The research must be able to be translated into practically applicable knowledge for actors working to develop and carry out preventive action.

In practical operations there is a great need to draw on research and expert skills and for these to be translated into activities on the ground. The purpose of the network of experts is to gather together leading researchers in different disciplines and glean their expertise on how research into violent extremism can be developed. In addition to this, the Coordinator has initiated a number of research projects to boost information on violent extremism. These projects have demonstrated the importance of including different academic disciplines in order to gain more knowledge of methods to prevent violent extremism.



## *Knowledge*

Research into which methods are effective for preventing violent extremism is currently limited and needs to be expanded.

The question of why someone would choose to join an organisation that advocates violence is still largely unresearched. There is some knowledge of the underlying reasons why individuals join politically motivated violent right-wing and left-wing extremist movements based on research and experience. Research into the individuals who have travelled to war-torn areas is more limited. The Swedish Security Service has good information on the individuals who have travelled to Syria. This information is largely only available to the Security Service, which makes it difficult to create a more comprehensive picture of the factors that underlie the high number of people travelling from Sweden.

The role of women in journeys to Syria and Iraq is another dimension that has not been researched. For example, there is no overview of their background or their reasons for travelling. In some cases there is information that indicates that they were forced to travel for various reasons, which indicates that there may be a link with honour-related violence, violence in close relationships and in some cases to human trafficking. More in-depth knowledge about the women's situation before they left Sweden, the reasons why they travelled to war-torn areas controlled by Daesh and how they were recruited must be obtained in order to provide protection for women and children and to combat pressure from both sides.

Several families have also taken their young children with them to areas of conflict in Syria. The Liaison Officer for Nordic Police and Customs Co-operation at the Swedish Consulate General in Istanbul has been a link to Swedish agencies in providing information on the people who have travelled to or from Syria and who may be suspected of having participated in conflicts or having been involved with a terrorist organisation in other contexts. Sweden no longer has a functioning embassy in Syria and the Ministry for Foreign Affairs advises against travelling to the country. This means that Swedish agencies are unable to help those who are in the country and want to leave it. The serious situation in Syria is so well-known that the parents should be investigated by social services if they are considered to have been irresponsible in relation to parenting. In several municipalities, social services have been forced to tackle complex cases involving children who for various reasons have become stuck in the border areas between Turkey and Syria. The children did not leave Sweden voluntarily and should be seen as victims in this context. Providing these children with adequate support is important in terms of investigating their needs and thus safeguarding their future. This issue here is the opportunities agencies have to act where they are aware of children being en route to or already in areas of conflict. Another key factor is what can be done in cases where their parents return to Sweden and say that they want to leave an environment that advocates violence. The guidance provided by the National Board of Health and Welfare is a good starting point in this respect.

The need for information is largely about developing methods for preventing violent extremism. The Coordinator has launched several research projects capable of serving as support in developing concrete methods and these will be made available to



practitioners at an early stage. The existing international networks for developing methods and exchanging knowledge among researchers and practitioners are excellent forums and it is important that information is spread within and between agencies and organisations that have an influence on work to prevent violent extremism.

### *Health and medical care*

Many aspects of health and medical care play an important role in preventive work. Maternity and child health clinics have primary contact with mothers and new families. They have a chance to spot early signs of family members' inclination to join or become involved in an environment that advocates violence, for example if parents intend to take the child to another country to join a terrorist organisation.

Experience from Sweden and other countries shows that in many cases mental ill-health is one key explanation for individuals becoming involved in environments that advocate violence. Young adults with a mental illness or neuropsychiatric disabilities are judged to be at risk of being recruited to environments that advocate violence. In several cases individuals have sought care themselves for this reason. The health sector has an important role to play with regard to opportunities to spot signs of violent extremism and supporting relatives and those looking to leave an environment that advocates violence. Several positive initiatives have been carried out in different parts of Sweden. It is essential that there is a national structure for cooperation in the health service. The psychiatric services need knowledge to improve their ability to spot signs of radicalisation and to be able to identify the psychological needs that underlie the ideological blocks in order to treat the individual patient. Child and youth psychiatry (BUP) has a great opportunity to discover and mitigate the risk of an individual seeking out violent ideologies.

In some cases, depression, psychosis, post-traumatic stress and other forms of mental ill-health may be one of the complex underlying causes leading to an individual turning towards an environment that advocates violence. The decision turn to these environments is often made in conjunction with a life crisis. If basic psychiatric needs are met, this may lead to strengthening an individual's resistance to joining an environment that advocates violence and also make it easier to exit such an environment.

The role of psychiatry in offering support to relatives and people at risk may also ultimately be of vital importance to identifying and heading off preparations and planning of terrorist acts.

In the first instance, existing clinics should have their mandate extended and take on special responsibility for regional support in which relatives and individuals at risk are quickly able to obtain a psychiatric assessment and support. The clinics should also offer counselling and provide information, training and consultation to other psychiatric units in Sweden on request. The clinics should interact with the knowledge hubs so that they can strengthen each dimension of the work to counteract violent extremism.

### Confidentiality

As a rule it is clear which information should be exchanged between the law enforcement authorities. It is important that existing guidelines for sharing information between the Swedish Security Service and the Swedish Police reach all the police's operations at regional and local level.

The capacity of the Prison and Probation Service to process personal data needs to be highlighted. At the moment the Prison and Probation Service is unable to process the personal data of people on probation. This makes it more difficult to carry out long-term preventive work as several of the clients judged to fall within the category of violent extremism are sentenced to short penalties and are handled within the probation system.

Good cooperation and exchanging of information between the police and the municipality is essential. Confidentiality legislation limits exchanges of information between social services and the police. In the report "*våldsbejakande extremism – stöd för socialtjänstens arbete med barn och vuxna*" (violent extremism – support for the work of social services with children and adults) the National Board of Health and Welfare describes how confidentiality legislation operates in cooperation between the police and social services.

The Swedish Crime Prevention Council's (BRÅ) experience from previous research on interaction between agencies and administrations shows that the opportunities to exchange information provided by confidentiality legislation are rarely exploited to their full potential (Brå 2008:10). One reason is a lack of awareness and uncertainty regarding the legislation, which goes hand in hand with concern about doing the wrong thing. Therefore it is important that the agencies and actors concerned ensure that staff have the information they need to perform the duties incumbent upon them. Every agency should start out from the assumption that they should be using their respective opportunities to share information to the full.

### Training

Research and experiences must be translated into knowledge that can be used in practice and will result in training initiatives.

The Coordinator has prioritised passing on knowledge on violent extremism, the forms of expression it can take and the consequences it may have. It is now time to take the next step – initiating, developing and passing on knowledge on the methods that are effective in preventing violent extremism from occurring and on how it can effectively be combatted. "Front line staff" are often referred to as a category that need knowledge. "Front line staff" are found in a number of different professions in a number of different places in different operations. Nor does this merely involve municipal operations - staff within the police service, the Prison and Probation Service, the Swedish National Board of Institutional Care, the health service, etc. are also affected. Nor do effective methods have any benefit unless there are resources available to use them in practical work. Decision-makers are consequently a vital category of actors who need to obtain knowledge in order to achieve greater understanding of needs at all levels of society.

### *Propaganda and the media*

There is a need for a status report on the propaganda that environments that advocate violence use for recruitment and for guidelines on whether it is to be countered and if so, how.

Environments that advocate violence have an aggressive recruitment strategy. They actively seek out individuals who may become part of an ideology that advocates violence and in the long run support and commit crime in the name of that ideology. In cooperation with other agencies, organisations and researchers, the Coordinator has emphasised the importance of understanding what propaganda looks like and the importance of criticising sources. At the moment there is no strategy for how propaganda that condones violence is to be tackled. Experience differs between different countries depending on how the work has been organised. However, it is clear that social media propaganda is calculated and has a clear goal. It would be impossible for every individual municipality or organisation to be aware of or have an overall picture of what is going on in social media and that may have ultimately have real consequences. There is a need for greater knowledge about violent extremist activities on the internet and how these are to be tackled. The Government has recently commissioned the Swedish Defence Research Agency to carry out surveys and analyses of violent extremist propaganda.

### *Evaluation*

Sweden is putting a considerable amount of effort into developing preventive work to combat violent extremism and a large number of measures have been carried out over a relatively short period. A number of government agencies are carrying out extensive work to ensure that efforts to counteract violent extremism are incorporated in their day to day operations. Municipalities and civil society in many places in Sweden have launched projects and collaboration to improve the resilience of society. As part of their role, the Coordinator has emphasised the importance of following up the work of the municipalities to ensure that these efforts do not lose momentum. Since 2014 the Coordinator has carried out a number of follow-ups and taken action on the basis of the results. Follow-up and evaluation of this work, especially at local level, must continue as part of improved consistent efforts against violent extremism and as an opportunity to make the most of the knowledge now being generated in many places across Sweden.

### **The future of joined-up efforts to combat violent extremism**

The Coordinator was given a two-year mandate to work to ensure that all actors in Sweden were better informed about extremism, recognised the role and responsibility of their operations in these efforts and launched cooperation with the organisations that are crucial in the fight to safeguard democracy. The Coordinator has sought to encourage and challenge all actors to shoulder their responsibility in this issue, particularly the municipalities. The total knowledge situation is considerably better now than it was in June 2014. The Coordinator has brought about greater knowledge and expertise in large parts of Sweden, actual measures at local and national level and, last but not least, a lively debate. International efforts have also been part of the Coordinator's work as the international community has devoted great attention to the preventive work that Sweden is performing to combat violent extremism. The work is

not over. Many municipalities continue to need support, particularly in drawing up status reports and implementing the action plans adopted, but also in further methodological support and developing the work. In order to do this, knowledge is needed, as is a central point to turn to for expert support. The local representatives have been clear in their desire for a national coordination function to remain in place. For the national level to abandon these efforts at a time when the municipalities are just starting to carry out action plans, appoint coordinators and create structures and long-term collaboration with relevant parties would be short-sighted to say the least.

In a supplementary directive on 2 June 2016 the Coordinator was charged with proposing how preventive work against violent extremism should be coordinated and organised nationally within the existing agency structure from January 2018 onwards.