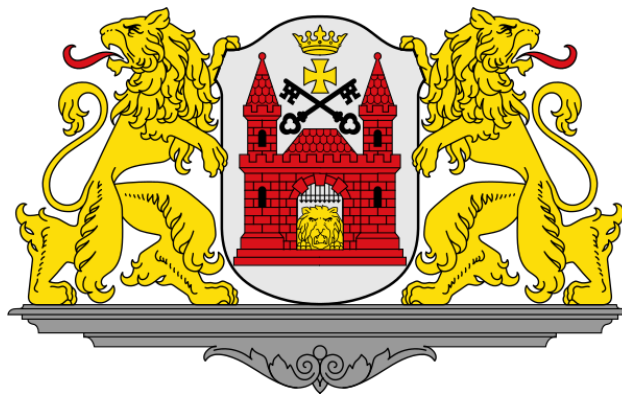


Riga



Municipal Activities or Strategy to Prevent Violent Radicalisation

A synthetic presentation as a proceeding of the Working Group of Cities - Work Package 8 of the Project PRACTICIES - Partnership against Violent Radicalisation in the Cities, aimed at the project consortium and general public.



This document has been produced in the context of the Practicies Project. The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 740072.

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General Information

Population: 704,476

Location: Latvia, Baltic states

Official website: www.riga.lv

Website or -page of the service or office in charge of radicalisation prevention:
<http://dp.gov.lv>

Twinned with: Bremen (DE)

Summary

The main response coordinator and regulator for all directives and programmes put in place is the Latvian security police. As the State's militarised body, it monitors levels of radicalisation and prevents any violence that may come about as a result.

The city's strategy is aimed at primary prevention of radicalisation of citizens, (refugees as well) integration and support, minimising day-to-day problems and general unhappiness with a reality that does not meet expectations.

Riga City Council's Department of Education, Culture and Sport has created a programme for societal integration and an action plan for this programme's implementation. The City Council also works with the "Safe House" shelter, whose aim is to minimise radicalisation by developing support services for victims of human trafficking, legal immigrants (including asylum seekers), refugees and persons granted subsidiary protection status.

Background

Riga still isn't a very popular place for refugees to go to. However, the situation in Western Europe has shown the need for the implementation of a strategy to counter violent radicalisation. Despite this, it is still more of a preventative, precautionary approach than a current urgent need.

Objectives

The main aims of the city's projects are:

- to map out the current situation in the field of migration and integration and to create an action plan to involve immigrants in cooperation with society and municipal and state bodies;
- to increase understanding and support for the integration of immigrants into society;

- to spread information about the negative nature of discrimination and stigmatisation;
- to create an open-minded society;
- to educate social workers, education specialists, police officers, medical workers and others, who get in contact with groups or individuals at risk of radicalisation;
- to ensure an individual's right to receive adequate assistance and protection;
- to promote rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Strategy and Activities

The city's strategy is aimed at primary prevention of radicalisation of citizens (refugees as well) integration and support, minimising day-to-day problems and general unhappiness with a reality that does not meet expectations. This strategy is based on prevention through education.

As a part of the strategy, some significant projects have been put in place. One of them is the information centre for immigrants that has provided support to citizens from 75 countries. It provides information and support to people of different nationalities, who have arrived in Latvia from countries outside the European Union, as well as specialists who work with immigrants. There are also several training courses for asylum seekers. The aim of the "Support Activities for Persons Under International Protection" project is to provide courses and informative events for persons under international protection, as well as promoting their inclusion in Latvian society. 10 informative video-animations have been produced through this project for the support of persons under international protection, who are illiterate or have serious difficulties reading or writing: security and assistance services in Latvia (how to act in emergencies), money and banks, documentation, transport in Latvia, seasons, housing, medical services, employment, holidays and education. Each study group had the opportunity to learn about the state of Latvia, its political system, history, culture and traditions. They also received practical information about Latvia and its services, inclusion in society, principles of non-discrimination, communication and religious differences, decision-making, sense of time, the property market, employment opportunities, education system and opportunities to receive education, leisure activities, the healthcare system, the social security network and the social aid system. During the lessons, training for children was also included in special groups.

Prevention is the best way for police to act – which is why there are municipal police officer in each school in Riga. The purpose of these officers is to keep public order and to work closely with the social care teachers. This activity enables the city to monitor beginning radicalization processes in their early stages. If evidence of the radicalization among the children or youngsters is detected, Riga municipal police Juvenile crime prevention unit officers intervene. They are police officers specially

trained to work with underage persons. Juvenile crime prevention unit officers visit schools with for educational sessions as well.

If the victims or the cause of radicalization process are foreign citizens, this is the field for Riga municipal police tourism unit officers. Tourism unit officers are specially trained to work with foreigners and can communicate in different languages.

In case of violent radicalization processes and public disorder, there is the Riga municipal police riot unit which works in dangerous situations, places or with violent crowds.

Partnership

In social integration programmes, Riga City Council cooperates with the Ministry of Culture, social organisations such as the “Safe House” shelter, the Latvian Civic Alliance, the Latvian Platform for Development Cooperation (LAPAS), the Latvian Contact Point of the European Migration Network, the State police and the Security police. In the case of social organisations – they help the city with some projects in the fields of integration or de-radicalisation. State bodies provide the support and tutorials.

Budget

Riga’s activities are financed by the municipal budget. If the programme is part of Common European Strategy, activities are partly financed by the European projects budget.

Results

The positive result is that some of the projects have been successfully implemented to the point that they are no longer just a project, but a support system or social integration mechanism. However, the main reason that we can’t fully evaluate the results is the lack of a wide target group. Our target group for de-radicalization and integration is very small, which is why it is hard to work out whether the methods are successful or not.

Challenges and lessons learnt

As previously mentioned, it’s very hard to check whether the strategy is correct when you have such a small target group to test it with. This is especially true when the strategy affects a very specific group of people. The lack of specialists in this field is another problem. These issues made us correct certain aspects – to rely more on other

countries' experience and to think about finding specialists in the future by using exchange programs.

Next steps

The city's next step is to continue the development of preventive tools, to widen the range of services and programmes, to become more informed on other cities' and countries' experiences and to continue acquiring European Funds for Strategic Investments to boost municipal integration programmes.