



## **What is the role of local and regional authorities in the protection of public spaces and what tools can they use to better respond to terrorist threats?**

### **A series of web conferences**

Public spaces are places of exchange, culture, commerce, leisure and political expression... Because of their open nature, their high level of frequentation and their symbolic dimension, they can be subjected to several threats, terrorism being one of them. The protection of public spaces is a complex challenge for local and regional authorities. As stated by the European Commission in the Action Plan to support the protection of public spaces, besides Member States, "local and regional authorities are also important stakeholders in the protection of public space".

### **A project to strengthen local and regional authorities' capabilities in the protection of areas in public space**

In this context, PRoTECT – a project co-funded by the European Union's ISFP programme – aims to strengthen local authorities' capabilities in the protection of areas in public space that could potentially be soft targets for terrorism. Soft Targets are locations that are easily accessible to large numbers of people and have limited security or protective measures in place, making them vulnerable to an attack, for instance: sports venues, shopping venues, schools, and transportation systems. By applying an overarching concept where tools, technology, training and field demonstrations will lead to enhanced situational awareness and improvement of a direct response before, during and after a terrorist attack, the PRoTECT project seeks to ultimately strengthen security in public spaces.

In order to promote the exchange of experiences, Efus, in the framework of PRoTECT, is launching a series of web conferences on the protection of public spaces and soft targets. The aim of these online sessions is to discuss and raise awareness of the role of local and regional authorities in the protection of public spaces, as well as to propose tools to prevent these types of risks.

### **PRoTECT web conference 1**

#### **Vulnerability assessment of a potential target: How can local authorities make informed decisions on the necessary security provisions for public spaces?**

> 17th February 2021-2:00 pm CET

Assessing risks and vulnerabilities against a terrorist threat has become a necessary step in the security management cycle for actors in charge of security. Gaining better knowledge on site vulnerabilities can facilitate making informed decisions on the measures to adopt in order to offer safer public spaces to citizens and visitors.

This session presented the vulnerability assessment tool produced by the PRoTECT project and the role of local and regional authorities. Who should be in charge of conducting a vulnerability assessment? Which actors need to be involved? What information is key to analyse and how to analyse it? What tools can facilitate the analysis? What challenges might arise for local security actors?



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## Speakers:

- **Radoslaw Olszewski, DG HOME - Terrorism and Radicalisation unit/Protection sector, European Commission.**

EU Vulnerability Assessment Checklist for Public and Security Authorities developed by DG Home as part of the European Commission's efforts to support Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) in the protection of public spaces.

- **Tatiana Morales/Pilar De La Torre, Programme Managers, Efus.**

The PRoTECT Vulnerability Assessment Manual to strengthen municipal staff's ability by putting in place an overarching concept where tools, technology, training and field demonstrations lead to situational awareness and to an improvement of direct responses to protect public places before, during and after a terrorist threat.

- **Anita Schilling, Technical Project Leader at DIGINEXT.**

Virtual Reality mock-ups of real-world spaces to facilitate the vulnerability assessment of public spaces-[STEPWISE Project](#)

## Main insights from the session:

The European Commission has adopted a Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU. The Agenda seeks to support Member States in better anticipating, preventing, protecting and responding to a terrorist threat.

Once again, the role of local and regional authorities in the protection of public spaces is key. The Agenda also stresses the importance of protecting public spaces while safeguarding the open nature of these spaces.

Actions to be taken at local, national, EU and International level across 4 pillars:



The Commission will propose an EU Pledge on Urban Security and Resilience, to prevent and counter radicalisation and reduce vulnerabilities in public spaces.

### [EU Vulnerability Assessment Checklist \(EU VATC\) for Public and Security Authorities developed by DG Home](#)

The EU VATC is a Microsoft Excel workbook containing 6 spreadsheets. Each spreadsheet relates to a specific phase a Public Space of Interest (PSOI) (i.e., main site or one of the surrounding sites) may have. Each spreadsheet denotes a 'phase' an individual goes through to get to the main site (i.e., sports stadium, outdoor concert hall, hotel, school or other public gathering area).

The EU VAT assists the user in performing a vulnerability assessment for a specific public space. The tool is designed in such a way that users are stimulated to use their creativity and imagination in discovering possible attack scenarios, as opposed to a design whereby the user is simply asked a lot of detailed questions.

Scenarios are thus presented in the tool as a mixture of possible threat types, images, situations, questions and examples – not necessarily complete in every detail and to be taken literally, but to be used as inspiration in discussions within a team of experts.

The EU VAT allows practitioners to:

- Identify vulnerabilities in a wide range of public spaces
- Put together the processes undertaken to conduct a vulnerability assessment in different public spaces
- Understand the importance of looking at threats in a holistic way, as everyone has a different interpretation of potential threats
- Think about different threats
- Consider the different public spaces and the different operational aspects

Main challenges

- Threat assessment is not always available to everyone - not everyone is privy to all classified information
- Interpretation whether something is a threat/risk or not is subjective. Everyone has a different perception of risk/threats - a threat and its impacts on events or targets is not always interpreted in the same way by all parties
- Terrorists don't follow traffic laws - they will take the easiest route to reach the target
- Different events/facilities have different vulnerabilities and challenges: events with spread-out security are more complicated, and multiphase attacks are particularly complex to plan security measures for.

Lessons learned:

- Importance of engaging with the local community – this gives you many more eyes than you would have if you limited yourself to only engaging with security providers
- The tool is an aide-memoire to remind the user of certain things when conducting a vulnerability assessment
- Local authorities and actors are crucial end-users of this tool
- It is impossible to prevent all threats but we can mitigate them and respond to them if they happen. Sometimes we have to accept the threat and that you can't stop e.g. someone walking in with a knife, and put more mitigating measures in place
- No solution will cater to everyone
- It is important to share information and learn from others' experiences



- Live webcams of an area can create extra/new vulnerabilities
- There is no a single approach to identifying the vulnerabilities of public spaces. A tool needs to be highly flexible and adaptable, but can also become a challenge as not everyone will have the same understanding of the risk/threats. There needs to be a general consensus in the assessment-- it's a work in progress.

The DG HOME is currently developing an app to help people use a tool such as this in their work.

### PRoTECT VAT manual addressed to municipal staff

- The PROTECT Vulnerability Assessment Manual was created based on the EU Vulnerability Assessment Tool which was developed by DG HOME as part of the European Commission's efforts to support Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) in the protection of public spaces. The Manual and a series of factsheets both follow the structure of the EU VAT.
- This manual facilitates the use of the EU VAT and helps local authorities in charge of security in crowded places to identify the vulnerabilities to a terrorist attack. It also provides the steps that need to be taken by cities to conduct a vulnerability assessment as part of the security management process.
- The manual is addressed to municipal staff of local and regional authorities in charge of the security of public spaces. Although the Manual was primarily developed for local authorities, it can also be used by other stakeholders, and other stakeholders should be involved in the process of conducting a Vulnerability Assessment.
- The manual proposes to include in the assessment of the vulnerabilities in a specific place all the areas that might have an impact due to a concentration of people. A main site when a specific activity in the area takes place is normally a crowded place due to said activity, and the surrounding sites are where an activity at the main site can lead to other congested areas around the main site.
- The vulnerability assessment exercise is part of the risk management process. It allows us to identify the threats and the potential threat scenarios, and to determine consequences, probabilities, risk levels and vulnerabilities.
- The manual is divided in two main parts: the preparation of a Vulnerability Assessment and the conduction of a VA. In the first part the manual explains what to do before starting the conduction of a VA (how to set up the work method to successfully identify vulnerabilities, how to use the content of the tool and how to summarize the results in the record template).
- To facilitate the use of the VAT and the Manual, PRoTECT has created 4 fact sheets in which local authorities can easily find the information phase by phase, from the preparation to the conducting of a VA.

For more information about the fact sheets visit the Efus website:

<https://efus.eu/en/topics/%activity%/16516/>

### STEPWISE Project

- STEPWISE is an EU-funded project focused on the protection of public spaces and 'soft targets', such as public squares, open gathering areas, public events, transportation infrastructures, and other urban areas vulnerable to attacks. Using STEPWISE, security professionals can visualise and assess vulnerabilities, and various threat scenarios and situations. The project has produced an innovative platform to support the cooperation, coordination and cross-sectoral preparedness of Law Enforcement Agencies and their partners (public and private) involved in the design and protection of public spaces.



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- STEPWISE have created a platform to explore the building in detail and assess it for threats from your desk; by using a Building editor for a 3D mock-up, the practitioner will be able create a building model (realistic models are highly needed but the current software is a good start). This tool will facilitate the assessment of the vulnerability of public spaces and jointly develop and evaluate strategies to improve both their security and resilience without having to physically visit each of them. This allows everyone to be on the same page which is key for a vulnerability assessment.
- The platform will also facilitate the security design and planning by refining the security design of a building, optimising the positioning of sensors, staff and equipment and studying fields of view, lines of sight, visibilities and blind spots.
- STEPWISE Practitioners Workshop #3: Hands-on workshop open to external guests – “Test the tools yourself” will take place on 4, 11 or 12 March 2021 – to be confirmed. Registration contact: Lavinia Cadar, CRISISPLAN [cadar@crisisplan.nl](mailto:cadar@crisisplan.nl)

### Main conclusions:

- According to the EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda in the framework of the new EU security strategy, the protection of public spaces at local, national, European and international level comes under four pillars of actions to be taken: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, and Respond
- DG HOME has developed the EU Vulnerability Assessment Checklist to provide support in the assessment of public spaces for different kinds of threats. TNO and Efus have written a manual and several factsheets in the framework of the PRoTECT project that are aimed at municipal authorities, to help them use this tool to conduct a vulnerability assessment.
- It is important to look at threats in a holistic way, as everyone has a different interpretation of potential threats
- Not all threats can be prevented, but we can mitigate them and respond to them. A key part of risk evaluation is deciding which threats to accept as not being possible to prevent, and what mitigating measures to put in place
- It is important to engage with the local community when conducting a vulnerability assessment, and to not limit those involved to municipal security actors
- It is necessary to equip local authorities and other local actors with the tools to better respond to the risks present in public spaces and to anticipate and be prepared for potential threats.
- Training programmes are all the more necessary in strengthening local actors' capabilities in the protection of public spaces
- Technologies are also an ally in facilitating a vulnerability assessment. Drones can facilitate a more comprehensive view, as can the platform created by the STEPWISE project which aims to help security actors visualise public spaces and assess them for threats using computer software. This tool can facilitate the conducting of a vulnerability assessment by providing a 3D overview of the places concerned.
- Tools and guidance material can be of great support to local authorities in their role due to their flexibility and high customisation, but they are not a one-size-fits-all solution. Constant cooperation and exchange of information are necessary to keep such tools and practices up-to-date and to update material for use by the relevant security practitioners.

