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Center mot
våldsbejakande
extremism

Support model for handling and investigating concerns for violent extremism

Support material



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Introduction

It can be difficult and challenging to handle and investigate issues related to violent extremism. For many professionals, it is a topic that comes up very rarely. Yet once it does, it can create uncertainty about how best to handle the case. What questions can be asked? Who can be contacted? What support – socially and legally – is available? And what exactly are violent extremism and radicalisation?

The Swedish Center for Preventing Violent Extremism (CVE) has developed a support model to help professionals who are concerned about an individual who may be on the path to a violent extremist milieu or is already part of one. The aim is to offer quality support that professionals can use when handling and investigating concerns about violent extremism. The support model is also intended to increase the knowledge of the social services, the police, schools and other stakeholders about factors that can affect an individual's radicalisation process.

The support model consists of three parts:

- The first part is a **process map** that focuses on various steps to assess concerns about violent extremism. This map is divided into five stages: handling the concern (concern report), pre-assessment of the concern report, investigating the concern, interventions, and follow-up. The process map follows the social services' processes in the exercise of public authority.
- The process map is accompanied by part two, a **conversation guide** that includes questions to ask and things to consider during each step of the process map. It is primarily intended for the social services, but can also be used by other professionals who are concerned about an individual.
- The third part is this **support material**, which serves as a knowledge-raising aid when using the support model. To make the support material accessible and easy to read, there are no references in the text. If you are interested in learning more about the research that forms the basis for the support material, please turn to the **appendix** (background and research) that accompanies the support model. This appendix is published separately.

What do we mean by *concern* for violent extremism?

In this context, *concern* can range from having direct knowledge that an individual has come a long way in their radicalization process, or merely having a gut feeling that something is not quite right. As a professional, you might experience something in an interaction with the individual, but the concern could also come from someone close to the individual (such as their family or friends). Being concerned about an individual means that you care about them. Acting on your concern means you want to help their life situation.

We always recommend acting on your concern. The first step should be to talk to the individual, their relatives or other people who are in contact with the individual. But sometimes a concern report to the social services may also be necessary.

However, it can be difficult to know how to start, what to look for, and how to handle the situation. The support model is intended to help professionals manage these kinds of uncertainties and better equip them to handle concerns about radicalisation and violent extremism. Knowledge is the key to creating greater safety and confidence in one's own actions. We also encourage multi-agency cooperation between others in your municipality and local community, such as local police and local coordinators tasked with preventing violent extremism in the municipalities. CVE is also available if support and advice are needed.

How to use the support material

The support material can be used in several ways. It can be read in full to get a basic introduction to the subject. It can also be used to handle specific issues that arise in the course of your work and serve as a support in your interaction with the individual. The support material can also be helpful in gaining an overall understanding of the legislation in this field, as well as the risk and protective factors involved in issues related to radicalisation and violent extremism. However, this text is by no means exhaustive and it may need to be supplemented with other information about the individual, their environment, or violent extremist milieus.

The support material is aimed at a broad group of professionals who may come into contact with an individual where there are concerns for radicalisation and violent extremism. This means that all the material in the support material may not be equally relevant for everyone.

How the support material is divided

Chapter Two provides an overview of the topic of violent extremism. We define what violent extremism and radicalisation are and offer a brief introduction to the three violent extremist milieus in Sweden. We also show how violent extremism overlaps with other forms of crime, such as organised crime.

Chapter Three focuses on legislation and information sharing. An important key word throughout the support model is multi-agency cooperation and, in this chapter, we show what legal possibilities there are to share information between authorities. Although the focus is on the social services and the police, the support is also relevant for other actors, such as school staff and mental health and health care professionals.

Chapter Four focusses on the individual and risk and protective factors. Here, risk factors that can increase the risk of an individual becoming part of a violent extremist milieu are highlighted, along with protective factors that can reduce the risk. Emphasis is placed on the importance of understanding the individual's life situation from a holistic perspective. This chapter is aimed both at social workers and at other professionals engaged in preventative work.

Chapter 2

Violent extremism

In Sweden, we have a constitutional right to believe, think and say what we want. We have freedom of opinion and religion, as long as we follow the rules that govern our democracy and we do not infringe on the rights of others. We also have the freedom to organise.

Violent extremist actors and ideologies do not accept these fundamental democratic values. These ideologies justify or encourage violations of the right of others to exercise their constitutionally protected rights. This may entail using, encouraging or justifying violence or other forms of crime to achieve one's political goals. However, it is worth noting that violent extremists do not always resort to physical violence. They may also engage in psychological acts of violence, such as unlawful threats or unlawful influence.¹

A common way of describing violent extremists is that they engage in, encourage or otherwise justify ideologically motivated crime. It is not forbidden to have violent extremist views. However, it is not permitted to resort to violence or other criminal acts in order to act according to such ideology.

The three violent extremist milieus in Sweden

Violent extremists can act alone or in groups, but almost all of them are part of what is usually described as a *violent extremist milieu*. This milieu can be described as an ideological community in which extremists share ideas as well as organise and encourage, plan, and, as a consequence, commit crimes. A violent extremist milieu can encompass closely affiliated political parties or organisations. It may also contain looser networks of extremists. These can consist of families or groups of friends, as well as chat groups and online forums that come together around a violent extremist ideology. Violent extremist milieus can thus be both physical and virtual.

In Sweden, the Swedish Security Service has identified three violent extremist milieus:

- The violent Islamist extremist milieu
- The violent far-right extremist milieu
- The violent far-left extremist milieu

The Swedish Security Service track these three milieus because they believe that there are individuals and groups within them who have the will or capability to commit crimes with the goal of changing Sweden's democratic governance.

¹ *Unlawful influence* is a crime in which someone endeavours to influence decisions made by politicians or officials through harassment, threats or other acts of violence against people or property.

The greatest threat does not necessarily come from groups or organisations, but from so-called *lone actors*. These are individuals who carry out attacks without necessarily having contact with a physically violent extremist milieu or being a member of a group/organisation. Many lone actors are radicalised through their consumption of propaganda or online contact with individuals in an extremist milieu. There are lone actors in all three of Sweden's violent extremist milieus.

There are also violent extremists who cannot always be sorted into the three described milieus. Some are inspired by various conspiracy theories and develop their own worldviews. Others may focus on issues such as animal rights, environmental law or misogyny (so-called *violent misogyny*). In this support material, we focus on the three milieus identified by the Swedish Security Service.

The violent Islamist extremist milieu

In terms of the number of individuals involved, the *violent Islamist extremist milieu* is currently the largest extremist milieu in Sweden. According to the Swedish Security Service, this movement (together with the violent far-right extremist milieu) constitutes the most serious terror attack threat in Sweden.

Violent Islamist extremism is a collective term for groups and actors who want to replace democracy with a government based on hard-line and literal interpretations of Islam. In Sweden (as well as other countries), the movement consists primarily of individuals and groups that follow an ideology called Salafi jihadism. Salafi jihadism is a small minority interpretation of Salafism. Salafism is a conservative theological orientation within Sunni Islam that aspires to live life and organise society as the Prophet Mohammed did in the 7th century Saudi Arabia. People who ascribe to this ideology are opposed to democracy as a form of government, strive for strict gender segregation, and advocate a lifestyle based on conservative values. What distinguishes violent Islamist extremists from the vast majority of Salafists is that they advocate violence – jihad – to build a Salafist society. Most other Salafists reject this approach.

The general public is the most likely target of terror attacks carried out by violent Islamist extremists. The general populations of Western countries are regarded by many violent Islamist extremists as being made up of 'infidels' who are complicit in the suffering and oppression of Muslims, for example through the wars Western countries have waged in the Middle East. From the Salafist jihadist viewpoint, they are therefore legitimate targets of violence. Groups such as Jews and the LGBTQI community (homosexual, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex people) can also be targets of terror attacks carried out by violent Islamist extremists. But violent Islamist extremists also commit violent attacks and terror attacks against other Muslims. Followers from the Shia branch of Islam (whom Sal-

afi jihadists do not consider Muslims) are particularly vulnerable, but Muslims who have other theological interpretations may also be targeted. Violent Islamist extremists generally dislike Muslims who associate with non-Muslims. According to them, associating with ‘infidels’ can drag Muslims into moral depravity and they therefore advocate segregation.

Unlike the violent far-right and far-left extremist milieus, both of which are visible in public, the violent Islamist extremist milieu is more secretive in its actions. Its members rarely organise themselves into mainstream political parties or associations. Instead, the milieu consists primarily of loose like-minded networks of friends, acquaintances or relatives. During the 2010s, the violent Islamist extremist milieu grew rapidly in Sweden and the rest of the world. This was largely because the terror group, the Islamic State (IS), attracted individuals from all over the world. About 300 people from Sweden travelled down to the Middle East to join the group. Since the Islamic State lost large areas of land and leading figures have been killed or imprisoned, the attractiveness of the milieu has decreased. The Swedish Security Service believe that this milieu is not currently growing within the country.

The violent far-right extremist milieu

Violent far-right extremism is a collective term, just like violent Islamist extremism. The Swedish Security Service long referred to this milieu as the ‘white power movement’, because that was the most prominent part. Today, there is a greater diversity within the milieu when it comes to orientations, groups and ideologies, although the issue of the superiority of the white race still dominates.

Together with the violent Islamist extremist milieu, the violent far-right extremist milieu constitutes the largest terrorist threat in Sweden. The threat comes from both groups and individuals. Since the 2010s, several deadly terror attacks have been carried out by lone actors inspired by far-right ideas. The most common targets of violent far-right extremists are Muslims, Jews, immigrants, LGBTQI people, politicians and civil servants.

Within this milieu, there are supporters of multiple anti-Semitic, racist, homophobic, anti-feminist and anti-democratic ideologies. In Sweden, the most prominent ideology is National Socialism (often called Nazism). The basic idea of National Socialism is that humanity can be divided into different races. People from the Nordic countries and parts of Europe are considered to belong to the so-called ‘white’ or ‘Aryan’ race, which is seen as superior to other races. According to National Socialism, white Aryans should not mix with other races. Instead, they are meant to rule over them. Thus, this orientation within the far-right extremist milieu is also called the ‘white power milieu’. National Socialists believe that democracy is a poor form of government that is insufficient to ensure the survival of the white race. A small, elite group of ideologically orthodox leaders should rule instead. Jews are often painted as the main enemy and are considered to be secretly sitting on all the power in society.

Many far-right extremists believe in a conspiracy theory known as ‘the Great Replacement’. In brief, it holds that there is a global elite (led by Jews and/or so-called globalists) that supports immigration from Africa and the Middle East to countries where the majority of the population is white. Its purpose is to exterminate the white race. Many far-right extremists are prepared to use force against those they see as responsible for this supposed replacement of white people.

In recent years, an idea that the collapse of society should be accelerated has gained popularity. So-called *violent far-right accelerationists* believe that it is too late to bring about change in today’s society. In order for the white race to survive, society and democracy must first collapse through a race war between whites and non-whites. According to accelerationists, the descent into race war can be accelerated through acts of terror carried out by far-right extremists (working alone or in groups). These ideas have been behind several of the bloody terror attacks carried out by lone far-right extremists over the past decade.

The violent far-right extremist milieu has grown rapidly in recent years. More ideas have taken their place alongside National Socialism. These do not always focus on racism or anti-Semitism. Environmental and animal rights issues have also taken a larger place (so-called eco-fascism).

Numerous far-right extremists and terrorists have developed their ideas in online forums. The increased importance of the internet within the violent far-right extremist milieu has led it to become more international. Instead of focussing on their own country, far-right extremists now see themselves as a global movement. A far-right extremist in Bromölla may well be in touch with far-right extremists in Sydney. As a professional, it is important that you consider the potential links between the local and the global in far-right extremism.

The violent far-left extremist milieu

Violent far-left extremism is a collective term for a variety of groupings and ideas. Violent far-left extremists belong to the most extreme branch of what is usually called the ‘extra-parliamentary’ or ‘autonomous’ left. The autonomous left is dominated by so-called libertarian far-left groups driven by ideologies such as anarchism and anarcho-syndicalism. In short, this means that they are opposed to a strong state, capitalism and fascism. They claim to fight for an equal, classless society characterised by anti-racism, feminism and LGBTQI rights. They reject the Swedish democratic model, in which representatives are voted for in elections. Instead, they want to see direct democracy with popular government, in which citizens participate directly by making political decisions. However, violent far-left extremists differ from libertarian far-left groups in their emphasis that it is legitimate to use violence and other crimes to change society.

Violent far-left extremists see far-right extremists, the state and capitalism as their main enemies. Anti-fascism is a driving mindset within the milieu and it is interpreted very broadly. It goes beyond being against far-right groups and extends to a rejection of companies, politicians and authorities. Far-left extremists are against the capitalist system, which they believe maintains oppressive and fascist structures in society. Individuals who far-left extremists see as being on the far-right, supporters of far-right parties, or representatives of certain companies and authorities may be targeted.

At present, it is unlikely that violent far-left extremists will commit terror attacks with the aim of killing many people. Instead, the main threat here is violent riots, as well as harassment, unlawful influence, mapping, and unlawful threats against opponents, politicians and business leaders. This milieu is the smallest of the three violent extremist milieus in terms of the number of active individuals, but at the same time it is a difficult milieu to map and follow because it is decentralised. There are no traditional organisations with membership registers; instead, individuals within the milieu organise themselves in loose networks, temporary campaigns and projects. At the time of writing, the most well-known and active network is the *Antifascist Front (AFA)*, which is sometimes also known as *Antifa*.

What does radicalisation mean?

Radicalisation is the process a person or group goes through before becoming a violent extremist. Some critics say that the word is misused to smear people who have socially critical ideas but distance themselves from violence. The Swedish Security Service have noticed that violent and non-violent extremists sound increasingly similar to each other. It can therefore be difficult to determine who may resort to violence and who ‘just thinks’ something. This makes it important to know what factors can lead someone to consider carrying out or justifying an ideologically motivated crime – and what can help prevent such an individual’s radicalisation process.

Radicalisation is a complex process that does not have a single explanation. There is no manual that describes how an individual is radicalised or a blueprint for the process. Our main advice to you is to trust your professional judgment. If you feel concerned about one or more individuals, this feeling is probably not baseless. You should address it. It is better that you start a case that does not lead to any action than (in the worst-case scenario) for an individual/individuals to harm others or themselves. Also seek assistance from people close to you and cooperate with other actors and authorities. A common challenge when it comes to concerns for violent extremism and radicalisation is that information can be scarce. Colleagues and other professionals can be of great help. In this vein, multi-agency cooperation is important. We will come back to this throughout the support material.

But just because the radicalisation process is complicated does not mean that no conclusions can be drawn. To begin with, it is more common for men to be radicalised than women. The vast majority of people in the violent extremist milieus are men. However, women's radicalisation and involvement in violent extremist groups should not be underestimated. There is a prevailing idea that girls and women are 'lured' into violent extremist groups by fathers, brothers, boyfriends or spouses. Women can be just as ideologically devout as men. If you feel concerned about a person, gender should not affect your assessment.

The same applies to age. It is easy to imagine that young people are more vulnerable to radicalisation than adults, but this is not always true. The 'high risk' age is from late adolescence to early adulthood. Children and young people often live a supervised existence and are therefore less likely to be radicalised. It is when the adult world does not have full control of a young individual and they are seeking and struggling to find their way in life that the risk of radicalisation is greatest.

There are more factors about individuals or their social environment that can lead to their radicalisation – or prevent it. These are called *risk and protective factors*, and we will examine them more closely in Chapter Four. In addition to risk and protective factors, there are also so-called 'push' and 'pull' factors. Examples of push factors are poverty, segregation and major political events such as wars and conflicts. Examples of pull factors include having friends or family who are part of an extremist milieu, seeking to find one's identity or a longing for adventure, or a perceived/real path to money and/or social status. You should regard push and pull factors as good background knowledge in your work. In practical work dealing with violent extremism, you focus primarily on risk and protective factors.

It is worth recalling the importance of the internet for the radicalisation process and for violent extremist milieus. Research has yet to prove that the internet plays an increasingly important role for radicalisation at the societal level. At the same time, we know that the internet is an important gathering place for violent extremists. In recent years, investigations into terror attacks around the world have revealed that, in many cases, the perpetrators were radicalised and communicated with other extremists via online forums. If you feel concerned about an individual or are handling a case involving a concern report, it is important that you remain mindful of the potential significance of the internet. With whom is the individual in contact? On which internet sites is the individual active? What role does the internet play in the individual's social interactions? These questions are important in order to get a more comprehensive picture of the individual's life situation and social life.

Overlaps with other violent milieus

Violent extremism can overlap and penetrate other violent communities, such as criminal gangs, MC gangs, football hooliganism, and criminal clan networks. As a professional, it can sometimes be difficult to determine whether an issue involves violent extremism or something else.

- **The way in and out:** there are many similarities between people's motives for joining violent extremist milieus and other criminality. The push and pull factors here are similar to those in violent extremism. One difference is that ideology and politics play less of a role in other violent communities.
- **Direct links between people:** research has shown that violent extremists are sometimes associated with MC gangs, football hooliganism and criminal networks. It is likely that there are people who move between these milieus/communities and/or are active in several types of violent communities at the same time.

As a professional, it may be useful for you to be acquainted with the similarities between violent extremism and other violent milieus. Joining a violent extremist milieu can lead to other criminality. It is also good to know that even if a person does not express extreme views, the individual may still be at risk of ending up in a violent milieu.

Chapter summary

In summary, we can say that:

- In a democracy like Sweden, violent extremism can be described as **ideologies that distance themselves from the rules of democracy and encourage violence** and other crimes as political tools.
- The Swedish Security Service has identified **three violent extremist milieus**: The violent Islamist extremist milieu, the violent far-right extremist milieu, and the violent far-left extremist milieu.
- **Violent Islamist extremists** are driven by their desire to govern society according to an extreme and hard-line interpretation of Islam. Examples of their targets include the general public, Jews, LGBTQI people, and Christians.
- **Violent far-right extremists** are driven by anti-Semitic, racist and anti-democratic ideas. Examples of their targets include Muslims, Jews, immigrants, LGBTQI people, politicians and civil servants employed by the state.
- **Violent far-left extremists** are driven by anti-democratic ideas that advocate the use of force in the fight against political opponents such as far-right extremists and capitalists. Examples of their targets include far-right extremists, supporters of far-right parties, and representatives of certain companies and authorities.
- **Radicalisation is a complicated process** and there is no single reason why someone becomes radicalised (or not radicalised).
- There may be **overlap between violent extremism and other criminality**. Preventing an individual from joining a violent extremist milieu can thus also prevent them from joining other violent communities.

If you would like to read more, you can turn to www.cve.se/publikationer or read the academic appendix that forms the basis for this support material.

Chapter 3

Legislation and Multi-agency cooperation

This chapter looks more closely at legislation and multi-agency cooperation in the face of concerns about violent extremism. We focus on the provisions on the breach of confidentiality contained in the *Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act (Offentlighets- och sekretesslagen, OSL)*, which provide for the possibility of information sharing for general crime prevention purposes and to prevent terrorist criminality.

As in the previous chapter, the aim here is not to provide an exhaustive overview, but rather to present the relevant legislation. To make the text simple and easy to read, we have included legal texts in the running text as much as possible. In case of uncertainty, we recommend that you consult your manager or the authority with whom you would like to get in touch. One way to deal with uncertainty in multi-agency cooperation is to build secure and trust-based relationships. We hope that after reading this chapter, you will have an increased knowledge of the legal conditions that govern the possibility for social services, the police and the security service to share information about an individual in cases involving violent extremism.

Legislation and multi-agency cooperation: an overview

There are a number of provisions on information sharing that are relevant in the preventive work against violent extremism. These provisions cover information sharing both for the purpose of preventing young people from becoming criminally active at an early stage, and to prevent and investigate terrorist criminality regardless of the person's age. While legislation on information sharing to prevent crime has been in place for some time, legislation on information sharing in connection with terrorist criminality is more recent. We focus on both in this chapter, but provide a brief overview of what is meant by 'terrorist criminality' and what new legislation is involved.

'Terrorist criminality' covers the following types of crimes or attempted crimes:

- a) crimes under Sections 4–10 of the Terrorist Offences Act (2022:666).
(Terrorist offences: financing, recruitment to, and training for terrorism; public incitement to terrorism; association with a terrorist organisation and travelling for terrorism purposes.)
- b) attempting, preparing or conspiracy to committing² a terrorist offence under Section 4 of the same Act.

² *Conspiracy* means that a person (acting either alone or with others) decides to commit a crime, takes it upon themselves to carry out the crime, or tries to get another person to commit the crime. Conspiracy can be the first step before committing a serious crime, after which steps may be taken to make preparations for the crime, for example by booking a rental car. Conspiracy is punishable only in the case of particularly serious crimes, such as murder, aggravated assault, and terrorist offences.

On 1 August 2020, new sections added to the OSL came into force that allow social services to share information with the police and security service in cases concerning terrorist criminality. They also permit the police to share information with the local social services for crime prevention purposes. The new sections of the law are:

- **Chapter 10, Section 18b OSL** – information sharing by authorities within the social services (local and national) with the police or security service for the purpose of preventing terrorist criminality. Not age-specific.
- **Chapter 35, Section 10 OSL** – information sharing by the police with local social services to prevent terrorist criminality. Not age-specific.
- **Chapter 10, Section 22a OSL** – information sharing by authorities within the social services (local and national) with the police or security service when terrorist criminality has already been committed. Not age-specific.

Information sharing – for the prevention of terrorism as well as other crimes – can be done on the sharer’s own initiative or upon request:

- There is no obligation to share information with another authority on your own initiative, but there is a legal **possibility** to do so.
- According to Chapter 6, Section 5 OSL, any person who exercises public authority has a duty to share information³. However, the provisions on the breach of confidentiality in order to share information for crime prevention purposes leave room to determine whether the information is relevant and whether it endangers one’s own planned or ongoing work with the client. Upon a request for information, it is the authority that will be disclosing information that assesses whether the conditions for breaching confidentiality are met. To facilitate this assessment, it is therefore important that the authority requesting the information justifies why the requested information is important.

The possibilities for the social services to share information

The first section of the law that is relevant to social services is **Chapter 10, Section 18 a OSL**. This section is aimed at people under the age of 21, and refers to crime prevention efforts at a very early stage, even before there are actual crimes to prevent. The provision is not linked to a particular type of crime or range of punishment. Rather, it concerns crime in general. For information to be shared, three conditions must be met: (1) that due to special circumstances, there is a risk that the young person will engage in criminal activity; (2) the information can be assumed to contribute to its prevention and (3) it is not considered inappropriate for the information to be disclosed, in view of planned or ongoing work with the young person, or for other special reasons.

³ Provided that the authority has the information, that it may be disclosed by law, and that the disclosure does not impede the due course of the work (OSL 6:5).

What does this mean in practice? The legislative text and the government bill contain certain key phrases that are worth noting:

- **Confidentiality pursuant to Chapter 26, Section 1 does not prevent information sharing:** The possibility of breaking confidentiality in order to prevent a young person from becoming involved in criminality applies not only to social services, but to all authorities that apply confidentiality in accordance with Chapter 26, Section 1 OSL (both local and national authorities; e.g., the National Board of Institutional Care). However, this does not apply to the Swedish Police Authority (see below).
- **What kind of information may be shared?** The information does not need to relate specifically to the individual; it is also possible to provide information that describes the individual's social context and immediate surroundings. For example, it can be about where the person lives, who they spend time with, or the members of their family. These details are important to the police in their work to localise, keep an eye on, and potentially prevent the individual's criminal activity.
- **What does 'special circumstances' mean?** There must be some sort of substance to the concern or fear that means it goes beyond mere speculation. The wording here is deliberately vague, to leave room for flexibility and sensitivity in the individual case. It may be that the individual has committed crimes before or is in an environment where there is a risk that they will start committing crimes. For example, they may be associating with people who are part of a criminal network or a violent extremist milieu.
- **What does 'criminal activity' mean?** The legislator has chosen not to use the term "crime", but rather "criminal activity". The purpose being to enable very early crime prevention interventions that can be implemented before the individual commits specific crimes. Perhaps a young individual is associating with people in a criminal network and there is thus a risk that they will commit crimes themselves.
- **What does 'be assumed to contribute to its prevention' mean?** It means that the information should be assumed to be useful to the recipient. The information alone does not need to lead to the desired result. It is sufficient that when combined with other information, it can be assumed to contribute to the desired effect. If you are uncertain whether the information is useful, we recommend that you contact the receiving authority and consult with them in anonymised form. This can be done without breaching confidentiality.
- **When is it not appropriate for information to be shared?** The ongoing or planned work of social services with a young individual is very important. If the disclosure of a particular piece of information compromises that work, it may be inappropriate to share it. The legislator thus gives social services a possibility to refrain from fulfilling its information obligation in OSL 6:5. At the same time, they emphasise that "within an established multi-agency cooperation, however, the premise should be that information can be disclosed."⁴ The balancing of interests in these situations is a matter of judgment. Please contact your manager in case of uncertainty.

In order for the information to be shared, the **three conditions** mentioned above must be met. The relatively low thresholds ('there is a risk', 'can be assumed', etc.) not only allow you to make an individual assessment in the individual case, but also discourage unnecessary or excessive information from being shared, while preventing the arbitrary withholding of important information that can prevent a young individual from descending into a criminal lifestyle.

The second section of the law pertaining to information sharing in relation to social services is **Chapter 10, Section 18 b OSL**. It gives social services the possibility to share information with the police and security service in order to prevent terrorist crimes, and is one of the sections of the law that came into force on 1 August 2020. It is essentially an addition to **Chapter 10, Section 18 a OSL** and has more or less the same wording, with only two important differences: Chapter 10, Section 18 b OSL is not age-specific and it pertains to specific type of crimes (terrorist crimes).

What does this mean in practice? The legislative text and the government bill contain certain key phrases that are worth noting. Several of them echo Chapter 10, Section 18 a OSL:

- **Confidentiality pursuant to Chapter 26, Section 1 does not prevent information sharing:** The possibility of breaking confidentiality in order to prevent terrorist crimes applies not only to social services, but to all authorities that apply confidentiality in accordance with Chapter 26, Section 1 OSL (both local and national authorities; e.g., the National Board of Institutional Care). However, this does not apply to the Swedish Police Authority (see below).
- **What kind of information may be shared?** The same type of information requested under Chapter 10, Section 18 a OSL. For example, where the person lives, who they spend time with, or members of their family.
- **What is meant by 'special circumstances'?** As above, there must be something tangible that makes the concern go beyond mere speculation. For example, perhaps the individual has expressed a willingness to travel for terrorist purposes or to carry out some other crime linked to terrorism (e.g. financing, preparing terrorist crimes, or inciting others to carry out terrorist crimes). Here, an overall assessment must be made of whether there is a not insignificant or far-fetched risk that this could occur. For example, an individual may have previously committed similar crimes, associate with people linked to terrorism, or spend time in such a milieu. The legislator has chosen not to go into further detail regarding the risk assessment process; instead they leave room for flexibility and sensitivity in the individual case. Note that the level of risk does not have to be 'considerable' or 'special'; it is sufficient that a risk is deemed to exist. If you feel uncertain, we recommend that you contact the police or the security service and discuss the matter in anonymised forms.
- **What is meant by 'can be assumed to contribute to its prevention'?** As above, this concerns how the information can benefit the recipient. There is no requirement that the infor-

mation alone must lead to the prevention of terrorist crimes; it is sufficient that it can be assumed to contribute to the desired effect. For social services, it can be difficult to determine what effect or what measures the police and/or the security service will take. Once again: In case of uncertainty, contact the police and/or security police and consult with them about the matter in anonymised forms terms.

- **When is it not appropriate for information to be disclosed?** The same rules as above apply. It may be inappropriate for information to be shared if it compromises ongoing or planned work with an individual. In case of uncertainty, please contact your manager to discuss the matter.

Chapter 10, Section 18 b OSL concerns information sharing to prevent terrorist criminality. But what about information sharing if an individual has already committed a terrorist crime? Then **Chapter 10, Section 22 a OSL** applies, which entered into force on 1 August 2020. This section of the law gives social services (local and national) the possibility to share information with the police and the security service when suspecting that a type of terrorist crime has been committed, regardless of its penal value.

People linked to violent extremism may not just have committed, or be at risk of committing, terrorist crimes. They may also commit other types of crime, some of them very minor. For these crimes, however, the general rules for breaching confidentiality apply; e.g., **Chapter 10, Section 23 OSL**. This means that in order to share information, the minimum required penal value for a committed crime is one-year imprisonment, and two years for an attempted crime.

The possibilities for the police to share information

On 1 August 2020, the Swedish Police Authority also received increased possibilities to share information in order to prevent terrorist criminality, pursuant to **Chapter 35, Section 10 c OSL**. Note that this provision does not include the security service, only the police authority. In addition, information may only be shared with the local social services and not with other authorities or private actors who act on behalf of the social services (e.g., the National Board of Institutional Care). The reason for this is that local social services fill an important preventive role through various actions that can (1) prevent individuals from being drawn into violent extremism, (2) help those who want to leave violent extremist milieus, and (3) provide support to those who have left these milieus in order to reduce the risk of a relapse.

This section of the law enables to share information that is otherwise protected under **Chapter 35, Section 1 OSL**. However, it does not enable sharing information that is protected by confidentiality under **Chapter 18 OSL**, e.g., information that is subject to pre-trial confidentiality. This means that information can only be shared if it does not harm the police's ongoing investigation and if it can be assumed to be beneficial to social services in their crime prevention work. For example, if an individual associate with people who the police suspect of recruitment to terrorism, or if an individual spends much time in a certain place linked to terrorist activities. The information alone does not need to lead to the desired effect; it can be just one piece of the puzzle that, together with other pieces of information, can be assumed to contribute to the prevention of crime. A balance of interests must be carried out before the information is disclosed, whereupon the benefit of disclosing the information is deemed to be greater than the benefit of protecting it. It is the Swedish Police Authority that makes this assessment.

Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an overview of legislation on information sharing. When it comes to violent extremism and radicalisation, the issue of what information authorities can and cannot share with each other is both important and challenging. Even if legal possibilities of sharing exist, one can still feel uncertain about when and how confidentiality may be breached and what type of information may be shared. Looking back at this chapter, we can make the following conclusions:

- **Take advantage of the possibilities for information sharing:** There is legislation that allows for information sharing, and it is there to be used. If you feel uncertain, ask! It's better to enquire about the possibility of sharing than to sit on information that might be of importance. Bear in mind that the intention of the legislator, in cases where the requirements are met, is that you should be able to share relevant information with each other.
- **Consult each other in anonymised forms:** In case of uncertainty, you can consult with the receiving authority in anonymised forms. This can be done without breaching confidentiality.
- **Multi-agency cooperation is crucial** for information sharing to work. But cooperation goes beyond the law: **it is grounded in trust and good relationships**. Build these relationships and create opportunities for contact between (and within) authorities.
- **Learn about each other's work and associating legislation:** this will facilitate cooperation and information sharing.

Chapter 4

Risk and protective factors

In this chapter, we take a closer look at *risk and protective factors* that can increase or decrease the risk that a person will become radicalised and join a violent extremist milieu. In the support model, it is important to look at both *individual and contextual* risk and protective factors. There is no single factor that can explain a development towards radicalisation and violent extremism; it is a process involving a number of interconnected relationships, conditions and circumstances that reinforce each other. An individual's life situation is characterised not only by their own conditions (individual risk and protective factors), but also by the social contexts (such as family, friends and society in general) of which the individual is a part. Viewed together, these provide a holistic understanding of an individual's life situation in order to address any concern for radicalisation and violent extremism.

This chapter is divided into several parts. First, we describe what seem to be important individual and contextual risk factors in relation to violent extremism. Next, we outline protective factors. In individual cases, there may be factors other than those mentioned below. These are of course important for you to identify and address. It is not possible to create a completely exhaustive checklist of which risk and protective factors always exist, or of those that determine a particular development. Nevertheless, the following factors are a compilation of what Swedish and international studies have highlighted in relation to radicalisation and violent extremism. You should regard this chapter as a tool you can use in your work to identify risk and protective factors.

Risk factors

Risk factors can, in short, be described as the factors that increase the risk of an individual being drawn into violent extremism, crime or other antisocial behaviour. The research in this area is much more extensive than that which focusses on protective factors. This knowledge gap is problematic, as supportive and preventive work has just as much to do with reinforcing protective factors (and the interaction between them) as it does with counteracting risks.

Plenty of people may share several of the risk factors listed below, yet never become violent extremists. It is not possible to establish what development a particular individual will take. But a careful consideration of risk factors can help identify what may increase the risk of an individual being drawn into a violent extremist milieu. In other words, risk factors can show what can act as 'push' and 'pull' factors for an individual. Identifying these factors can thus assist in the investigative work to determine what leads an individual to feel attracted to or become part of a violent extremist milieu, but this step alone can never constitute the entire investigation.

Risk factors must also be weighed in relation to a person's age, maturity and life situation. For a person in their teens, contact with people they see as role models (within, for example, a violent extremist milieu) can be important if the young person is searching for a path in life and feels like an outsider in other contexts. For an older person with a wider social network, such contact can have a totally different effect. As with all investigative work, it is important to look at each individual's situation and interpret risk factors in relation to the individual's life story.

Swedish and international studies have identified a number of individual risk factors that can increase the risk of an individual being radicalised or drawn into a violent environment:

- **Age and gender** often emerge as potential individual risk factors. As is also the case in other forms of criminality, young men in their teens or twenties are overrepresented in violent extremist milieus. However, it is important to avoid overgeneralisation. Age does not necessarily constitute a risk that an individual will be drawn into a violent extremist milieu. There are examples of children who are active in extremist milieus on the internet, and there are also people over the age of thirty who join violent extremist milieus. Moreover, women of all ages also become radicalised. Although men are still overrepresented in violent extremist milieus, women can play active and very prominent roles, both ideologically and socially. Perceptions of what it means to be a woman and traditional gender roles can have implications for women's radicalisation, just as destructive perceptions of masculinity and masculinity (e.g., machismo and macho culture) can be risk factors for men.
- Other risk factors highlighted in research are **previous experiences of violence, abuse and criminality**. It may be that the individual has experienced these kinds of things in the past, for example been part of a gang, possess knowledge of how to exercise violence (including the use of and access to weapons) or been around people who glorify the use of violence to achieve political goals. Fascination and interest in guns and violence can also be risk factors for (or even a sign of) violent extremism. The individual may also have been subjected to abuse – physical and emotional – that leads to a desire to seek revenge, either against specific individuals and groups or against society. A previous history of criminality may be a risk factor for radicalisation.
- **Mental illness and psychiatric diagnoses** can be possible risk factors for radicalisation and violent extremism. Low self-esteem, low self-control, thrill-seeking, aggressiveness, identity crisis, a lack of a sense of belonging and neuropsychiatric disabilities (e.g., ADHD and autism spectrum disorders) can all increase the risk that an individual may be drawn into an extremist milieu. As we saw in Chapter Two, violent extremist milieus can contribute to identity-building and social belonging. But while mental illness can be a contributing factor, it is by no means a conclusive one. Rather, one must examine the interplay of various factors, where a certain form of mental illness or mental disorder (e.g., if the individual exhibits a grandiose, unrealistic or narcissistic self-image) can be linked to certain ideological leanings and the search for community. For some individuals, this can increase the propensity to seek answers in radicalised environments.

- **Unemployment and dropping out of school or higher education** can also be individual risk factors. Such circumstances can result in a sense of alienation and failure that can lead to mental illness (or be a result of mental illness), as well as (in the case of unemployment) financial difficulties. Failure itself can create a willingness seek to frame perceived or real shortcomings in compensatory contexts.
- **Perceived or actual social and political marginalisation and exclusion** have been noted as individual risk factors for radicalisation and violent extremism. For example, an individual may feel alienated from other groups, that they cannot make themselves heard or are being silenced, or that they are being prevented from expressing their opinions in some other way. This area also overlaps with more contextual risk factors, such as a lack of political representation or feeling that specific issues or political views are not given space in the public debate. Experiences like these can of course also lead to pro-social societal engagement. The lack of real participation should not only be noted as a risk factor; it can also be translated into more general preventive and promotional work in which contexts are created that make people feel seen as positive resources.

If individual risk factors can help us understand what makes an individual become more vulnerable to radicalisation, **contextual risk factors** help us gain a deeper understanding of the social context in which the individual lives. It is often difficult to separate individual and contextual risk factors because they interact. An individual's mental well-being and experience of themselves is shaped by the social environment in which they live. Contextual risk factors thus help us to gain a broader and more comprehensive understanding of an individual's life situation.

Contextual risk factors are important because they help us to see what kind of social environment to which an individual will be returning if they leave a violent extremist milieu. Perhaps there are relationships or groups that they perceive as problematic, for example socially or in their living environment. If so, it will be important to support the person as they shift back into their old environment.

- In interaction with other factors, **destructive family relationships**, such as physical, psychological and emotional abuse, parents in prison, social and financial vulnerability, death, or a lack of support from parents can all contribute to an individual's decision to seek out a violent extremist group. Family relationships can also be characterised by a lack of parenting skills and a counterproductive childrearing style with too little warmth, attention and thoughtfulness. Family-related circumstances can interact with a desire for social belonging and security. Family members or close relatives who are active in violent extremist milieus can also be contextual risk factors. They give individuals a more direct path into a violent extremist milieu and can also facilitate the creation of emotional relationships with a violent extremist group and/or ideology. Such ties can make it more difficult for an individual to leave such a group, even if they would like to, as it can mean cutting family ties.

- **Friends and acquaintances who are active in violent extremist milieus** can constitute a contextual risk factor. Through friends, an individual may come into contact with radical and violent ideologies and materials. The involvement and stories of their circle of friends give meaning to a young person's life and can generate a curiosity that can lead an individual to choose to join a violent extremist milieu.
- **A lack of social relationships** can be a contextual risk factor that may contribute to an individual's decision to seek out violent extremist milieus and ideologies, not least to experience a sense of community. The lack of a social context can lead to an increased hatred of those who the individual sees as reasons for their perceived or actual exclusion. For some individuals (but of course far from all of them), this can spark sympathy with ideologies that dehumanise such groups (e.g., immigrants, 'Swedish society', women) and lead the individual to choose to advocate a violent extremist ideology. Dehumanisation is itself a risk factor and can be a sign that an individual is part of or about to join a violent extremist milieu. For some, expressing sympathy for violent extremist ideologies and groups can also be seen as a cry for help in response to an unsustainable situation and may be linked to mental illness. Therefore, it is important to contextualise how an individual expresses themselves, and take their life situation and life story into account.

Protective factors

Protective factors are the factors that can reduce the risk of radicalisation. These are sometimes framed as the opposite of risk factors – the things that work against what is not working – but that is not always the case. Protective factors do not eliminate risk factors; rather, they contribute to an increased understanding of an individual's life situation. Moreover, protective factors do not remain static during an individual's life. Events in life can lead an individual to develop new protective factors or reinforce existing ones, thereby improving their life situation. Protective factors can become less effective if something negative happens in an individual's life.

Protective factors in relation to radicalisation and violent extremism remain a rather unexplored area. However, a number of recent research studies have focused on this topic. Knowledge is crucial not only to prevention, but also to support and treatment work. Without knowledge of an individual's protective factors, the picture of their situation remains incomplete. Furthermore, if it is not possible to analyse how various factors interact and counteract each other, this makes it more difficult to know what can halt a development towards radicalisation. Identified protective factors show what is working in an individual's life and thus provide the opportunity to reinforce these areas. As with risk factors, the list of protective factors below is by no means exhaustive.

We first focus on **individual protective factors**:

- **Success in school, education and work** are identified as possible individual protective factors. Having a job to go to can also be a protective factor that prevents an individual from being drawn into violent environments, especially if the person feels a strong motivation and social connection to the educational institution and/or workplace. School and work can also contribute to a desire to leave a violent extremist milieu.
- **Cognitive abilities, such as critical and complex thinking**, can be individual protective factors. Violent extremist groups and ideologies are often permeated by black-and-white, conspiratorial ways of thinking in which simplistic answers are ascribed to complex problems. The ability to think in critical and complex terms increases the likelihood that an individual will see through simple explanatory models and be less willing to simply accept them without question. At the same time, critical thinking can also be a risk factor if it becomes conspiratorial, and reinforcing critical thinking without addressing the risk factors in an individual's life can prove counterproductive.
- Studies have shown that psychological protective factors such as a **positive self-esteem, self-control, healthy self-confidence, and capacity for empathy** can reduce the risk. Such qualities say something about a person's security in who they are – with both strengths and shortcomings. They also foster a sense of being valuable and appreciated. The capacity for empathy, that is, the ability to imagine oneself in another person's situation, can also be a protective factor. It challenges the dehumanisation and stigmatisation of specific individuals and groups by violent extremist milieus. However, these psychological factors have been criticised as vague and difficult to apply in practice. It is difficult to assess what should be classified as “healthy self-confidence”, “self-control”, “positive self-esteem”, or “capacity for empathy”, and these qualities can be interpreted differently depending on social context and profession.

There are a number of **contextual protective factors** that can prevent an individual from being drawn into a violent extremist milieu or facilitate their exit. At first glance, they may seem to be the exact opposites of certain risk factors. Among them are secure family relationships, close and stable friendships, good role models and positive political representation.

- **Secure family relationships**, including supportive and good relationships with one's parents, good parenting, and growing up in a safe environment, can be a contextual protective factor. Studies also tell us that there are individuals who grow up in secure families who choose, nonetheless, to engage in violent extremist milieus. Yet at the group level, a safe family environment is generally important and can play a significant role in whether someone chooses to leave a violent extremist milieu. It also makes it more likely that the individual will have family members in whom they can confide.

- **Close and stable relationships outside the family** – both with relatives and with friends – can be important. Friends and relatives who are outside violent extremist milieus can be important reasons not to join or to leave. It can thus be important to focus on reinforcing these contacts when concern about an individual is expressed, or during a subsequent investigation.
- There are also societal contextual protective factors. Among others, research highlights the importance of **good role models in the local area**. These can be people such as youth group leaders, leisure activity leaders, sports coaches or religious representatives who interact and build good relationships with individuals. These people can also be compensatory figures if an individual's home environment and/or circle of friends have a negative influence. Political representation and the feeling that one has a voice in the public debate can also be contextual protective factors. They can generate social platforms where the individual can find pro-societal engagement if they so choose.

Chapter summary

In this chapter, we have taken a closer look at risk and protective factors that can increase or decrease the risk that an individual will become radicalised and join a violent extremist milieu. By focussing on both risk and protective factors, we gain a more holistic understanding of an individual's life situation – both the negative aspects and the positive ones. This chapter leaves us with some conclusions:

- **Risk factors are the factors that can *increase* the risk** that an individual will become radicalised and join a violent extremist milieu. There are both individual risk factors, which relate to the individual, and contextual risk factors, which concern the individual's social environment.
- **Protective factors are the factors that can prevent** an individual from radicalising, but can also be factors that facilitate their exit from a violent extremist milieu.
- **Risk and protective factors are not static**. Negative events in an individual's life can make them more vulnerable, while positive experiences can strengthen their resilience. Protective factors can be built up through interventions, activities and treatment.
- When there is a concern about radicalisation and violent extremism, it is important to **look for both risk and protective factors** in the individual's life situation.
- To this end, **always be curious and ask questions** about the individual's life situation. Get them to describe what is going well and what is not.
- **The conversation guide in the support model** is intended to facilitate such conversations and help identify risk and protective factors in an individual's life.

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