

***Evaluation and mentoring of the Multi-Agency approach to
violent radicalisation in Belgium, the Netherlands, and
Germany***

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1. Introduction

In the context of radicalisation prevention, there are numerous initiatives taken at the local, regional, and national level. In recent years, we have been witnessing an increasing and strong focus on bringing together different actors in preventing violent radicalisation through a Multi-Agency approach. Multi-Agency structures and working processes are crucial for early and effective identification of individuals at-risk, improved information-sharing, joint decision-making, and coordinated action. But there are still many challenges that local actors are facing in their MAW (Multi-Agency Working) network.

2. EMMA-project

In order to identify the needs and conditions under which effective cooperation is successful, an evaluation research is required. The EMMA project (Evaluation and Mentoring of the Multi-Agency approach to violent radicalisation in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany) attempts to facilitate this evaluation. The EMMA project is an EU-funded project (funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund – Police) which focuses on the MAWs in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany in order to develop a self-evaluation toolkit for these structures to enhance the self-reliance of local actors in improving the existing structures. The programme runs from January 2020 until the beginning of 2022. The partners of the EMMA project are the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG), Ghent University, RadarAdvies and Violence Prevention Network (VPN).

2.1 MAWs in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany

Firstly, an overview of existing MAW approaches in the context of violent radicalisation in the three countries will be given. Information on the Belgian, Dutch, and German structures was primarily collected by consulting experts (key informants) in the field (EMMA project partners, data protection officers, and relevant MAW actors from the three countries) and supplemented with relevant literature and legal documents.

Although these countries are neighbouring one another, the approaches to MAW in these countries differ a lot in terms of legislation (e.g., on information sharing), structure (e.g., level of organisation, key actors), procedures (e.g., case management), and goals (e.g., target groups, role, and function). There does not seem to be one general MAW approach in the field. Just as with the case of crime prevention, there is no magic bullet.

2.1.1 Belgium

On 13 July 2018, the legislation for the LISC-R (local integrated security cell on radicalism, extremism and terrorism) came into effect. From that point on, municipalities were obliged to establish or join an LISC-R.¹ The objective of the LISC-R is the prevention of terrorist crimes. This general objective can be divided into two goals (1) the early detection of individuals vulnerable to violent radicalisation and (2) the development of a personalised/tailor-made approach. Belgium had 272 LISC-Rs on 1 September 2020 (FOD Binnenlandse Zaken, 2021). MAW structures consist of various local actors (e.g., municipalities, local police officers, social housing agencies, healthcare professionals, etc.).

Despite the existence of a legal framework, there is no universal approach for the structure of the MAW. The most common structure in Flanders is a combination of the strategic and operational roundtables in an 'integrated' roundtable (Orgaan voor de Coördinatie en Analyse van de Dreiging, 2019). However, the LISC-R law does impose a number of obligations on the composition of the

¹ Omzendbrief betreffende de informatie-uitwisseling rond en de opvolging van Foreign Terrorist Fighters afkomstig uit België en de inperkingen van de dreiging die ervan uitgaan (21 augustus 2015) (Brussel: Minister van Binnenlandse Zaken en Minister van Justitie); Circulaire relative à l'échange d'informations et au suivi des Foreign Terrorist Fighters (21 août 2015) (Bruxelles: Ministre de l'intérieur et du Ministre de la Justice).

MAW structure and requires the mayor, the information officer, and a municipal officer as coordinator, to participate in the LISC-RLISC.

In general, there are two ways in which an individual case can be brought up for discussion at the LISC-R. The first way a case can be submitted is through the vertical top-down information flux with the LTF (Local Task Force)² in which the information is passed on from the LTF to the mayor through the information officer. Alternatively, a case can be submitted bottom-up, either via signalling structures for citizens and organisations within the municipality or directly via a participating MAW actor. Decision rules and timings for the closing of a case can differ from MAW to MAW (De Waele, 2018).

2.1.2 The Netherlands

In the Netherlands, the responsibility for developing a preventive approach to violent radicalisation lies with the local authorities. For a number of elements of this preventive approach, such as case management, municipalities can rely on the facilitating support of the Care and Safety Houses (CSH) (in Dutch: Zorg- en Veiligheidshuizen) as a Multi-Agency working unit. To obtain this support, the local authorities can join the regional CSH (Hardyns et al., 2021). The CSH structure is organised on a regional level, per safety region. The Netherlands currently has 30 CSHs in total (Zorg- en Veiligheidshuizen, n.d.).

On 13 February 2020, a legislative proposal was introduced that would include the legal task of mayors and aldermen to organise a case management approach in a matter concerning a radicalising individual. This legislative proposal also formulates the exchange of information between the participating actors and defines the goal of the case management as promoting coordination of measures with regard to persons who reside or have resided in the city and can be linked to radicalising activities. The permanent actors – the mayor/the Board of Mayor and Aldermen, police, public prosecutor's office, the Ministry of Justice and Security, probation institutions, and the Child Protection Board – are also described, each with a specific role in the case management.³

² Wet tot oprichting van lokale integrale veiligheidszellen inzake radicalisme, extremisme en terrorisme, art. 4.

³ Wetsvoorstel persoonsgerichte aanpak en meldingen over radicalisering en terroristische activiteiten (13 februari 2020) (Den Haag: Minister van Justitie en Veiligheid).

The scope of the MAW structure in the Netherlands is broad. All complex problems that meet predetermined criteria can be discussed. Four specific themes have been defined and are believed to cover a substantial proportion of these complex problems, including radicalisation and violent extremism. The other themes covered are domestic violence and child abuse, re-integration of ex-prisoners posing a security threat, and persons with confused behaviours posing a security threat. However, these four themes are not exhaustive and do not cover all 'complex problems' (Rovers & Hoogeveen, 2016).

The case management procedure can generally be defined in several steps, starting with (1) registration and case intake, followed by (2) the triage, (3) the individual case approach, and finally, (4) the conclusion. To steer its operation, the CSH has a process coordinator who is responsible for the preparation of both the triage table and the case management, for recording the decisions of this structure, requesting further information, and informing the persons involved.

2.1.3 Germany

In Germany, a variety of MAW cooperative approaches are used to tackle the problem of violent radicalisation (on local, regional, and federal levels).

In 2004, the GTAZ (Gemeinsames Terrorismusabwehrzentrum, Joint Counter-Terrorism Centre) was set up as a community platform of police and intelligence services from federal and state level. Others, who are unique in the area of Islamist terrorism and extremism, were also included. The aim of this platform is to pool and consolidate information, minimise loss of information and redundancies through cross-border and cross-agency exchange, and to bundle the expertise of 40 German security authorities in compliance with the principle of separation between the police and the intelligence service (Deutscher Bundestag, 2018). Then, in 2012, the GETZ (Gemeinsames Extremismus- und Terrorismusabwehrzentrum) was established. GETZ is responsible for dealing with right-wing, left-wing, and foreigner extremism and terrorism as well as espionage. Recently, right-wing extremism had the highest political priority (Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, 2020). Furthermore, several policy documents exist outlining strategic aspects of the German approach for combating

extremist radicalisation, such as the 'National Prevention Program against Islamist Extremism' and 'Guidelines for a holistic approach for dealing with returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs)', referring to a strong coordinated approach with relevant actors on the level of the states, municipalities, and civil society actors.

There is, however, no legislation on the Federal or State level, and no overarching national framework describing the structure and organisation of the MAW in the field of prevention work regarding violent radicalisation. Consequently, the level of organisation of local MAW structures differs across the country. There is no fixed role and function of the MAW structures across Germany. Instead, MAW structures determine their own scope and objectives, either focusing on operational aspects, strategic aspects, or a combination of the two. Also, the general objectives of the MAW structures can vary, from building trustful relationships between actors and connecting meaningful actors in their engagement for democratic values, to raising awareness, supporting information exchange, or discussing recent trends and developments in the radicalisation field. Furthermore, the key actors involved and the target groups of MAWs vary substantially (Hardyns et al., 2021).

2.2 Objectives of the EMMA project

Evaluating whether a MAW approach to prevent or counter radicalisation is successful is something that cannot easily be measured. To measure the success of CVE interventions, descriptive assessments, such as the number of participants, can be used, but these outputs do not necessarily reflect the larger effects of the approach (Mastroe & Szmania, 2016). Therefore, the first objective of the EMMA project is identifying the key factors for a successful MAW approach. By means of a systematic literature review, concrete process indicators can be identified. To achieve this objective and answer the question 'what works and under what conditions?', a variety of qualitative methods are used, such as interviews with key actors, participatory observations from MAW roundtables, and finally, focus groups to identify possible strengths and pitfalls.

The second objective is improving coordination of services and lines of communication. To achieve this objective, a practical self-evaluation tool for local actors involved in MAW is being

developed. In addition, a mentoring package is included in the EMMA project. The focus of this part of the project lies in offering practical support and improving MAW practices through advice, guidance, and peer-to-peer assessment networks.

Furthermore, training modules, e-learning modules, and peer-to-peer assessment networks should contribute to the achievement of the third objective, namely guiding local actors to a more professional MAW approach and thus enhancing their professional ability with the aim to translate the lessons learned to their MAW.

To further transpose the lessons learned to all MAW agencies and policy makers, EMMA aims to deliver a digital platform with hands-on information on diverse types of MAW (start-ups, advanced users/experts) where local MAW officials learn from each other by sharing best practices. A communication programme and the organisation of an international conference to promote the tool and the platform are also included in the programme's objectives.

Lastly, to deal with the diverse MAW characteristics and structures specific to the local context, EMMA sets forth standardised procedures to determine key factors and indicators for self-evaluation and standardised analytical tools for advising, supporting, and consulting with local MAW structures.

2.3 Methodology

The methodology of the EMMA project consists of three phases, process evaluation, mentoring, and extending. Process evaluation consists of field 'preparation', evaluation research through interviews, observations and focus groups, and a systematic literature review that will result in a self-evaluation tool. The mentoring part of the project includes individual guidance, peer consultancy, international workshops, and training modules. The created tools will be extended for use by local professionals over Europe (Dorme et al., 2020).

The four working pillars of the EMMA project are coordination, scientific evaluation, mentoring, and dissemination. Together with VVSG, RadarAdvies, and Violence Prevention Network, Ghent University will contribute to the accomplishment of the objectives of the second working pillar of the EMMA project, the scientific evaluation pillar. The question of 'what works under what

conditions?’ will be approached in the three different contexts by means of a ‘realist process evaluation’. Process evaluations can be used to identify the effective key components of an intervention, and thus can help to understand why a programme is successful (or not), in which context, and under what circumstances. By understanding how MAWs try to achieve their objectives and which processes are set in motion in each of these contexts, we can explore what works, if it is promising, and under what context or conditions it works. This ‘realist process evaluation’ is needed in order to a) develop a self-evaluation toolkit with an extensive manual for these structures to enhance the self-reliance of local actors improving the existing structures, b) to make constructive recommendations for MAW approaches in the context of radicalisation, and c) to give an answer to the research question ‘How and under what conditions does MAW in the context of radicalisation and violent extremism work within the three countries?’.

The first research phase (February 2020 – August 2021) consisted of an extensive literature study to identify indicators and good practices. Four criteria for retrieving process indicators are used: occurrence (‘Is there a repeated or single observation in the literature?’), evidence (‘Is there a rationale for this indicator specified?’), usability (‘Is the indicator concrete?’), and applicability (‘Could it be applied in the MAW context?’). Taking into account the criteria, the identified indicators are then grouped in nine broad categories: information sharing, coordinated collaboration, approach, vision, case management, expertise, quality assurance, practical conditions, and structure. With regard to the literature search, three inclusion criteria were used. First of all, the literature studies must have (de)radicalisation as a common theme and an intervention/action/approach to prevent at-risk individuals and/or disengaging radicalised individuals. Moreover, at least one MAW intervention should be described at the local/meso level. Lastly, an evaluation of the effect of one or more MAW approaches or recommendations of good MAW practices must be included in the retained literature studies, excluding economic evaluations. A total of 58 sources were eligible for inclusion. Twelve additional sources were included after a first round of citation screening of the included sources. Some first thoughts can be inferred from the 70 included sources in the systematic literature study. There seems to be little evaluation research on MAW in the radicalisation context and very few scientific publications. The included literature

consists mainly of reports. Also, a lack of transparency in research methods can be observed (Dorme et al., 2020). Many sources that formulated recommendations did not clearly specify how they came up with these recommendations. Recommendations were often based on expert discussions. The majority of sources performing an empirical evaluation performed a process evaluation, sometimes accompanied by an additional effect or product evaluation. All process evaluations made use of (semi-structured) interviews as a research method. Most MAW approaches are targeted on prevention of radicalisation. We can conclude that the most discussed recommendations deal with information sharing, collaboration between actors, the types of actors, and what skills, knowledge, or training they should possess. It is advised to include a wide range of relevant partners.

Thereafter, the 'realist process evaluation' has been carried out in nine cities in three countries: Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany. Firstly, the nine MAWs were selected and contacted (three cities in each of the three countries) and the informed consents, interview schedules, and observation lists were prepared during the data preparatory phase (May 2020 – July 2020). The data needed for the 'realist process evaluation' has been collected (September 2020 – February 2021) by means of 45 interviews with key actors (local government actor(s), security actor(s), and socio-preventive actor(s)) and 18 participatory observations from MAW roundtables. During a later stage (March 2021 – May 2021), three focus groups (one per country) were organised to deepen missing elements and to develop the self-evaluation tool (September 2021) in collaboration with local MAW actors. In November 2021, another three focus groups are organised to review the self-evaluation tool.

3. Leading by example

An example of one of the few scientific publications in the context of MAW and radicalisation is Roberts' (2018) study, which identified the best and worst elements in MAW partnerships. Positive elements include rapid information sharing, networks, and good relations between actors while the processes and procedures, the time between meetings, and long presentations negatively impact the MAW partnerships. Roberts (2018) puts forth a number of recommendations to further strengthen MAW partnerships, the

most important one being investing in relationships between MAW partners. The components that play a role in the quality of MAW partnerships are the frequency of contacts and the duration of the relationship. There should be trust, openness, and honesty in information sharing. It is also recommended to engage in dialogue with local communities and involve a variety of organisations to gather layered information about individuals and their immediate environment. The recommendations considered, Roberts (2018) concludes that there is indeed a powerful role for MAW partnerships in detection and prevention of radicalisation.

4. Conclusion

Overall, it is recommended to include a wide range of relevant organisations and partners, in order to ensure an integral and broad approach in countering violent extremism. From the literature and from interviews with local MAW officials, it is clear that the challenge in powerful MAW partnerships lies in trust building and the sharing of sensitive information among these actors. Actors struggle with what can be complex legal restrictions. The key seems to lie in clear agreements and trust through time. Through clear communication, clear roles and expectations, and a clear understanding on when and what information can be shared with whom, trust over time and working relationships can be built.

Furthermore, there is a big emphasis in the literature on the importance of evaluation of MAW approaches and the current lack of ways to evaluate these approaches. The challenge here lies in the large variety of MAW approaches, as is demonstrated in the differences in the Belgian, Dutch, and German contexts. The EMMA project tries to provide an answer on how evaluations should be shaped by providing the tools for practitioners to evaluate their own MAW approach. By the beginning of 2022, this is expected by means of delivering a practical self-evaluation tool, with a hands-on manual, for local officials.

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