



MECHELEN

Factsheet Multi-Stakeholder-Collaboration Team Profile

Mechelen risk landscape

There is an emerging threat as right-wing extremists (RWE) align with other polarising factors, including anti-vaxxers and conservative Muslim groups. This convergence has manifested in protests against sex education in schools, sometimes escalating to arson attacks in schools. Additionally, there is a growing concern about upcoming threats targeting the LGBTQ+ community, stemming from both the RWE and conservative perspectives. Amidst these challenges, the presence of Muslim extremism remains a persistent concern, underscoring the complexity of the city's risk landscape.

The MSC's primary focus

The primary focus remains on Islamist extremism as well as anti-LBGTQ+ sentiment. Currently, the MSC still experiences a lack of political backing to explore RWE.

Stakeholders currently involved and coordinating body

Hands-on meetings involve discussions of individual cases with social workers, while more escalated matters are brought to the attention of key figures like the MSC coordinator, the mayor, and the Mayor's Advisory Council (MAC). These meetings involve a broad spectrum of participants, including social workers, street corner workers, police, and grassroots organisations, offering a comprehensive view of the issues at hand. The Head of the Department of Social Prevention assumes the coordinating roles and plays a pivotal role with direct access to the mayor, holding a speed dial connection for quick communication. Collaboration between youth workers and the police currently still faces difficulties.

Further stakeholders to be involved

One desired inclusion in the prevention efforts is the involvement of football clubs to address RWE. However, there is reluctance from the police to share information regarding this aspect, and the relationship between law enforcement and the clubs fluctuates across different instances.

Major contribution of the MSC to the prevention and countering of violent extremism?

The MSC has played a key role in advancing information sharing via formal bi-weekly police prevention meetings based on case conferences and an Information Officer sits permanently located within the police with high security clearance who links to the city and the regions, including security services. Information to youth workers is filtered on a need-to-know basis and high level meetings with the mayor can be initiated.

How has participation in icommit impacted the MSC's work?

A chance to improving co-operation was mentioned as the most important thing and the feeling that Mechelen is not alone in their prevention efforts but shares their experiences with teams from other European Cities. The main point addressed during the mentorship was developing a protocol for working with prisons. As it is still waiting to be signed off, efforts are already being made to establish an informal exchange with prisons on Islamist extremism. The icommit exercise on political buy-in was immediately applied to lobby for an outreach worker to work in the context of prison releases.

Future focus

The MSC aims to finish the process of formalising the prison protocol and develop a structured prison outreach program and pursues goal of placing right-wing extremism prominently on the agenda.

Piece of advice for other MSCs

To think very carefully about the qualities wanted in the team before assemblage of the MSC. Personalities are crucial when it comes to the make-up of the team, and it helps communication if stakeholders are somewhat of the same mindset. It's such difficult work even if you have protocols, the team will not function without trust, they won't walk the extra mile.

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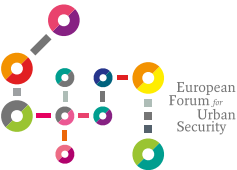
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