

**Violent Extremism:
Prevention of a wicked problem
- the role of local authorities**

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and Regional Authorities (KS)



Published

September 2017

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Publisher

Center for Research on Extremism, The Extreme Right, Hate Crime
and Political Violence, University of Oslo



Center for Research on Extremism: The Extreme Right, Hate Crime and
Political Violence (C-REX) established at the University of Oslo, February 1. 1016

www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english

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Violent extremism: Prevention of a wicked problem - the role of local authorities

Yngve Carlsson

This paper discusses the role of the Norwegian municipalities in coping with Islamic extremism – compared to how they handled right wing extremism 15-20 years ago. The main questions are: What do the municipalities actually do to prevent radicalization into militant extreme Islam? What is it reasonable to expect that the municipalities can do to prevent such activity? Such questions are highly relevant given the central position of the municipalities in the Nordic welfare states as a provider of many of the welfare services¹, and the role they play in developing vital, attractive and safe communities. It is not surprising that local authorities are expected to deal with this issue.

The main argument in this paper is that preventing radicalization into Islamic extremism, dismantling groups and reintegrating individual extremists into the local community through local action, is a far more complex and difficult process compared to how right-wing extremism was handled 15-20 years ago when such groups were active in some Norwegian local communities. It is the intention of this paper to show the complexity of this issue and present some of the challenges and dilemmas that the municipalities have to face. Unless this complexity is understood, it may be difficult to find strategies and measures that can reduce the problem. It is unrealistic to believe that this problem can be completely prevented – at least by actors at the local community level.

The Norwegian context

With a total of 100 known persons who have travelled from Norway to participate in terrorist organizations in Syria ² – a ratio of 19 per million inhabitants – there are countries in Europe with relatively higher ratios of “Syria-travellers” or foreign fighters such as Sweden,

¹ Primary health care, child care, social relief, kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, leisure and cultural activities, care for people suffering from mental diseases and drug-abuse, care for the elderly, housing for disadvantaged and poor people, integration-programs for refugees. The most important welfare-state services are provided by the municipalities.

²This number was provided by the Norwegian Police Security Service on request in January 2017 and includes all those who have travelled to Syria to join a terrorist organization with links to the conflict in Syria and Iraq. Thus includes both foreign fighters with an military assignment and individuals with an intention to play a civilian role. The Threat Assessment from the Police Security Service for 2017 reports that only 40 of these still stay in ISIL-controlled areas in Syria (February 2017). The rest have either returned to Norway, have been killed in Syria or they may have moved to other areas of conflict. During 2016 and 2017 very few have left Norway to join ISIL’s self-declared caliphate in Syria. <http://www.pst.no/media/utgivelser/annual-threat-assessment-2017/>. Professor Tore Bjørge, Center for Research on Extremism, at the University of Oslo) claimed at a meeting in Arendal (17. August 2017) that 40 had returned to Norway – about half of them were imprisoned, twenty were killed in Syria and 40 probably were still in Syria.

France, Denmark and Belgium (with from 20-40 per million). Nevertheless, there has been a strong focus on the foreign fighters returning to Norway – with the possible intention and capacity to carry out a terrorist attack. But there is also a fear of home-grown terrorists who have no foreign-fighter experience. The threat scenario seems fairly similar to that of other Western European countries. Yet the number of extremists within the general population of a country is not a reliable gauge of the likelihood of a terrorist attack. The terrorist attacks in Oslo and on Utøya on the 22. of July 2011 where 77 persons were killed by solo-terrorist Anders Behring Breivik, occurred while the right wing movement was weak in Norway compared with the strength it had in most other European countries (Fangen and Carlsson 2013). The current challenges and how they are perceived in Norway are highly influenced by the 2011 terrorist events, which showed how much suffering and damage one single terrorist can cause. The entire nation was affected.

Since the municipalities play such an important role as a provider of welfare-state services and the role they play in developing vital, attractive and safe communities, it is not surprising that local authorities are expected to deal with this issue. In addition, Norwegian municipalities, in cooperation with local police, local NGO's, parent groups and local business, played an important role in the 1990's and early 2000 in preventing and dissolving local right-wing extremist groups (Carlsson 2006, Fangen and Carlsson 2013³). Compared with other countries, more emphasis was placed on preventive than on repressive measures in this work (Vindino and Branden 2012).

This local approach proved to be successful⁴, which also increased the expectations that the municipalities would be able to handle Islamic extremism.

The Norwegian approach to dismantling right-wing extreme groups was based on some very favourable conditions. The Norwegian right wing extremism of the 1990'ies was largely local community based. A dozen small towns and a few suburbs in Oslo and Kristiansand had extremist groups who were in contact with the leading activists of the national right-extremist scene who gladly added fuel to local fires. The groups were visible locally. The participants were partly uniformed (Doc Martens Boots, Bomber-jacket...), they gathered in public places, in some communities they marched in the streets. It was easy for both local police and municipal youth workers to identify leaders, rank and file participants and youth flirting with the scene. One could identify risk of radicalization by spotting youth who were

³ A more thorough description and analysis of the Norwegian situation concerning the prevention of right-wing extremism can be downloaded in both English and German here (see pp. 327-357): <http://publication.fes-gegen-rechtsextremismus.de/>

⁴ This local approach does not necessarily prevent the kind of lone-actor terrorism that the Anders Behring Breivik case exemplifies. He did not belong to any local group, was radicalized through the internet and was invisible for local authorities and even the Police Security Service.

friendly to and participated in social activities with participants from the local extremist group.

A majority of the participants in the local groups were between 14-18 years old. They were still in the sphere of municipal services like secondary school, youth clubs, out-reach-workers and the child-care-service. Professionals within the municipality together with the local police knew nearly every participant; name, age, friends, criminal record, leisure activities, family-relations, degree of ideological commitment etc. etc.

The local transparency of the phenomenon made it easy to analyse and get a reliable picture of the group structure - and thereby use targeted and tailor-made interventions. A large portion of youth flirting with the scene could be talked out of it by an empowerment conversation at the local police station together with their parents⁵. In two of the most affected communities (Oslo South and Kristiansand) parents groups were organized and given professional assistance to help the parents to get a grip on their children and at least to ensure that they did not turn their backs on them. Hard core offenders were sent through the court-system and into prison. If one at the same time offered rank and file participants positive leisure activities, education or a job – sometimes in other parts of the country - the group was likely to be dissolved when the hard-core participants and leaders returned from prison. The unprecedented economic growth in Norway from the mid-1990's made it possible for former extremists – even with a criminal record - to get a job and a normal life. They had a future.

Norwegian municipalities and local police – in cooperation with parents, local NGOs and even local business – became fairly good at dissolving local extremist groups. The main precondition for this was that the challenge matched the local problem solving apparatus.

A couple of Norwegian communities, though, found it impossible to dismantle right-wing-extremist groups completely – especially groups with adult group-members in their twenties and early thirties. Even in such cases, the communities succeeded in reducing group membership to a handful of persons by putting a lot of energy into stopping recruitment. It is noteworthy that when the members of extremist groups grow older, their interest in recruitment may also decrease. Adult men will be much less interested in bringing teenage boys into their circle of friends, unless of course the men happen to be deeply dedicated activists (Carlsson 2006). Such groups may “*age out*” or transform to other criminal activities for instance within outlaw biker gangs.

⁵ The Empowerment Conversation is a method of early intervention for youths connected to racist groups or other criminal behavior, using non-confrontational dialogue. It is one component of a comprehensive approach devised by Manglerud Police in Oslo run by preventative police officers, in conjunction with a teacher or youth worker. More information: <https://www.counterextremism.org/resources/details/id/489>

Islamic extremism in Norway – a perceived threat and a municipal concern

Despite the right-wing solo-terrorist act in 2011, Islamist extremism has for more than a decade been considered by the Police Security Service to be the most serious threat to Norwegian Society. The perception of this threat increased after 2012 when young men from Norway started to travel to Syria. By June 2014 the Police Security Service reported that 50 had left Norway to fight in Syria, and the service warned that this might increase their intention and capacity to commit terror on Norwegian soil. ⁶ In July 2014, the Norwegian Security Police were warned by cooperating foreign security services of a planned attack in the near future in Norway by terrorists belonging to the ISIL/IS. This resulted in a national alarm with control measures and armed police presence at airports, traffic junctions, parliament and some governmental buildings. The terrorist attacks in Paris and Copenhagen in 2015, in Brussels, Ankara, Istanbul, Nice and Berlin in 2016, and Stockholm, London and Manchester in 2017, have kept the issue of extremism at the forefront of public attention and political debate.

In addition, one of the four terrorists that executed 63 innocent persons and wounded an additional 175 at Westgate mall in Nairobi in March 2013, was a young man of Somalian origin from Larvik, a small town on the west side of the Oslofjord. Furthermore, a suicide bomber who killed 20 persons in Somalia in spring 2014 was a Norwegian-Somalian from Halden, a small town on the east side of the Oslofjord. Several IS-affiliated foreign fighters from Norway are also known to have committed atrocities in Syria, Iraq and Turkey.

It is difficult to say whether extremism and terrorism are higher on the political agenda in Norway than in other Western European countries, but it is fair to say that these issues have been at the top of the agenda for the past six years. The present government, a coalition between the Conservative Party and the Progress Party, which assumed power after parliamentary elections in 2013, made prevention and fighting extremism one of its main objectives. A detailed action plan to prevent radicalization and violent extremism was released in summer 2014. In October 2014, Prime Minister Erna Solberg sent a letter to the mayors of 23 cities/towns at risk⁷ in Norway, in which she asked for more municipal assistance in preventing violent extremism. In that connection she stated that “radicalization into extreme Islam and the increasing number of Norwegian foreign fighters is one of the most serious challenges we face”⁸.

⁶ <http://www.pst.no/media/utgivelser/norske-fremmedkrigere-i-syria/>

⁷ With a population of only 5,2 million people, Norway only has four cities with more than 100.000 inhabitants (Oslo, Bergen, Trondheim and Stavanger) – and may be also Kristiansand with 90.000 may be considered a city. The letter from the prime minister was also sent to 18 larger towns with a population between 25 - 80.000.

⁸ <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/iriks/Erna-Solberg-ber-23-kommuner-ta-grep-mot-radikalisering-7749332.html>

Handling an utterly complex issue

Islamic extremism represents a challenge that differs greatly from the work against right-wing extremism described above, for several reasons.

Some reasons are global – and certainly beyond the control of Scandinavian municipalities. They are related to conflicts and wars in Africa and Asia – including the Israel-Palestine conflict as well as conflicts between Shia and Sunni Muslims. They are related to the interference of the US and its European allies in civil wars within Muslim states. They are related to the rise of Salafism and Conservative Islam and their dissemination throughout Europe. They are related to the large numbers of refugees heading for Europe – who end up waiting endlessly in refugee camps where their expectations of making a good life in Europe are blocked. This is a fertile soil for agitators from IS/ISIL who may have infiltrated the hundreds of thousands refugees heading for Europe.

On the national and local levels, the question of extremism is related to social exclusion, unemployment, poverty, and limited opportunities for social mobility⁹. On the individual level it may be related to a feeling of not belonging to the country in which they live. When Norwegian municipalities in 2012-2013 started to address the issue of Islamic extremism, they had little reliable information on what characterized the extremists. Information from England indicated that many of them may be well educated and have a university degree. An overview made by the Norwegian Broadcasting Cooperation in 2014 on the background of 45 foreign fighters from Norway, showed that most of them came from a marginalized position in society and that many had a criminal background. This picture was confirmed in September 2016 when the Police Security Service published a report on the background of 138 Norwegian Islamist extremists – which included the majority of the one hundred who ended up as foreign fighters in Syria, some who tried to go, but failed, and some of the head figures of the extreme Islamist scene in Norway.

The participants from Norway were indeed marginalized – with poor education and mostly without a job. With an average of 27,5 years they were out of the immediate grip of the municipal services for children and youth. 61% were not born in Norway, but came here as children, teenagers or young adults. Some had poor education from their home-countries, and they came to a country where they did not understand the language, habits, norms and values. Some of them were - more or less – destined to fail in the educational system¹⁰. One out of five was a Norwegian convert and they were also marginalised individuals. Only one

⁹ [http://www.nrk.no/norge/terrorforskere-om-fremmedkrigere -- -mange-har-mislyktes-i-livet-1.12066062](http://www.nrk.no/norge/terrorforskere-om-fremmedkrigere--mange-har-mislyktes-i-livet-1.12066062)

¹⁰ 88% of the sample is men. Three out of four were radicalized after 2011 – most of them in adulthood. 64% of the sample are unemployed or have a very loose connection to the labor market. Two out of three had a criminal record before they were radicalized.

out of five was born in Norway with immigrant parents. This is not – in contrast with England and France – a second generation immigrant phenomenon.

The participants in the Islamic extremist scene have some of the same risk-factors and characteristics as the members of criminal gangs in Oslo a decade ago. They entered a gang for friendship, protection, recognition and admiration. Gang membership and a cafeteria-style-pattern of crime¹¹, including drug-dealing and numerous robberies, introduced them to a consumption pattern they otherwise could not afford, and their hyper-masculinity gave them access to (some) Norwegian girls (Carlsson 2005). Their life style was hedonistic with a huge consumption of drugs and women and thus far from Islamic rules. There is ample evidence that many of the Islamic extremists today were members of criminal gangs in Norway some years ago – especially in the Oslo-region. The English filmmaker Deeyah Kahn, who grew up in Oslo, and who made “Jihad: A story if the Others”, interviewed a large number of English Islamic extremists. For some of these former extremists the driving force for Jihad/violent extremism was a desire to compensate for an earlier hedonistic and un-Islamic lifestyle. The Norwegian gang-researcher Inger Lise Lien documents that gang members in Norwegian prisons with a background from Pakistan, Middle East and Africa suffer far more than ethnic-Norwegian gang-members from anxiety and depression and also physical trouble closely connected to this like heart rhythm problems. Many gang-members with a Moslem background immerse themselves into religion to get some relief (Lien 2011). And some of them are probably easy targets for radical entrepreneurs within the prison.

Islamic extremism is thus to a large degree connected to problems that are out of the reach of the local municipalities. And it is connected to problems like social marginalization and social exclusion that are challenging to solve and hard to reduce.

Another essential feature with Islamic extremism is that the process of radicalization leading up to it is not easily visible for the local police and municipal youth/social workers and teachers. Islamic extremism is to a large degree stimulated by the Internet; YouTube, blogs and other social media where extremist organizations disseminate their propaganda. The process of radicalization partly develops at home in the “youth-room”, but also face to face on social arenas inaccessible to local police and municipal youth-workers – private homes, mosques, cafés etc.. There may be some indicators of radicalization like clothing and growing a beard, but these are unreliable. The more reliable indicators are mainly attitudes that favour use of violence as a political means and which oppose fundamental democratic and human rights principles. It is not illegal to have such opinions, and since these particular radical attitudes also have a religious component, it is demanding to know when to react and

¹¹ A universal finding from American and European gang-research has been that youth-gang members participate in a wide range of criminal activities – drug-dealing, shoplifting, burglary, street robbery and stick-ups – and with an extensive use of violence. They do a little bit of this and a little bit of that. The term cafeteria-style was introduced by the American gang-researcher Malcolm Klein, and has later been widely used in European research on criminal gangs.

how to react: Islam is a religion most Norwegian teachers and social/youth workers have limited knowledge about. Frontline professionals feel they lack the skills to identify people at risk. They have no tradition for being an “attitude police” or for passing information to the police on individuals holding radical views. It was much easier a decade or two to identify the neo-nazis who bluntly expressed their identity and attitudes by their uniform and the name of the group.

The fact that most Norwegian Islamic extremists are in the twenties and early thirties, and that 73% of the sample of Norwegian Islamic extremists were radicalized after November 2011 when the violent conflict in Syria started (PST 2016), means that most of them were radicalized when they were in their adulthood. They were thereby out of reach of most of the municipal services. Some of them have been clients or users of the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV) searching for a job or housing – but the brief and instrumental meetings with this service is not a proper arena to bring up religious and political attitudes as it have been with teachers and youth workers in earlier days. And if they were – it is easy for the client to conceal radical and extreme attitudes and values if he or she wants to.

Complexity requires coordination

The problem-reducing process involves numerous actors – from the Government of the United States which has tried to take a world lead in community prevention¹², the EU with the RAN program¹³, the Council of Europe and the Nordic Council of Ministers. On the national level we find the Police Security Service, ordinary police, prisons, at least nine of the Norwegian ministries, and most state welfare services from employment agencies to hospitals treating traumatized foreign fighters who have returned from Syria – and even universities and research institutions doing research on this topic. It involves municipal

¹² The White House arranged a summit on countering violent extremism in February 2015. This summit has been followed up by regional conferences on each continent. The European conference was held in Oslo in June 2015. Crime-prevention coordinators from the larger Norwegian municipalities and from the local police have participated in excursions to American cities organized by the American authorities.

¹³RAN - Radicalisation Awareness Network - is a network of frontline or grassroots practitioners from around Europe who work on a daily basis with people who have already been radicalised, or who are vulnerable to radicalisation. Practitioners include police and prison authorities, but also those who are not traditionally involved in counter-terrorism activities, such as teachers, youth workers, civil society representatives, local authorities representatives and healthcare professionals. In RAN Working Groups, frontline practitioners may share their extensive knowledge and first-hand experience with one another, and peer review each other's practices. RAN is also a platform for the world of practitioners, researchers and policy makers to pool expertise and experience to tackle radicalisation. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network_en

services such as schools, the child protection service, youth-clubs, out-reach workers, the social service, the municipal health service and all the way to the municipal council as a democratic body and conveyer of attitudes and values.

Prevention and problem solving involve the local civil community with mosques, youth organizations, sport organizations, local political parties, social entrepreneurs and local businesses.

Not all actions need to be coordinated, but for some actions coordination is required – especially preventive and ameliorative action aimed at individual extremists themselves, their families and also victims of extremism. Some efforts must be implemented in a fixed order in time and space, and information needs to be more freely exchanged. There are considerable challenges with regard to coordination and exchange of (confidential) information – especially on the local level.

Stakeholders often have radically different frames for understanding the problem, and thus they may radically disagree in what should be done to reduce the problem. There is great uncertainty regarding which measures have intended and positive effects and which may have undesired effects – since local work is not evaluated and that in general it is nearly impossible to separate the effect of one single measure from other efforts to prevent and handle the problem. Since the issue also involves strong ideological or religious convictions, frustration and anger – it may be unpleasant for first line professionals in both state and municipal services to address. It is thus understandable why responsibility regarding the issue is passed on.

There are good arguments for calling mobilization against radicalization and violent extremism “one of the most complex issues in Europe today” – referring to its connectedness to other unsolvable problems, the large numbers of actors involved and the uncertainty related to the impact of different preventive measures. Violent extremism is indeed a ‘wicked problem¹⁴ in the political science meaning of the word.

In describing this complexity, there is of course a chance that the problem is made more difficult to handle and prevent than it really is, and that this may demotivate local actors from trying to do anything at all. On the other hand; if we do not understand this complexity, there is a risk that we may go astray and end up in helplessness and the inability to act, in

¹⁴There is a huge literature within the social and political sciences on wicked issues/problems. Wikipedia defines it like this: A **wicked problem** is a problem that is difficult or impossible to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements that are often difficult to recognize. The use of the term "wicked" here has come to denote resistance to resolution, rather than evil. Moreover, because of complex interdependencies effort to solve one aspect of a wicked problem may reveal or create other problems. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wicked_problem

never ending blame games, or superficial symbolic action – or even worse, with measures that will have an adverse and negative effect. We need to understand this complexity to find ways through the wilderness.

What do the Norwegian municipalities do to prevent Islamic extremism?

The answer to this question has been – until now - that no one really knows. The Norwegian municipalities do not report on this issue to the state authorities, and they probably should not do that either. Since the prevention of radicalization and extremism is integrated into many other on-going preventive activities, a compilation of preventive activities from 428 municipalities would be of little value.

On the other hand, it is important to know what is going on in the municipalities with regard to this issue. The Norwegian Association of Local and regional Government (KS) initiated in 2014 a research project that describes and analyses work in five large municipalities where extremism is especially topical and relevant¹⁵. The research report was published in December 2016. Today we know at least what is going on in five municipalities in Norway that have been confronted by this challenge.

What are then the roads through this wilderness, which may lead to the desired goal: a reduction in the numbers of extremists and a reduction in extremist violence? I do not have an answer to this; but I can try to illustrate it by presenting what seem to be the most common actions from the municipalities that have been confronted with this issue. In doing this, I choose to include policies and strategies that have justifications other than preventing extremism, but which most likely have a positive effect on preventing extremism and reintegrating extremists back into the community. This makes prevention of extremism wide and indistinct, but reflects the complexity of the issue. There is no single magic bullet to solve such a problem.

I. Prevention of social exclusion/promotion of social inclusion

¹⁵ Three of the five cities/towns – Oslo, Sarpsborg and Fredrikstad - were selected because they had several foreign fighters in Syria. The situation in Fredrikstad was presented in an article in the New York Times in april 2015: A Norway town and its pipeline to Jihad in Syria: https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/05/world/europe/a-norway-town-and-its-pipeline-to-jihad-in-syria.html?_r=0 .Larvik was selected because one of the leading figures in the extreme Islam scene in Norway Mohyeldeen Mohammad came from Larvik. In addition one of the terrorists that killed 63 persons at the Westgate Mall in Nairobi was a young man of Somalian origin from Larvik. Kristiansand had no known foreign fighters in Syria when the city was selected for this project - but the city has a rather large immigrant population. Besides Kristiansand had more than 10 years of experience fighting right-wing extremism and has been a Norwegian frontrunner in preventing extremism.

Not all extremists have been socially and economically excluded in their local community. But there is little doubt that the overwhelming majority come from a marginalized and disadvantaged position in society, and that a majority has a criminal background (PST 2016). This means that if the municipalities succeed in reducing social exclusion and furthering inclusion and participation within the most important arenas in society, one will be more likely to reduce the number of recruits to extremist groups and organizations. Whatever prevents crime and social marginalisation in general, will probably have a good effect on preventing extremism¹⁶.

It is fair to assume that the Norwegian municipalities use a lot of both political and professional energy and economic resources to prevent social exclusion and promote inclusion. This is one of the core values of the welfare state in which municipalities play a major role. A large part of the municipal services deal with social exclusion/inclusion. Not all services deal with this as their main issue, but most services have social inclusion as one of their goals: Kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools, the primary health care, social service and child protection service. Probably a majority of the municipalities have established systems of interagency cooperation around vulnerable children, youth, and their families. They run targeted programs to handle deviant behaviour, bullying at school, violence within the family (including forced marriage), and schemes for reducing the effects of poverty and preventing students from dropping out of high school. The municipal services play an important role in relieving inequality, social exclusion and social problems created in other sectors in a modern and complex society.

The fact that the percentage of second generation children taking a college/university degree is as high as within the ethnic Norwegian majority, is an indicator that Norway to some extent has succeeded in integrating immigrant children. There is still some discrimination based on cultural background in the labour-market, but not enough to overshadow the possibilities for social mobility for children of immigrants. Within the age-group 25-39 years, 73% of second generation immigrants are employed, compared to 65% of first generation immigrants and 82% of ethnic Norwegians (SSB 2016¹⁷). Even though these figures are not satisfactory, they indicate that immigrant children born in Norway should have a hope for the future. The fact that only one out of five Islamic-extremists is a second generation immigrant born in Norway, may be a consequence of this.

The integration challenge seems rather to be in regard to immigrants and refugees coming to Norway in childhood, adolescence and early adulthood. How is it possible to promote

¹⁶ Norwegian prevention of extremism since the early 1990s has been based on this assumption. Source: Bjørgero, T. and Carlsson Y. (1999) Vold, rasisme og ungdomsgjenger. [In Norwegian: Violence, racism and youth gangs] Oslo: Aschehoug.

¹⁷ <https://www.ssb.no/arbeid-og-lonn/statistikker/innvregsys>

success within the education system and later on participation on the labour market? The municipalities play a vital role in this – by providing elementary and secondary education. The municipalities are also responsible for the Introduction program for adult refugees.¹⁸

Despite all the efforts made to eradicate it, some degree of social exclusion seems to be inevitable. But it is possible to reduce both the numbers of those excluded and the degree to which they are excluded in various spheres of life. The statement that “more should be done” is thus always valid, and new approaches should be considered to promote social inclusion.

Avoid ghettoization

Since 1970, Norway has gradually developed into a multicultural society. Today 16.3 % of the population are immigrants themselves or born in Norway by two immigrant parents. 40% of the immigrant population has an African or Asian background¹⁹. The immigrants are not evenly dispersed throughout the country. In the eastern and southern suburbs to Oslo (Groruddalen and Søndre Nordstrand), half of the 170.000 inhabitants have an immigrant background – most of them from Africa and Asia. Within these suburbs there are areas with a much higher concentration than this. Seven primary schools in Oslo have more than 90% pupils with an immigrant background.

There are of course socially and ethnically segregated areas in Oslo and some of the other cities and larger towns in Norway. But it is unfair to call these areas for ghettos. They are not characterized by run-down buildings, schools and public institutions, nor by a crime rate high above the average. Nor do large portions of the male population find themselves outside the labour-market, leaving adolescents without active role-models.²⁰

A consequence of this is that the ethnically segregated areas are not breeding grounds for criminal gangs or extremism to the same extent as is the case in many other countries of Western Europe. This situation is partly due to 25 years of economic growth and a strong demand for manpower that have given residents the economic possibility to buy their own

¹⁸ “The introduction program is a full-time qualification program that usually last up to two years. The content of the program is adapted to the individual participant’s need, and an individual plan is drawn for each participant. The municipal introduction program is intended to teach participants basic skills in in Norwegian, and to prepare them for an active working life or motivate them to take an education. The program also aims to give participants insight into Norwegian society. The participants are entitled to receive introduction benefit”.

¹⁹ https://www.ssb.no/_image/224858/label/

²⁰ 75% of men (age 25-54 years old) with an immigrant background from Africa and Asia living in the eastern and southern suburbs of Oslo were employed (SSB 2015). The employment rate is clearly lower than for ethnic male Norwegians (87%) in these suburbs, but it is still normal that men with an immigrant background have a job. This means that young people have role-models with a job. <https://www.ssb.no/befolkning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/innvandreteres-demografi-og-levekar-i-groruddalen-sondre-nordstrand-gamle-oslo-og-grunerlokka>

flats²¹. But it is also due to a close cooperation between state authorities and municipalities to improve the living conditions and the services in such areas. The cooperation was not established to prevent extremism, but has obviously had an effect in limiting the recruitment base for both criminal gangs and extremist groups.

II. Develop and strengthen local democracy

Because of several terrorist attacks on European soil the last couple of years, there has been a strong focus on prevention of violence. In our eagerness to prevent violence we may have forgotten that extremism – Islamist, right wing, and left wing – implies contempt for democracy and democratic procedures.

The Scandinavian municipalities, representing a third to a half of public expenditure and the majority of welfare state services, are built on a strong democratic foundation. They enjoy confidence and legitimacy, but not in equal measures among all groups; especially not among marginalized groups. This means that an important goal should be to increase the participation of marginalized groups, including refugees and immigrants, not only as voters in the local elections, but also in local decision-making processes through channels for dialogue and participation. This may increase trust in democracy. The pioneer municipality in Norway in this regard is probably the municipality of Øvre Eiker– which experienced a neo-Nazi mobilization twenty years ago. The solution found was: more democracy – more local democracy. Since then Øvre Eiker has continuously developed local democracy by establishing new fora and modes of participation for different groups within the society (Sandkjær-Hansen, Klausen and Winsvold, M. (2013).

Most Norwegian municipalities have established representative and democratic youth councils. Many of these youth councils play important roles as conveyors of the interests of youth to the municipal political processes. Some youth councils run workshops where important local issues are discussed – such as tolerance and prevention of extremism. At the same time it is fair to say that not all youth councils function particularly well. In the worst case, if they do not have any clear purpose, tasks and good working procedures, they may be counterproductive and stimulate political passivity or even contempt for democracy.

²¹ During the last decade both Oslo and some of the other larger municipalities – with support from state grants - have put a lot of resources in improving the quality of kindergartens, schools and leisure activities in segregated and disadvantaged areas. The apartment-blocks are well maintained which is mainly due to the fact that the flats are collectively owned by the dwellers through housing associations. These associations are well organized and are responsible for the maintenance of the building. The dwellers are free to sell their flat on the market. With an average marked value for a flat (75-80 m²) in the suburbs of Oslo of 350 – 450.000 Euro, the inhabitants have a strong interest in avoiding physical decay of apartment-blocks and flats. This seems not to be the case in some other west-European countries where the dwellers rent their flats from large housing companies.

To improve and extend local democracy is an end in itself. The municipalities and their association (KS) have continuously placed the quality of local democracy on the agenda. Since a strong local democracy is also a bulwark against extremism, this is an argument for continuing this effort to develop a more well functioning local democracy.

III. Using tools from the crime prevention toolbox – and developing some new ones....

Through the institutionalised cooperation between key actors from the municipality and local police for more than twenty years, a rather large toolbox for handling delinquency, violent groups and right wing extremism has been developed. Such tools may also be used to prevent and handle Islamic extremism – like the empowerment conversation which has been used to talk fringe members out of right wing-extremist group, parental groups, the use of mentors to help former extremists back into society and a huge range of activities (football, mountain-climbing, hip-hop-dance etc) to stimulate mastery of an activity and to include the participants in a prosocial sport community instead of an criminal gang or extremist group. In this toolbox there are of course also measures to help youth with a criminal or extremist background into the labour market.

But there is no guarantee that such tools will have the same positive effect on adult Islamic extremists as they have had on right-wing extremists or gang-members in their teens. The NIBR report (2016) indicates, for example, that adult extremist do not trust mentors who work for a municipality that cooperates closely with the police. They will neither talk to them or be helped by them. If a mentor program is to succeed, it may be advisable to find mentors that the extremist already know and trust. This means that the tool must be adapted to this special target group.

In addition to adapting old tools to the challenge of Islamic extremism, there is also a need to develop new and innovative measures to prevent or handle this new and complex problem. Such innovation is often stimulated when professionals who trust and respect each other sit down and discuss how to handle new and complex challenge. An illuminating example of such innovation is the way the Oslo police manage demonstrations in cooperation with municipal agencies.

Demonstrations – for example against Israel or drawings of the Prophet – may easily devolve into riots, where the aggression is directed towards the police, public buildings, near-by-shops and even private cars. The chance that a riot will occur often attracts extremists leaders who wish to fuel the fire and make use of the occasion for recruitment purposes. Nowadays, demonstrators in Oslo will not see many police officers along the route, but they will probably see youth workers and teachers from the boroughs where most of the protestors live. The youth workers and teachers are mobilized through the crime prevention

coordination system in Oslo. Protestors/demonstrators see civilians they know, and these civilians thus exert a soft and non-provocative social control. This is in contrast to demonstrations in other parts of Europe where demonstrators are often met by a police force dressed and equipped for a fight with helmets and visor, dogs and even armoured vehicles. In addition, the Oslo-police enter into a close dialogue with the initiators of the demonstration in advance in order to make them aware of their responsibility and ability to prevent violence – a form of self-policing. The police guarantee their right to protest, but this implies that the demonstrators must cooperate and follow some basic rules. Over the last five to six years such a strategy has proved to be successful. This means that one of the mechanisms that may ignite riots, gang-affiliation and violent extremism has been neutralized.

IV. Measures solely directed at preventing Islamic extremism

Raising the awareness of front line practitioners

Larger municipalities such as Oslo, Bergen, Stavanger, Trondheim, Kristiansand, Fredrikstad, Asker, Bærum and Hamar have prepared local guidelines for front line practitioners based on a national model worked out by the Ministry of Justice. The guidelines present the most important concepts (such as radicalization and extremism), the most active extremist groups, and describe a path of action for handling concerns. This includes the signs of concern, who to contact to confer about the worries, guidelines for initiating a dialogue with a person threatened by radicalisation and how to follow up persons who are more deeply rooted in extremism. Some of the guidelines also clarify the rules of confidentiality when exchanging information between agencies, and how these rules are affected by the public servant's duty to avert serious criminal acts.

Some of the municipalities have also established guidelines as how to handle persons who are about to be recruited as foreign fighters and how to follow up persons returning home after having served as a foreign fighter.

Several large municipalities have run seminars for front line practitioners working with groups at risk of radicalization. Lecturers at such seminars have usually been the most prominent researchers or most experienced practitioners in this field in Norway – including specialists from the Police Security Service²². This focus on awareness-raising and how to handle worries, has resulted in more reports from front-line practitioners to either the

²² The twin towns of Fredrikstad and Sarpsborg even managed to obtain Haras Rafiq, a Managing Director of the Quilliam Foundation in London, as a keynote speaker in a seminar in fall 2014 for 250 first line practitioners from the two municipalities.

interagency coordination group or the police concerning persons at risk of radicalization (NIBR 2016:201). Many of the front-line practitioners also share their worries with professionals with a multicultural/ Muslim background to clarify the concern. It is especially demanding for a non-Muslim to distinguish a conservative interpretation of Islam from an extreme interpretation.

An open question is how much energy small municipalities - those with populations of one or two thousand and very few refugees or immigrants - should do, when the probability of extremism is very low. One possible answer is that a few professionals within the municipality gain some competence and knowledge about the phenomenon, and that the municipal police council is prepared and knows what to do if a situation should arise.

Dialogue and cooperation with Muslim communities and mosques

Many municipalities with a Muslim population (of a certain size) have established a dialogue with the Muslim communities and mosques, at least with moderate Muslim communities, to discuss how to coexist and cooperate within a multicultural and multi-religious community. In addition, religious leaders are probably better mentors for young people on religious questions than a municipal front-line professional. Besides - both radicalization and the recruitment of extremists occasionally seems to happen in the periphery of the Muslim communities. It is important that Muslim leaders are aware of this and that they are prepared to handle it.

An obvious challenge is the expectation of some municipalities that they be alerted when the Muslim community becomes aware of extremist tendencies among individuals or groups. Such an element of control may impede the building of trust between the municipal authorities and the Muslim community. An important lesson from the five cities/towns studied by NIBR (2016:11) was that a trust-based relationship is essential to successful cooperation. And it takes time to build such a relationship. For some Muslim communities and mosques it seems strange that local authorities show an interest only when problems occur and not otherwise.

A challenge for some municipalities is whether they should cooperate with conservative Muslim communities and groups that dissociate themselves from the use of violence, but promote values that are in conflict with democratic and liberal values. Are such groups a firewall against violent extremism or a conveyor belt into extremism? And can cooperation with such groups give them a legitimacy they should not have? There are no simple answers to such questions, but the municipalities cannot ignore them. They must nonetheless relate to these conservative Muslim communities in some ways.

Strengthen resistance to hate rhetoric, anti-democratic propaganda, conspiracy theories, etc.

Extremism is not only associated with social exclusion. It is also related to the conveyance of hatred, myths, conspiracy theories, etc. – through blogs, social media, and YouTube videos. A pressing challenge is how to promote tolerance and democratic values and build resilience to intolerance and hatred – within the school system. How can we stimulate critical thinking among pupils so that they are not so easily affected by hatred and extreme ideas? The NIBR-report (2016) shows that to prevent the spread of extremist views and attitudes and to build resilience to such views have been given little priority in the five municipalities studied.

The Norwegian Centre for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities has developed a program – in close cooperation with some schools from Oslo and a couple of municipalities near by the capital - to strengthen activities in schools to increase the pupils' resistance to racism, anti-Semitism and undemocratic attitudes. This program seems to have much in common with the Swedish Kungälv program to foster tolerance²³. Its model for tolerance work has spread to many other Swedish municipalities and now also to the municipality of Sarpsborg in Norway. Such programs can be very demanding and time-consuming for the schools. Considering that we are confronting one of our nation's and Europe's most severe challenges, however, there are good reasons to consider applying such programs.

A challenge for frontline professionals like teachers and youth/social workers is how they shall relate to extreme attitudes and values expressed by their students or clients. Should they counter such arguments – and in what way? How can they avoid the pitfall of not saying anything and thus giving an impression that such attitudes and values are ok? And how can they avoid the opposite pitfall of being too confronting and thus undermine a dialogue later on – where you might win the battle, but probably lose the war.

Most teachers and youth workers are probably not prepared to go into “this battle of ideas”. There is a need for both research on the effect of different approaches – and a need to develop the ability of teachers and youth works how to handle this.

Especially challenging is the fact that internet and social media have become a salient arena for extremist activities. None of the five municipalities investigated by NIBR had developed any strategy to be present and active on the internet. Some preventive police-officers have been present and visible on certain radical or extreme internet forums, and the National Criminal Investigation Service (KRIPOS) “patrols” the internet. This has not been a defined role for municipal first-liners in schools, youth work and social work. Whether or not it should be, is at least questionable.

²³ <http://toleransprojektet.se/the-tolerance-project-2/>

The widespread use of conspiracy theories, false news, easily accessible extreme propaganda videos on the internet and the aggressive tone in public debate on immigration, represent a great challenge for an educational system with a mission to foster tolerance, a belief in human right principles and a democratic spirit. An important question what kind of role public authorities should have in producing counter narratives to conspiracy theories etc. The challenges posed by the present situation are probably greater than ever since the Second World War. There is much to be done.

Exit from extremism

During the previous wave of right wing extremism from 1990 to 2005, several Norwegian municipalities succeeded in reintegrating extreme youth into the community. They used a variety of measures – in cooperation with both local police and local NGOs²⁴. Whether the extremists were deradicalized, we do not exactly know. Some of them probably continued to have racist views, but they were disengaged from the violent groups and they stopped using violence. One reason for this success was probably that many of these participants were fairly young and that the target group matched the local apparatus so well (se pp.....). Today, the participants in extreme groups are older, and those returning from Syria may have psychological traumas and problems that may be beyond the capacity of the municipal services. This makes reintegration and the exit process more demanding.

Aarhus in Denmark has established a municipal exit strategy, based on a widespread use of mentors, developed in close cooperation with the institute of Psychology at the University of Aarhus. In Sweden, for the past 18 years a national exit program for neo-Nazis and gang members has been run with ‘formers’ in some of the leading roles within the program (Christensen 2015). Both these programs seem to place more weight on disengagement than on de-radicalization.

It may be argued that exit projects or mentoring programs aimed at Islamic extremists/foreign fighters exceed both the capacity and competence of most Norwegian municipalities. To establish and run a national exit project for adults in Norway should probably be a national responsibility. There is a need for a project with very special competence – perhaps supplemented by ‘formers’ as in the Swedish project. It will be too demanding for almost all Norwegian municipalities to find relevant personnel and competence to work with adult extremists returning from IS and Syria. And if they find such competence locally, it will be difficult to preserve this competence because such local exit projects must be staffed up and down according to rather random recruitment.

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The municipality of Fredrikstad (75,000 inhabitants) has obtained state grants to establish a local exit project. Probably 10 foreign fighters have left Fredrikstad to fight in Syria. A possible solution is to develop this local project into a national project.

V. Cooperation between the municipalities and applied research

The efforts to prevent and counter extremism in the three communities which were hardest affected by right wing extremism between 1990 and 2005 were described and analyzed in several research reports. Brumunddal, Oslo south and Kristiansand became important learning arenas for how to handle such extremism (Bjørngo and Gjelsvik 2015). The local strategies were developed in a close cooperation between key actors in the local community and researchers. The other 15 communities that were affected received counselling from researchers and practitioners that were at the forefront. The bridge between research and local community was made short and broad. The research and the exchange of knowledge were supported by project grants from a generous state.

A precondition for successful action to prevent and reduce a complex and wicked problem, is that the actors involved work in the same direction, share *necessary* information and knowledge, and often that they contribute with their resources in some orderly and coordinated way. This means that there is an urgent need for systematic learning and evaluations. This is why the Norwegian Association of Local Governments (KS), with financial support from the Ministry of Justice, already in spring 2014 prepared a research project in five cities/towns to study how the problem of extremism is defined, perceived and handled²⁵.

In Scandinavia – as elsewhere - there seems to be a broad overlap between participation in criminal gangs/violent youth groups and extremist groups. The American criminologists and gang-researchers Scott Decker and David Pyrooz (2015), have published an interesting article on twelve lessons learned – regarding both mistakes and successes – from the study of gangs that have relevance to the study of extremist groups. One lesson is: Evaluate your programs and action.

On the other hand – as is emphasized by Bjørngo and Gjelsvik (2015) – it is important that policymakers on both the national and local level do not expect evaluations that produce results that clearly demonstrate the types of measures that work (and those that do not work) in preventing radicalization and extremism. It is nearly impossible to carry out controlled experiments with a matched control group where one is object for an intervention and the other not. The effect of a measure is dependent on the social context and circumstances in which it is implemented (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). What has an

²⁵ This is no evaluation, but a forerunner for such evaluations later on

intended effect in one context, will not necessarily work in a different local community or with a different target group. In the affluent Scandinavian welfare states and municipalities, most extremists will not be affected by only one measure, but often a combination of many. This means that it is difficult and even impossible to isolate the effect of one specific measure. It is more realistic to evaluate whether the combination of measures has the desired effect or not. In-depth evaluations of local action/programs may make us wiser, but there still are considerable uncertainty about what works and what does not.

VI. Cooperation between the municipality and the police.

The Norwegian approach to handling extremism is built on an established system of cooperation between the municipal agencies and the local police to prevent crime. Approximately 170 out of the 428 municipalities have established local youth-crime-prevention councils – many of them from the early 1990s onwards. Key persons from the municipal services (secondary schools, child protection, primary health work, out-reach work, youth club leaders, etc.) regularly meet with key persons from the police and especially police officers with a defined preventive responsibility. They monitor the local youth crime situation, discuss appropriate measures and coordinate these both on the community and individual level. A majority of municipalities with more than 10,000 inhabitants have such councils and also a crime prevention coordinator that serves them. In smaller municipalities cooperation and coordination between the municipal services and the local police is more informal and ad hoc. A large number of the municipalities with such councils address crime in general and not just juvenile delinquency – so they are in fact local crime prevention-councils. In addition, nearly all the municipalities have established so-called ‘police councils’, which are a regular meeting point at a more strategic level among the political and administrative leadership from the municipality and heads of the local police. Neither the youth-crime-preventive councils nor the police councils are mandatory for the municipalities.

The cooperation between municipal services and the local police has greatly improved over the last 20-25 years. A major reason for this is that the police have changed their attitude in favour of prevention. Large police stations have established preventive units, and many small police stations have a dedicated prevention officer. In addition, all police officers educated during the last 15 years have a bachelor degree from the Police University College. They are not only educated in law enforcement and how to chase criminals, but also in sociology, criminology and prevention. There is today better agreement between professionals from the municipalities and the police on what causes crime and what needs to be done to reduce it. There are seldom major ideological controversies between them. The proactive role of the police to prevent criminal action and even to actively contact possible delinquents and radicalised persons to express their concern, is highly appreciated

within the municipalities²⁶. Evaluations of the police councils show that leaders from both the police and the municipality express general satisfaction with this cooperation (Rambøll 2014).

Denmark has a similar system for cooperation between the police and the municipalities. Sweden also has such a system, but has strict laws on sharing information on individuals, and the Swedish police are not as proactive as in the two neighbour countries. While some other countries dealing with extremism have to build up such a system, in addition to a cooperative spirit and trust, the Scandinavian countries already have a solid basis on which to build this work. In Norway such councils have played a major role in selective crime prevention – activities directed at groups at risk.

Three out of the five municipalities studied by NIBR (2016) had established a coordination group of three to six key participants to address this specific challenge of Islamic extremists and foreign fighters. Its role is to coordinate efforts to contact extremist with an intention to go to Syria, foreign fighters returning from Syria, handling parents and sibling to fighters in Syria or who are reported killed²⁷. The extremists themselves may be in need of medical and psychological help, younger siblings may be in need for psychological treatment, the parents may be in need for advice how to relate to the extremist views of their children and that it is not wise turning their backs on them. In addition such a specialized coordination group also gives advice to other professionals who have to face such a challenge.

Exchange of information between the municipality and the police security service on serious cases is demanding

A new agency has now entered the field of local prevention: The Norwegian Police Security Service which is formally organized outside the ordinary police, but with units in the 12 regional police stations in addition to the central office in Oslo. This service has until recently been very invisible for the municipal agencies. During the last couple of years the security service has become more open and generous in sharing its knowledge with the municipalities on extremism as a phenomenon and on the current situation internationally and nationally. Several municipalities still claim that the service is too restrictive when reporting on the local situation. If the municipal agencies are to reintegrate foreign fighters and assist their families (including their siblings), they need to know who these fighters are. On several occasions they have not been informed.

²⁶ The Norwegian police actively use “worrying”-conversations with both youth and adult at risk. Fringe members can be talked out of a criminal or extremist group. More hard core criminals and activist may refrain from committing a criminal act simply because they are warned by the police and thus are being aware that they are under surveillance.

²⁷ Of the 100 that have left Norway to join terrorist organisations in Syria and Iraq, approx.. 20 are reported dead, 40 have returned to Norway and approx.. 40 are still in Syria/Iraq.

The Police Security Service obviously has its reasons for not revealing the identity of some of the Syria travellers engaged in terrorist organisations in Syria and Iraq, because they may run the risk of revealing its sources. This makes reintegration of individuals and assistance to the families difficult. The security service has even been reluctant to tell specific municipalities how many travellers from the municipality who are engaged in Syria. For the municipalities it is of great importance to know whether there are one or two or eight to ten Syria travellers when it allocates resources for prevention, intervention and rehabilitation. If they are not informed, this may reduce their motivation and willingness to allocate resources to re-integrative work, family assistance and other preventive measures.

One challenge is the expectations within both the local police and the Police Security Service that first line professionals within the municipal services should pass over information on individuals, their family and friends who are suspected for having extremist views, and to whom the police have no access and little information. The long established and good relation between local police and the municipality may encourage municipal first-liners to pass over sensitive information on individuals (NIBR 2016:14). The intention is obviously a good one – to prevent extremism and even serious offences. But this is a double-edged sword. If municipal services get a reputation for reporting sensitive information to the local police or even the Police Secret Service, this may in the long run undermine the trust the services depend on from those who have turned extremist, their families and within certain pockets of the immigrant population. It is therefore important to have a clear definition of roles and what the various institutions and organizations expect from one another. The dilemma presented above - between control and help/assistance - is by the way one of the oldest dilemmas in the relationship between the police and municipal front-line professionals.

The NIBR-report describes the cooperation between the municipality, local police and the Police Security Service as continually evolving, and still challenging (NIBR 2016:10).

Conclusions: What action is it reasonable to expect from the municipalities to prevent extremism?

The municipalities – locally elected political organizations – play a predominant role within the Scandinavian welfare state. They control a large part of public resources to ensure that the citizens can “live good lives” and to prevent whatever obstructs “good lives”. Given this role, it is no doubt that the municipalities have some responsibility for the prevention of extremism. This is a responsibility they share with the local police, the police security service and a numerous state run services.

One crucial question is then: What is it reasonable to expect that the municipalities should do to prevent extremism in general and particularly Islamic extremism?

A straight forward and uncontroversial answer to that question is that the municipalities should concentrate on the municipalities' primary roles;

- through kindergartens, primary and secondary schools and leisure activities, give children a solid platform of knowledge and skills to qualify for adulthood.
- build attitudes and norms that promote tolerance, democracy and peaceful solutions of conflicts – within the school system and by improving the municipality as a democratic system.
- counteract social exclusion, avoid establishment of social and ethnic ghettos - and promote inclusion of disadvantaged groups and individuals, including refugees and immigrants
- build secure communities through prevention of delinquency and crime

The main argument is that these activities and services build secure and vivid local communities and further good lives for the citizens. A positive side effect is that they also prevent extremism. If preventing extremism becomes the most important argument to counter social exclusion, include immigrants and to develop the local democracy, we risk making extremism a much more dominating problem than it really is. By doing lack of integration of immigrants and refugees to a dominant security treat, we risk creating unnecessary fear and to stigmatize a large part of the immigrant population – Muslims in particular. Such a stigma can in its turn inhibit inclusion and further polarization (Lindekilde 2015).

A characteristic of Islamic extremism is that it is unevenly distributed between Norwegian municipalities. For a large part of the 426 municipalities²⁸, especially municipalities with a small population and few immigrants, it is unlikely they ever will meet this challenge. They should therefore not do any specific effort other than what they otherwise would do to promote “good lives” and social inclusion. In addition – there should be a few persons within the municipal administration with some specific knowledge on Islamic extremism and what to do if worries for local individuals should occur.

In the other end we have municipalities which have Islamic extremism as a manifest challenge – with citizens that clearly hold extreme views, participate in extremist organizations or groups and that even have joined terrorist organizations in Syria/Iraq. The

²⁸ In august 2017 there are 426 municipalities in Norway. This number will be reduced to approximately 360 within 2020.

report from NIBR documents that such municipalities have taken this challenge seriously and have put a lot of energy and resources to handle it.

In this article several measures to prevent and meet Islamic extremism is presented. This does not mean that every affected municipality carries out all these activities. Not even rather prosperous Norwegian municipalities have a capacity to do this. The actions chosen must be adjusted to the characteristics of the local challenge, the economic resources and skilled manpower the municipal organization possess. These actions must be adjusted to other challenges that the municipality has to handle. While the Norwegian municipalities with right-wing extremist challenge in the 90's met a rather generous state – which gave extra funding to municipalities with extraordinary challenges, this has not been the case for municipalities meeting the challenge of Islamic extremism. They have had to handle this new challenge within the economic resources they already possess. This is not entirely negative, it forces the municipalities to a sober prioritizing of resources.

Islamic extremism and the repeated terror attacks in European cities the last few years, make this to a highly emphasized and focused challenge. Given the role of the municipalities to prevent social problems and to build secure communities, they cannot simply ignore such a challenge if they wish to maintain both trust and legitimacy among the local population and even with the parliament and government. It is difficult especially for larger Norwegian cities and towns to ignore it. The problem today is probably not that the larger municipalities do not prioritize extremism. The danger is that in emphasizing extremism, the municipalities must downgrade their work on challenges that do not get the same amount of public attention, but that probably is equally important to prioritize. This especially include challenges that are complex and in need of much coordination and cooperation between different agencies and professionals. An example is violence towards children (both within and without the family). Extremism has some characteristics that may make it into a cuckoo in the prevention nest that easily may displace other challenges. The role of the municipalities is not to throw as much resources and energy into the more specific prevention of extremism. This must be balanced to all the other challenges the municipalities are expected to handle. To avoid the “cuckoo-nest-trap” is a main argument for earmarked state project-grants to those rather few municipalities which have Islamic extremism as a manifest challenge.

The probably most important lesson learned from local Norwegian work against extreme Islamism, is that the municipalities have some evident limitations in their ability to prevent such extremism and to reintegrate extremist back into main-stream society. Islamic extremism in Norway is characterized by a large proportion of immigrants/refugees that have come to Norway as adolescents and young adults, and they have been radicalized after the age of 20. They thereby steer clear of the municipal services and grip. This means that the state run services – specialized health care (both somatic and psychiatric), the Labour and Welfare administration with its unemployment schemes, prisons and the police – play a

crucial role. Specific efforts or projects to deradicalize, treat and integrate traumatized foreign fighters from Syria and even their traumatized children who may have been indoctrinated to hate and kill infidels, exceed the capacity and competence of an average Norwegian municipality. This means that the role and responsibility of the municipalities should be somewhat downgraded and the role of state authorities should be somewhat upgraded.

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