Reporting and Radicalisation
and how it's relevant to you

GUIDELINES
FOR JOURNALISTS

This guideline has been written for journalists, and contains some discussion of the relationship between reporting and radicalisation and terrorism. It gives some suggestions on working methods, and factors which journalists might take into consideration when covering his sensitive issue.

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION: CENTRAL ISSUES AND OBJECTIVES

A lot has been written on the almost symbiotic relationship between the media and terrorism. The now famous metaphor by Margaret Thatcher that "publicity is the oxygen of terrorism" refers to the need of terrorists for a public. Media, by their capabilities of agenda setting and framing, are crucial in shaping and moving such a public. The benefits are mutual, then, since terrorism provides the media with drama, shock, and tragedy – suited to be packaged as human interest news, the perfect ingredients for a product that sells. The influence reporting about terrorism may have on the public is often addressed in terms of fear, or of support for counterterrorism measures. What terrorists also try to accomplish, though, is getting recognition of their motives and sympathy for their cause. This points to the perspective of this document: the influence of **the traditional news media on radicalisation**.[1]

Not only reporting on terrorism, but also depicting and addressing minorities is an issue here. Stereotypes and prejudices can easily (and sometimes unintentionally) be maintained or reinforced by media coverage, especially on matters of religion or ethnicity. Confirmation of existing (but not ideal) social relations or status quo, may add to (group) grievances, consolidate or even fuel nationalism, or otherwise contribute to inter group tensions. On the other hand, when fully aware of the influence of rhetoric on the experience of 'us-and-them' thinking or on perceived deprivation, journalists also have the power to avoid facilitating or verbalising discrimination.

The objectives of this document are
- to raise awareness on how reporting on some aspects of society might influence radicalisation processes in Europe.
- to stimulate discussion on the role media play and to what extent they can or should take responsibility.
- to point out options for policy makers, editors, and journalists for working consciously with this subject.

RADICALISATION

Definitions of the term 'radicalisation' are manifold – due to its use in the political arena where definitions are used to motivate policy choices. Also academic definitions often seem to be coloured by the specific discipline, and most of them suffer from lack of precision. Most definitions have in common that they refer to an individual process, often strongly influenced by group processes. During this process, the dominant political order is rejected, as well as dialogue, compromise and tolerance as means to bring change. Instead, violence is increasingly accepted as an appropriate method to attain certain goals

1 There is a huge body of literature on online radicalisation, but that is not the focus of this text.

2 HOW MAY REPORTING ON MINORITIES INFLUENCE RADICALISATION?

Research shows that there are lots of factors which can push someone towards radicalisation. It may be a personal issue – essentially a search for identity or meaning, or a personal trauma which triggers drastic change – but the fact that the social context plays a vital role in dictating how this process progresses, and on the narratives which feed it, is undeniable. What is crucial here is how people perceive their conditions. Subjective perceptions of discrimination can powerfully generate feelings of deprivation, on an individual level or on group level. Those perceptions may be reinforced by deep prejudices, and strong us-and-them thinking, thus becoming self-fulfilling prophecies.

Group grievances, where the members of a group see less rights or possibilities for themselves than for other groups, are more often mobilising than personal experiences. What is especially noticeable is that groups or individuals some-times 'adopt' grievances from others and become self-appointed promoters of a cause other than their own, for instance people leaving to join a fight in a conflict in another country.

Whenever people don't find a way to address their grievances by the normally accepted ways of social regulation like dialogue, legal process, democracy and tolerance, they seek alternative routes, thus taking a step into the process of radicalisation. This can be the case not only for minorities feeling discriminated against, but also for majorities feeling threatened by immigrants or minority groups.

REPORTING ON MINORITIES CAN INFLUENCE RADICALISATION IN A NEGATIVE WAY

- By framing
  - Stereotypes often easily come up, for example in the connection between negative actions or provocative statements and someone's cultural or religious background – even when this background is in fact not relevant at all.
  - Using episodic frames, not placing it in the bigger context.

- By agenda setting
  - Whenever a group undergoes serious injustices and it is subsequently neglected by the media, this makes it even more painful.
  - At the same time, heavily addressing the grievances of a few as if they represent a whole community may also result in misbalance which could put a situation under much more pressure than necessary.

- By rhetoric
  - A style which underlines a sense of "us-and-them" or "good and bad", may reinforce polarisation.
  - Once launched, a (newly-coined) term may become a stereotype in itself, which does not acknowledge the complexity of the situation, and does harm.

*We can unintentionally have
a political impact in how we report; our first duty
as journalists is to be as accurate and as attentive
to what is really going on out there.*

REPORTING ON MINORITIES CAN INFLUENCE RADICALISATION IN A POSITIVE WAY

- **By framing**
  - Referring to overarching patterns of particular risk factors.
  - Showing the bigger picture, for instance by providing statistics, expert analysis or other relevant background information.

- **By agenda setting**
  - Raising awareness about diversity, stimulating the public debate on discrimination.
  - Paying attention to positive examples of cooperation between minority and majority groups, and of minority contributions to majority society.

- **By rhetoric**
  - Using a nuanced style, and a positive tone.

3 HOW MAY REPORTING ON TERRORISM INFLUENCE RADICALISATION?

Apart from grievances, also thrill and excitement may push someone in the direction of radical behaviour. Coverage of terroristic acts or threats could "feed" the thrill seeking tendency of young men at risk of radicalisation by depicting terrorist activity as exciting and adventurous. Think of the Rolling Stone glam cover photo of Boston bombing suspect Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, which pictures the bomber as a sexy star, recalling photos of Jim Morrison.[2]

Some other pull factors include the emotional pull to act in the face of injustice, and status and internal code of honour. Terrorists will try to use the media to address these factors and win receptive young people for their cause. Their goal is to make those people think about their motives and to gain sympathy for their cause, and to gain a certain kind of legitimate status, that makes them in the eyes of the public equal to the mainstream political actors.[3] This doesn't mean that they always force-feed their motivations to reporters. Often, motivations are relevant for the story, or the only new information once the events are reported on, and therefore voluntarily addressed.

The other factor, the desire for status and respect, is played upon by terrorists by showing their potential supporters what they are capable of. Spectacular images of attacks can inspire admiration. Apart from that, they try to achieve a profile for their leaders that makes them seem comparable to 'regular' political leaders, for instance by personal interviews, professionally recorded videos, and carefully framed messages.

A last factor to be mentioned here, leading to radicalisation in some cases, is trauma and a desire for revenge. Here, a different perspective is at stake: the impact of reporting about terrorist attacks on victims and their communities. Reporting on the attack and interviewing victims may influence the way a community reacts to the drama. Especially in the case of separatist attacks in areas where conflicts are deeply rooted and touching complete communities, this can be highly relevant.

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2 'Rolling Stone defends Tsaernev glam cover amid outcry http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2013/07/17/dzhokhar-tsarnaev-boston-marathon-bombing-rolling-stone/2523891/
3 Brigitte Nacos developed an extensive framework on this in her book Mass-Mediated Terrorism: The Central Role of the Media in Terrorism and Counterterrorism, (2007) Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

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REPORTING ON TERRORISM CAN INFLUENCE RADICALISATION IN A NEGATIVE WAY

- **By framing**
  - Framing terrorist activities as war, or as evil, reinforces polarisation, and forces an us-and-them dichotomy, only leaving two camps. This can be very confronting to people with dual identities, and move them towards more extreme directions.
  - Framing it as glamorous. This will seriously make it more attractive to young guys seeking for "coolness".
  - Sheer focus on the action risks presenting an unbalanced picture of the intensity of the conflict as a whole.

- **By agenda setting**
  - Paying a lot of attention to terrorist groups behind an attack, including their motivations and leaders, may generate sympathisers.
  - Not covering the victim's perspective, as well as emphasising it too strongly, can lead to grievances working as a seed for radicalisation.

- **By rhetoric**
  - When a report on a (suicide) attack contains a lot of details, it could almost be read as an instruction.
  - (Detailed) references to planned or current anti-terrorist actions may inspire radical groups and harm the counter terrorism approach.

REPORTING ON TERRORISM CAN INFLUENCE RADICALISATION IN A POSITIVE WAY

- **By framing**
  - Presenting terrorist attacks as criminal acts, regardless of the terrorist's cause, makes it subject to laws and justice, instead of placing it on an equal level. This may reduce the perceived power of the terrorists.

- **By agenda setting**
  - Paying attention to issues other than the attack, brings balance and perspective. Maintaining the status of 'breaking news' when it's not so breaking anymore, may increase its impact.

- **By rhetoric**
  - Be careful with the use of the terms terrorism, extremism and radicalisation. Definitions of those terms are manifold. Because of this, it is important to realise or even make explicit what connotations may arise when describing certain events in terms of terrorism or radicalism.

4 MEDIA AND RADICALISATION: DILEMMAS AND PERSPECTIVES

Media coverage of ethnic and religious issues has already been a focus of attention during the last decades, at least in the mainstream, quality press, as a result of the introduction of diversity policies and editorial guidelines. Research amongst journalists in several European countries shows that, when reporting about ethnicity and religion, journalists declare themselves dedicated to the values of objectivity, media plurality, democracy and civic society. At the same time, they acknowledge that the media still often play a role in the promotion of negative stereotypes and prejudices connected to ethnicity and religion. What is needed, according to the journalists interviewed, is to achieve a balance between two main efforts in reporting on diversity issues: informing and interpreting. Informing refers to a true presentation of the events as they occurred while interpreting should aim at the promotion of "a constructive public dialogue about the issues of public concern".[4] The report comes up with a number of recommendations, which are mostly also made explicit in other documents on the topic and many of the journalistic professional codes and guidelines that have been developed since the late 19th century. In fact, it's generally about sensitive reporting, background information and fact checking (see frame). The same principles hold true when it comes to reporting on terrorism. Then, too, it is important to be balanced, critical about sources and careful in the representation of perpetrators and victims.

IT'S ALL ABOUT SENSITIVE REPORTING

The type of recommendations given in documents on reporting on diversity, are mostly rather basic. Some examples:

Move beyond the event:
provide background information, and explain legal contexts.
Many news stories feature provocative or salient aspects of an event, without referring to overarching patterns of particular risk factors. Instead of those so-called 'episodic frames', reporting on sensitive subjects benefits from the use of 'thematic frames', that show the bigger picture. This can be done for instance by providing statistics, expert analysis or other relevant background information.

Your story is only as good as your sources
if you are reporting frequently on a community ensure you know it well, work on sources there. Make sure you provide a full picture.

Never be satisfied with getting one side of a story.
Be sure to interview sources with opposing viewpoints to prevent the story from giving readers a distorted version of an event.

Do not stay on the fringes.
Balance in reporting is not simply going to the extreme left and the extreme right.

Give a voice to the voiceless.
Whenever a group undergoes serious injustices and it is ignored,

4 Rupar (2012) Getting the facts right. Reporting ethnicity and religion. Belgium, International Federation of Journalists. p. 58

There is often a difference, though, between those codes and guidelines on the one hand, and daily practice on the other. Several explanations reveal the harshness of reality at this point:

- The focus in codes and guidelines on fact checking, using multiple sources and being nuanced, seems to contradict what news making means nowadays: being the first with the story, (leaving not much time for thoroughness or making well-informed decisions on whether or not to publish or broadcast certain aspects); and attracting viewers and readers and thereby increasing advertisement income.

- The heavy workload of most journalists seems discordant with the recommendations for greater thoroughness, and more post-degree education for journalists on, for example reporting on minorities.

- Terrorist attacks offer a lot of opportunity to attract news consumers: it has drama, danger, shock, blood, human tragedy, miracle stories, and heroes. Terrorism makes people pay attention to the news media for a long time, so it almost seems a logical choice or even a duty to over cover it. Besides, who decides how much news coverage is "too much"?

- Nuance often gets lost in moral equivalency, meaning that when media refuse to condemn acts that are labelled in politics as terrorism or murderous acts, they will be under suspicion of offering a platform to perpetrators or criticizing counterterrorism policies.

- This may have direct consequences for commercial liability: reputational risk is directly related to financial risk in terms of lost advertising or circulation revenue. When, in the UK, the Daily Mirror took a strong anti-war stance in 2003, they suffered a crippling loss in circulation as a result.

- When it comes to the choice of hiding or revealing details, the risk is balanced with the urge to protect society's right to know. There may even be systematic efforts to mislead, by parties who have an interest in that, by providing journalists with disinformation.

Given the restrictions of time and money, the pressure of competition, and the changing place of traditional media in the media landscape, sticking to the codes all the time seems really tough. If it is so hard to avoid negative effects, is there any possibility - or even responsibility - to use the news media's power for the positive? The Media4Diversity report,[5] goes as far as stating that the media do have a responsibility for raising awareness about diversity, taking a stand on discrimination, and promoting a positive identity for ethnic and religious minority groups. The report describes many examples of how this is practiced across Europe. It is, however, not self-evident that this is something all types of media are more or less obliged to do. Given the diversity of characteristics, traditions, target groups, and ideological and political backgrounds in the media landscape, it resembles more an approach which some channels or papers can use to distinguish themselves by. This also raises the question whether general guidelines and recommendations are useful at all, if in practice the tradition and colour of a specific channel determines its policy entirely. What the discussion should be about, is maybe not so much the content of quality standards, but their actual status and power. What is the responsibility of the news media towards the public, and in what way can this guide decisions? This should be the topic of debate, in a general sense, but surely with specific attention for radicalisation.

5 Media4Diversity. Taking the Pulse of Diversity in the Media. A Study on Media and Diversity in EU Member States and 3 EEA countries

When we are working on difficult material
about political violence is very easy
to become black and white very quickly.

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5 HOW TO TAKE
THIS A STEP FORWARD?

Given the demonstrated necessity and the complexity of paying attention to the connection between reporting and radicalisation, there is a need to invest in motivation and knowledge. Those seem to be conditions that should be met first in order to be able to be keep codes and guidelines.

AWARENESS AND MOTIVATION

Radicalisation is a very relevant topic for media, not just to publish about, but also to formulate policy on. Awareness of the connection between reporting and radicalisation, and the motivation to act accordingly, should be higher on the agenda of media education and media policy. The discussion we referred to earlier could stimulate that, along with examples of best practices

ACCESSIBLE INFORMATION

More easily accessible knowledge on terrorism mechanisms and processes of radicalisation will help to avoid getting the bigger picture in relatively short time, and avoiding easy mistakes.

On a policy level, this means that knowledge from research should be constantly updated in easily available practical factsheets and directions, which take into account that there is often little time to search and read. Also, an overview of possible databases should become available. See for some help the lists of resources here below. This list can be of help on the practical level, for editors and journalists, as a quick starting point for checking facts and the use of terms, or for doing back ground research.
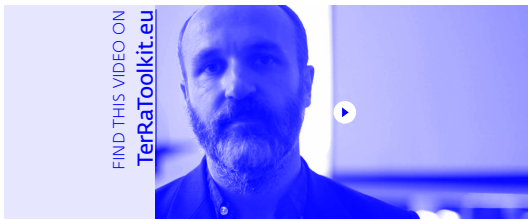
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6 INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

TERMINOLOGY AND USEFUL GLOSSARIES

Definitions of the terms 'terrorism' and 'radicalisation' are manifold – partly due to its use in the political arena, where definitions are used to motivate policy choices. Therefore, it is important to realise or even make explicit what connotations may arise when describing certain events in terms of terrorism or radicalism.

Words not used frequently in your native language sometimes have connotations you may not be aware of. Also avoid using terms that the audience may have little or no knowledge of or that can easily be misinterpreted. In case they cannot be avoided, clarify. The word "jihad", for example, is often mistranslated as "holy war" and connected to terms like wrong, dangerous, sinister, etc. Even though some militant groups use the term in that way, the concept has a totally different connotation for mainstream Muslims. Likewise, the Arabic phrase "Allahu Akbar," which can be translated as "God is the Greatest," is extremely important to and commonly used by Muslims. It is a repeated feature of Islamic prayer but it is also used as a general cheer. However, in the media the phrase has sometimes been explained as a battle cry. This potentially casts all uses of the phrase as suspicious or threatening.

Some useful glossaries in this context:

- **Glossary Religion**
http://www.thearda.com/learningcenter/religiondictionary.asp (US) dictionary of religious terms, also contains maps, graphics, and a rich information database

- **Glossary Immigration**
http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/european_migration_network/glossary/index_a_en.htm

The EMN Glossary has been published in a number of languages and also in Arabic. It contains an introduction explaining how the Glossary was developed by the EMN. The following language versions are currently available: Deutsch, English, Español, Français , Italiano, Português and Arabic.

- **Glossary Terrorism**
http://www.terrorism-research.com/glossary/

- **Index of symbols and groups:**
http://nctc.gov/site/groups/index.html

RESOURCES ON TERRORISM

Most assumptions on terrorism are based on the so-called 'black swans': incidents that fall outside the realm of regular expectations, have a high impact, and defy predictions. The attack on 9/11 is an example of a black swan; an extremely deviant event in all respects, but it has had major influence on many theories, definitions and measures related to terrorism. Being aware of the 'myths' on terrorism this event generated may also support a more balanced reporting on terrorist attacks. See for examples of 'myths' LaFree's account on

"Discussion point: black swans and burstiness: countering myths about terrorism"

(http://www.start.umd.edu/news/discussion-point-black-swans-and-burstiness-countering-myths-about-terrorism) and "START Director addresses common myths of terrorism"

(http://www.start.umd.edu/news/start-director-addresses-common-myths-terrorism).

The Annual EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT), produced by analysts and experts at Europol, drawing on contributions from EU Member States and external partners

https://www.europol.europa.eu > Strategic analysis reports > EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT)

Official European list of terrorist persons, groups and entities
http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32013D0395&rid=1

http://www.terrorismdata.leiden.edu/
Research database on Terrorism, Counterterrorism and Radicalization, set up by the Centre for Terrorism and Counterterrorism (CTC) of Leiden University (Campus The Hague), The Netherlands.

http://www.start.umd.edu/
The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism—better known as START—is a university-based research and education center comprised of an international network of scholars committed to the scientific study of the causes and human consequences of terrorism in the United States and around the world
The website contains a database of publications, background reports of attacks, datasets en tools to search data, such as the **Global Terrorism Database** (http://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/)
The Global Terrorism Database (GTD) is an open-source database including information on terrorist events around the world from 1970 through 2012 (with additional annual updates planned for the future).

http://www.transnationalterrorism.eu/
This is the official website of the European research project **Transnational Terrorism, Security, and the Rule of Law (TTSRL)**. TTSRL was a multi-faceted research project that aimed to help Europe better understand terrorism. The research was conducted between 2006 and 2009 and yielded several useful publications, available via this website.

Information and instruction on interviewing victims and reporting on shocking events:
http://dartcenter.org/gateway/journalists
A lot of information and guidelines on reporting on traumatising events, rresponsible interview techniques, using open questions and avoiding the re-traumatisation of witnesses/ victims.

The DART Center for journalism and trauma also offers a lot of information, fact sheets, tip sheets and guides on this subject, for example "Tragedies & Journalists - a guide for more effective coverage"

RESOURCES ON RADICALISATION

www.radicalisationresearch.org
Provides policymakers, journalists, and anyone whose work utilises concepts such as radicalisation, fundamentalism or extremism with easy access to high-quality academic research on these controversial issues.

www.strategicdialogue.org
The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) is an independent think tank working with leaders in government, business, media and academia to develop multi-country responses to the major security and socio-economic challenges of our time and to enhance Europe's capacity to act effectively in the global arena.

www.counterextremism.org
Contains a rich database, which allows to search on theme, country, target area and resource type.

http://icsr.info

Website of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation

RESOURCES ON REPORTING AND DIVERSITY

http://www.media-diversity.org/en:
Rich database of codes, guidelines, reports, best practices etc.

http://ethicaljournalisminitiative.org/en
Rich database, links to many resources, publications and practices.

http://www.mediawise.org.uk/diversity
Articles, reports and guidelines for best practice on Ethnic minorities, Gender, Islam, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans, People with disabilities, Roma, Gypsies and Travellers

http://www.mediaact.eu
Website of an EU research project on media Accountability and Transparency in Europe, with literature database and research outcomes.

http://ethicaljournalisminitiative.org/en
A.o. full text of the report by Rupar, Getting the facts right. Reporting ethnicity and religion.

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Vymetal, S., Vitousova, P., Cirtkova, L., Kloubek, M. (2008) Journalists and Victims of Crime Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic
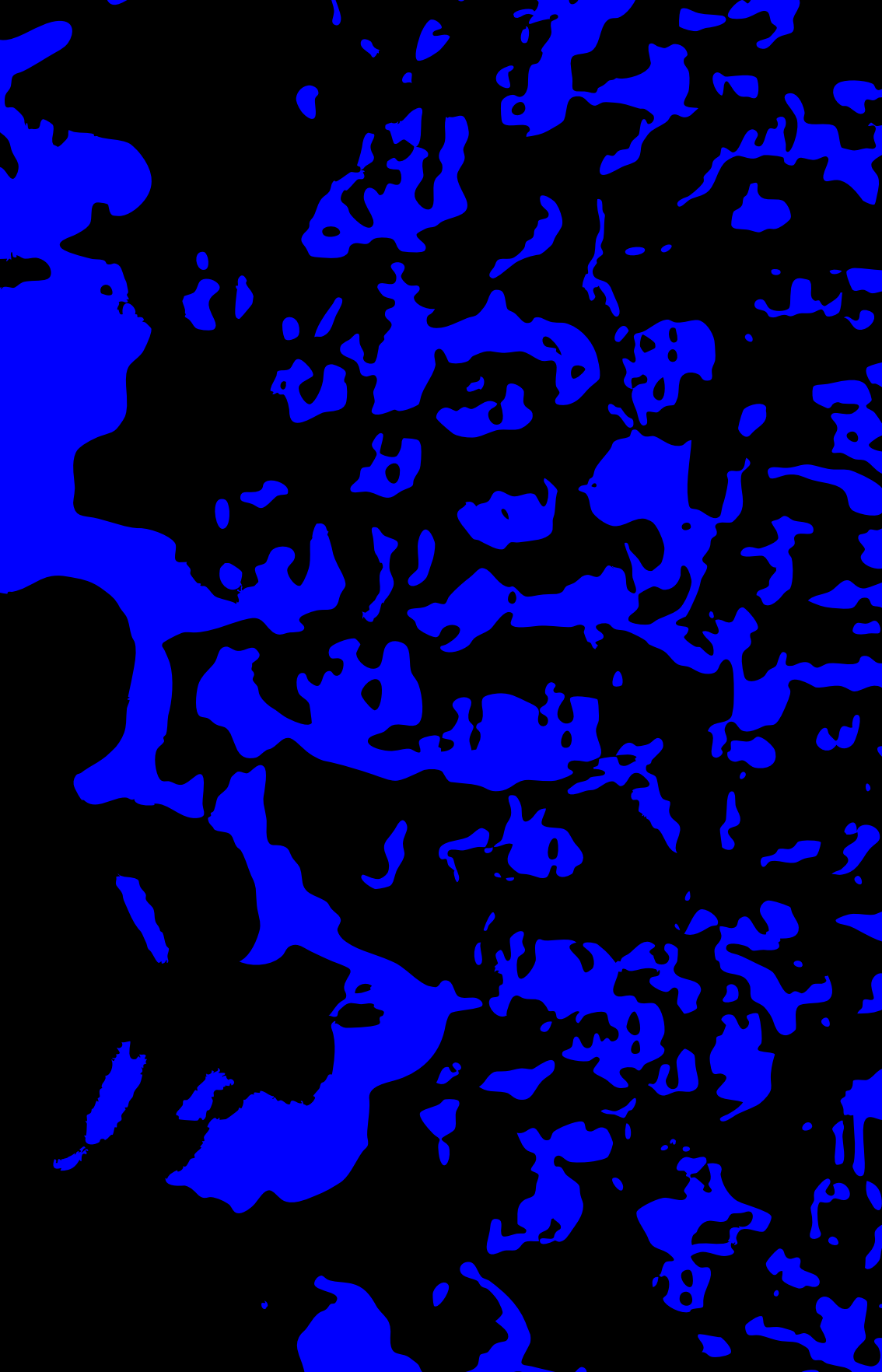
The material you can find in this Toolkit and online on **www.terratoolkit.eu** has been designed for professionals who come into contact through their work with a population which may be vulnerable to radicalisation. It explains why this subject may be of relevance to you, how you might notice if this issue was developing, and what you can do about it. Manuals which contain a fuller picture of this problem and an approach to solving it, and short fact sheets, can both be downloaded from the website free of charge.

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NETWORK OF ASSOCIATIONS OF VICTIMS OF TERRORISM

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ASOCIACIÓN DE AYUDA A LAS VÍCTIMAS DEL 11-M