

Reporting and Radicalisation How are they connected?

Dealing with Radicalisation: Aims

These recommendations are intended for journalists.

It is not your task to change society or combat radicalisation but you can make an important difference, e.g. by maintaining balance, offering both sides to a story and avoiding labels.

After the course, you should:

- Be aware of how reporting on some aspects of society might influence radicalisation processes in Europe;
- Be aware of the role media play in radicalisation processes and to what extent they can or should take responsibility.

What is radicalisation and how is it relevant to journalism?

- Individuals who feel unable to address their grievances in normally accepted ways may seek alternative routes, taking a step in the process of radicalisation.
- This can be the case for minorities who feel marginalised or discriminated against, or majorities who feel threatened.
- Social context and narratives play a vital role in dictating radicalisation processes.

Journalists can have a crucial impact in this area. Here we focus on:

- 1) Sensitive reporting on minorities.
- 2) Fair and balanced reporting of issues surrounding terrorism and radicalisation.
- 3) Responsible techniques for interviewing victims and witnesses of shocking events.

Sensitive reporting on ethnicity and religion

Journalists' reporting style (tone and language) may influence public opinion, including perceptions of themselves or others. Journalists have the power to reinforce or break down negative stereotypes of groups.

Reporting on minorities may **negatively influence** radicalisation processes, e.g.:

- Media making unnecessary connections between an individual/group's negative actions and their cultural or religious backgrounds, which is often of no relevance.
- Media neglecting (underrepresenting) injustices suffered by a group, or over representing another group, may add to an individual/group's grievances.
- A reporting style underlining a sense of 'us and them' or 'good and bad' may reinforce tensions between groups in society.

On the other hand, reporting on minorities could have a **positive influence**, e.g.:

- Present both sides of a story, interviewing sources with opposing viewpoints.
- Presenting the bigger picture when reporting on minorities to dispel negative stereotypes.
- Avoid connecting negative actions or provocative statements to an individual/group's cultural or religious background unless it is directly relevant.

Balanced reporting and responsible interviewing

It is difficult for journalists to report on terrorism:

- On the one hand, journalists want to inform the public on events, and in turn the public may wish to be informed. However, journalists may not want to become the mouthpiece of terrorist views.
- Coverage of terrorist acts could feed the thrill seeking tendency of young men vulnerable to radicalisation.
- Interviewing victims of an attack may influence the way a community reacts, e.g. inspire desire for revenge.
- In extreme circumstances (e.g. following 9/11) media can become overly nationalist or patriotic, which may heighten integration problems and thus grievances for ethnic minority groups.
- Tendency for media to immediately relate new attacks to old, e.g. immediately after Anders Breivik's bomb attack in Norway, media linked it to 7/7, heightening suspicion of Islamist groups and strengthening radical groups' narratives on enmity.
- Detailed references to current or planned anti-terrorist actions may inspire radicals.
- Presenting terrorist acts as criminal acts makes them subject to laws and justice, which may reduce the perceived power of the terrorists.