



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – 04.11.2021

Evaluation of the National Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Radicalisation and Violent Extremism

The key points in brief

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This report reflects the opinion of the project team, which is not necessarily the same as that of the commissioning entity or advisory bodies.

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Executive Summary

Background

In the course of implementing Switzerland's national strategy to counter terrorism, the Confederation, cantons, cities and communes decided in November 2017 to formulate a five-year **National Action Plan (NAP)** to prevent and counter radicalisation and violent extremism. The NAP comprises 26 measures and seeks to prevent violent radicalisation or, where radicalisation has already taken place, to identify the early warning signs and mitigate its impact with targeted action.

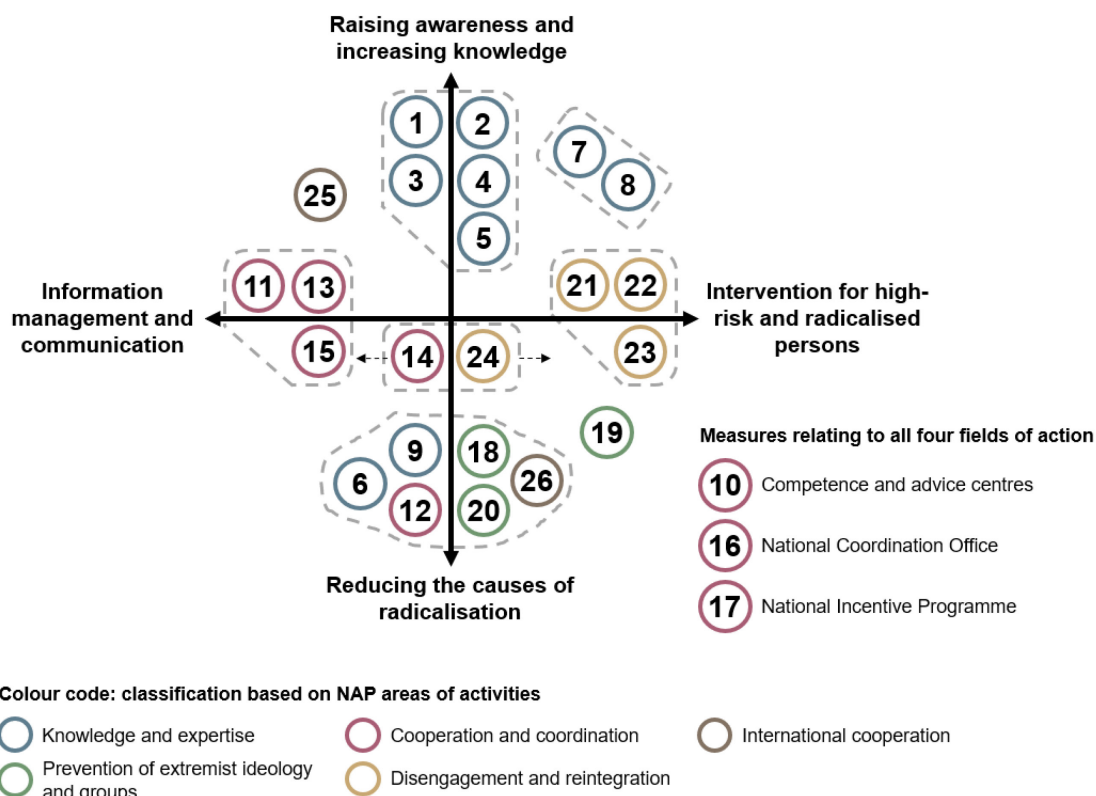
This study examines the effectiveness of the NAP with its 26 measures and identifies potential for improvement. In the course of the study, the work of the National Coordination Office established under the NAP was also analysed, as was that of the National Incentive Programme adopted by the Confederation to support implementation of the NAP. In addition, the need for and possible approach of a potential follow-up action plan were also assessed.

Methodology

Preventing and combating radicalisation and violent extremism poses complex and multifaceted challenges. The NAP's five areas of activities therefore cover a broad spectrum of measures, ranging from research projects and awareness-raising activities, to improving cooperation and promoting disengagement and reintegration. Categorising the NAP's 26 measures into these areas of activities is a valid approach in principle, but is not entirely suitable for evaluating their impact. Therefore, for the purpose of this evaluation, the 26 measures were regrouped into **four fields of action** based on their potential impact. Figure K-1 on the following page illustrates the result of this regrouping, with the four fields of action corresponding to the diagram's four sections. It should be noted that measures with several impact vectors are grouped on the intersection of two or more sections.

Our evaluation focused on the impact of the NAP on these four fields of action. Using a combination of different methods, the project team also analysed, where possible, the effectiveness of the 26 measures as well as their potential for improvement. Our findings are based on a document analysis, which included the NAP monitoring reports, 21 guideline-based interviews with individuals who had worked closely with the NAP either on a strategic or operational level, and an online survey involving 103 people and institutions.

The results show that the findings of our evaluation are broadly based, with a large degree of consistency between the results of the interviews and those of the online survey.

Figure K-1: The 26 measures of the NAP divided into four fields of action

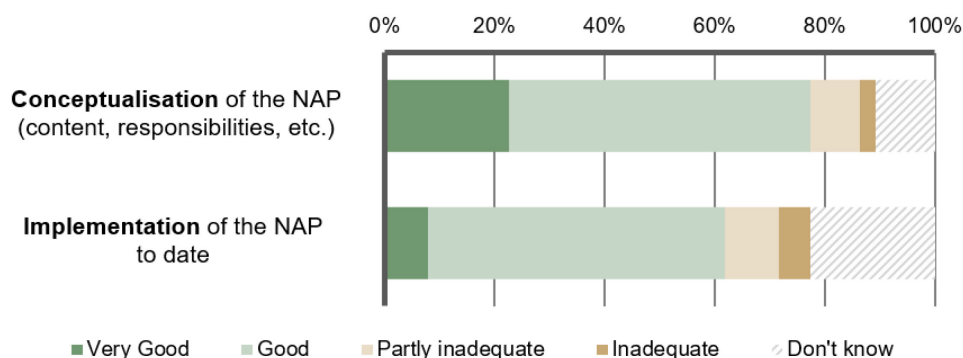
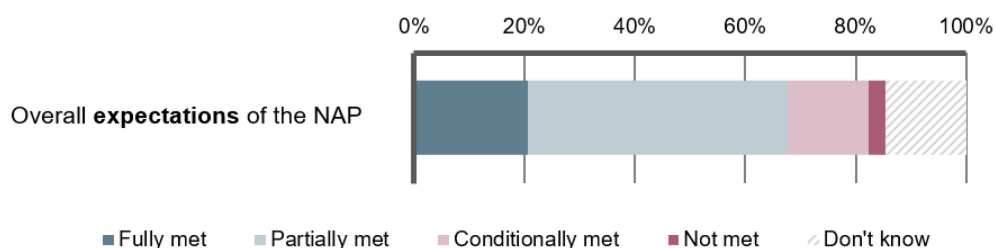
Source: Ecoplan

Evaluation of the National Action Plan

Positive overall conclusion

The project team's overall conclusion on the National Action Plan is largely positive, despite shortcomings in several areas and a need for further action. The NAP has set many things in motion and put radicalisation and violent extremism on the political agenda, not only at all government levels but particularly among stakeholders from outside the security services. Stakeholders from social welfare services or from civil society now have much more awareness about radicalisation and violent extremism; they are generally better able to identify problematic tendencies and are therefore more likely to report such cases to the relevant authorities. In addition, many projects aimed at reducing the causes of radicalisation have now been established and competence and advice centres at cantonal and communal level have also improved.

In the online survey, the majority of the respondents rated the conceptualisation and implementation of the NAP as 'good', i.e. on level three of a four-point scale (see Figure K-2). Nonetheless, most of them said the NAP had only 'partially' met their expectations. This confirms that there are shortcomings and that there is room for improvement in certain areas.

Figure K-2: Results of the online survey on the overall assessment of the NAP**Part A: Summarised assessment of the NAP's conceptualisation and implementation****Part B: Overall expectations of the NAP**

Source: Ecoplan, based on the online survey.

Sample: n = 102; all online survey participants were questioned.

Challenges

Four years into its five-year timetable, the NAP has not yet been fully implemented. This is often the case with such programmes because measures like awareness raising or reducing the causes of radicalisation are ongoing tasks. However, there are areas that have an obvious potential for improvement. The three main ones are:

- **Improving communication:** A key shortcoming at present is the lack of communication between the various authorities. This area is inadequate, despite the NAP. There is not yet a culture of sharing information between institutions or implementing best practices. Stakeholders from the communes, the cantons and the Confederation should discuss their work and share their findings more often.
- **Reducing regional differences:** There are considerable regional differences in implementing the NAP. Cantons that have already experienced cases involving radicalisation in the past have pressed ahead with measures. However, it is important that all cantons implement certain minimum standards, since radicalisation can occur anywhere and anytime. Better regional cooperation (e.g. between competence and advice centres) could facilitate this.
- **Questioning the focus on Islamic-motivated extremism:** The analysis further showed that although the NAP is clearly directed at all forms of violent extremism, in its implementation it often focuses on Islamic-motivated extremism. During the course of our survey,

various stakeholders criticised the fact that other forms of violent extremism, such as right- and left-wing extremism, have sometimes been given too little attention in the past.

Evaluation of the National Coordination Office (Measure 16)

Under the provisions of the NAP, a National Coordination Office was established. It is located at the permanent secretariat of the SSN and is responsible for bringing together the relevant stakeholders and for knowledge transfer on radicalisation and violent extremism. It also performs various general NAP-related tasks, such as compiling monitoring reports and supervising the National Incentive Programme in collaboration with the Federal Office of Police (fedpol).

Taking into account the resources available, our conclusion on the work of the National Coordination Office so far is overall positive. It has made an important contribution to implementing the NAP through its role as a central point of contact, its work in implementing the National Incentive Programme and through organising expert conferences. Nonetheless, it should be noted that there is still considerable potential for improvement in fostering communication between stakeholders and in preparing and disseminating information for specialists. However, as the office is staffed with just a 0.8 full-time equivalent, it lacks the personnel resources for these important tasks.

Evaluation of the National Incentive Programme (Measure 17)

The Federal Council has supported the NAP's implementation by creating a National Incentive Programme. Over a period of five years, cantons, cities, communes and civil society will receive CHF 5 million in financial support for projects aimed specifically at implementing the NAP. Funded projects should serve as a model by sharing their findings so that these can be used in future projects.

The fact that the Confederation is funding the implementation of the NAP through its National Incentive Programme is, in principle, positive and this financial support has indeed made a tangible contribution to its implementation. However, the considerable potential impact of the programme has fallen short of expectations because the findings from the funded projects have not been widely shared.

Reflections on continuing the National Action Plan

The findings of our evaluation indicate that it makes sense and is important to continue with the National Action Plan in an appropriate form. This was also widely recognised by those who were interviewed and those who took part in the online survey. Numerous stakeholders are of the opinion that preventing and combating radicalisation and violent extremism is a long-term task because the radicalisation of society is an ongoing development. A new NAP could focus on the aforementioned points that have potential for improvement, besides other aspects.

Regardless of the precise structure of a follow-up project, it is crucial to actively continue efforts to prevent and combat radicalisation and violent extremism in order to consolidate and build

on the progress made so far. Through the NAP, the understanding has evolved that targeted prevention in this field is a task that must be shared among numerous authorities and civil society. Preserving and strengthening this understanding, and the collaborative effort that goes with it, will be of great importance in the future.