

Awareness Trainings and Detecting Jihadists among Asylum Seekers: A Case Study from the Netherlands

by Joris van Wijk and Maarten P. Bolhuis

Abstract

Dutch frontline professionals who work with asylum seekers receive awareness training to assist them in identifying possible signs of jihadist convictions. During these training sessions, they are provided with a complex, ambiguous, and multi-interprettable advice on how to detect such convictions. Based on interviews with respondents working in the immigration process and with the Dutch intelligence services (AIVD and MIVD), this article discusses how these trainings are translated into practice and to what extent the alerts shared by frontline professionals are relevant in the actual identification of jihadism. It concludes that it is as of yet unknown whether such trainings are useful, effective, and/or efficient. They might even have negative consequences such as over-reporting and stigmatization. It is therefore imperative to perform empirical and evidence-based studies that evaluate the effects of available training and tools.

Keywords: asylum, jihadism, frontline professionals, awareness training, signs, indicators

Introduction

Since the end of 2014, a broad political debate has emerged in Europe about asylum-seeking migration and jihadism-related risks. Where national security agencies and other experts initially expressed themselves in cautious terms about the risk that jihadists would make use of the migratory flows to enter Europe, this changed after the attacks in Paris in November 2015.[1] The subsequent knife attack by an Afghan asylum seeker in a German train in the summer of 2016,[2] the lorry attack by a Tunisian asylum seeker in Berlin later that same year[3] and a lorry attack by an Uzbek asylum seeker in Stockholm in 2017[4] only strengthened interest in the 'asylum-jihadism-nexus'. Currently, security experts acknowledge at least three risks:

- (i) jihadists travelling with the migratory flows into Europe (and applying for asylum);
- (ii) recruitment with jihadi intent amongst asylum seeker populations and
- (iii) the radicalization of asylum applicants during their stay at reception centres.[5]

There is a longstanding and rich societal and academic debate on how (non-)government actors in the margin of their normal line of duties can assist in preventing terrorism.[6] A recent questionnaire by the European Migration Network (EMN)[7] demonstrates that many European countries have been introducing initiatives to train frontline professionals working with asylum seekers in detecting possible jihadists amongst incoming migrants. These workers are somehow expected to 'spot' jihadists or processes of radicalization. Yet is this possible? The academic literature argues that it is challenging, if not impossible, to identify terrorists on the basis of their expressions, appearance and/or behaviour.[8]

This article discusses a variety of challenges related to training frontline professionals in detecting jihadism amongst asylum seekers. Taking the Netherlands as a case study, it discusses:

- 1) the structural setup of the information exchange relating to jihadism in the immigration process;

- 2) how Dutch frontline professionals working with asylum seekers are trained and/or equipped to identify possible indications of jihadism;
- 3) how the trainings and tools translate into actual practice;
- 4) to what extent the alerts that frontline professionals share are deemed relevant by the Dutch General and Military Intelligence and Security Services (AIVD and MIVD respectively (hereafter referred to as 'Security Services')); and
- 5) whether or not Security Services can and should store all alerts they receive.

The findings of this study are not only relevant for academics and professionals working in the field of migration, but also in relation to other sectors where frontline professionals receive awareness trainings on jihadism. As many other European countries currently develop or work with comparable awareness trainings, this contribution caters to an international audience. The article concludes that frontline professionals working with asylum seekers receive complex, but ambiguous and multi-interpretable advice on how to detect signs of jihadist convictions, and finds that it is yet unknown to what extent existing trainings and tools are useful, effective, and/or efficient. It is imperative to perform empirical and evidence-based studies that evaluate the effects and pros and cons of trainings and tools that aim to create awareness about jihadism amongst frontline professionals.

Methodology

Being aware of the many different definitions and interpretations of the concepts 'jihadism' and 'radicalization',[9] this study follows the definitions by the Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV, hereafter referred to as 'National Coordinator'). 'Jihadism' is understood to be "an ideological movement within political Islam based on a specific interpretation of the Salafist doctrine and on the ideas of Sayyid Qutb striving, by means of armed struggle (jihad), to gain global domination of Islam and the re-establishment of the Islamic state (caliphate)".[10] 'Radicalization' is defined as "the (active) pursuit and/or support of radical changes in society, which may endanger (the existence of) the democratic order (target), possibly with the use of undemocratic methods (means) which may prejudice the functioning of the democratic order (effect)".[11] Processes of radicalization and recruitment are considered to be interlinked. Recruitment processes are regarded to be a form of directing individuals towards radicalization, with the aim of developing this radicalization in a violent direction.[12]

The data presented in this article was gathered in the context of a study carried out at the request of the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice. The report, which discusses how frontline professionals try to detect jihadism in the Dutch immigration process, was published in November 2016 and is available in the Dutch language only.[13] Apart from an analysis of relevant academic literature, policy documents, and training material, the main source of data stems from semi-structured interviews with 49 respondents working for organizations involved in the immigration process. This includes interviews with policy makers as well as practitioners. In the context of this article, we focus in particular on the information provided by one respondent working for the Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV), six respondents working for the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND - hereafter referred to as 'Immigration Services'), twelve respondents working for the Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (COA - hereafter referred to as 'Reception Agency') and two respondents working for the AIVD and MIVD.

The respondents were recruited through snowball sampling, based on availability. We started interviewing a limited number of policy makers and subsequently were brought into contact with frontline workers. Interviews lasted between one and three hours, took place at the offices of the respondents and were not

taped. Instead, we made notes and shared interview reports with the respondents for approval. During the interviews, we used a topic list; the interviews had a semi-structured character. All respondents were guaranteed anonymity.

The context in which the research was conducted can be characterized as dynamic. During and since the period of data gathering, Europe has witnessed several more terrorist attacks. For this reason, it is important to place the findings of this study into context. It cannot be ruled out that respondents would by now express themselves differently or that the described practice has in the meantime been subject to some changes.

The fact that we selected the respondents by means of a convenience sample and the fact that we only interviewed a limited number of respondents means that the study is not representative and should therefore be considered exploratory in nature. The views and opinions expressed by respondents are not necessarily representative of the main perspectives within these organizations, but are nonetheless useful as they do illustrate the types of challenges associated with training frontline professionals in detecting jihadism amongst asylum seekers.

The Organizational Arrangements for Sharing Information

The Netherlands does not have a single integrated design for the identification of jihadism in the immigration process. Instead, over the years, various measures and methods were adopted and introduced with the aim of improving and facilitating the identification of national security-related matters, jihadism being one of those. Over the past years, agreements were made and covenants drawn up to facilitate information exchange between the Immigration Services, the Reception Agency, and the Repatriation and Departure Service (DT&V, hereafter referred to as 'Repatriation Service') on the one hand, and the Security Services on the other hand. Between the Immigration Services, the Reception Agency, and the Repatriation Service, a 'reporting structure' was set up for matters related to national security, including possible signs relating to jihadism. Signs identified by professionals working within these three organizations can, by means of an alert, be sent to liaison officers of the Immigration Services who can refer these alerts to the Security Services. Employees of the Reception Agency are required to also share signs with the local police.

Identifying Jihadism: Passive Detection and the Use of Indicators

Frontline professionals working with asylum seekers are expected to engage in, what Schuurman et al. refer to as, the 'passive detection' of terrorism.[14] Whereas 'active detection' takes place by law enforcement or intelligence services during ongoing criminal or intelligence investigations, passive detection is done by (non-)government actors in the margin of their normal line of duties. A quick scan of academic literature shows that differentiating possible terrorists from non-terrorists in the context of passive detection is challenging. As Rae indicates, "the most prevalent method of attempting to achieve distinction between these two groups is to establish a set of psychological, socio-economic, physical, and/or racial attributes that mark one from the other." [15] Ideally, actors engaged in passive detection can be provided with a list of characteristics of terrorists – what they look like, where they come from, what kind of personality they have – which would allow them to make an assessment of which cases are relevant to bring to the attention of Security Services. Yet, many authors highlight that it is extremely complex to identify terrorists or jihadists on the basis of expressions, appearance, and/or behaviour and that there are other ethical and societal problems associated with profiling such as criminalising specific populations and racial stereotyping.[16]

As Sageman points out: "There's really no profile, just similar trajectories to joining the jihad." [17] And even with respect to the possibility of identifying or detecting such trajectories, reservations have been expressed. Radicalization processes are not always linear and deterministic in nature and factors that may indicate radicalization should always be assessed interdependently.[18] Persons who 'flirt' with radicalization do

not irrevocably radicalize, while people who radicalize do not necessarily engage in violence.[19] The use of indicators to promote passive detection of possible jihadists or radicalization is therefore controversial. The efficiency and effectiveness of such indicators are questioned, as well as the extent to which the potential benefits of detection of certain indications outweigh possible adverse consequences, such as over-reporting or stigmatization. When individuals who follow a conservative interpretation of Islam experience negative consequences from being labelled possible jihadists, this can – potentially fuelled or promoted by extremist groups – even contribute to actual radicalization.[20]

The Dilemma

With the increased influx of asylum seekers from the Middle East, in November 2014 the Immigration Services and the Reception Agency started an ‘awareness tour’ to inform frontline professionals working with asylum seekers about issues of national security, with a specific focus on jihadism. Our study indicates that those responsible for developing awareness trainings and tools to help frontline professionals identify jihadism were – and still are – confronted with a dilemma. On the one hand, dominant actors in the security domain indicate that there are inherent limitations to ‘checklists’ or ‘lists of indicators’ as tools for identifying a possible jihadist mind-set. Respondents representing the National Coordinator as well as the Security Services (AIVD and MIVD) expressed serious reservations to using indicators as tools for passive detection (R7, R11, R51). They pointed out that jihadism comes in many forms and shapes and that it is unlikely that someone who comes to Europe with the aim to carry out an attack would be ‘recognizable’ by means of his/her expressions, appearance, and/or behaviour. They further acknowledge that the use of indicators could lead to an increase of irrelevant alerts (false positives) and further stigmatization of particular groups.

On the other hand, politicians and society at large expect organizations working with asylum seekers to act as a ‘first line of defence’ against the threat of terrorism and to actively try to identify possible jihadists. During periods of a large influx of asylum seekers, the frontline professionals working for these organizations are first and foremost occupied with their primary tasks, namely the processing of asylum claims (Immigration Services) and counselling and supervising asylum seekers during their stay in an asylum centre (Reception Agency). If, on top of that, they are also expected to engage in passive detection of jihadism, they should, ideally, be provided with concrete tools, such as indicators, which can give them guidance in detecting possible jihadism. Concrete tools on ‘how to recognize a jihadist’ are desired in particular by frontline professionals who, due to the nature of their work, only have a short time with asylum seekers, such as staff members of the Immigration Services who interview asylum seekers to assess the validity of their claims.

The Compromise

The result of this dilemma is a compromise, if not a contradiction. Frontline professionals in the Netherlands are given a complex, ambiguous, and multi-interpretable message. For example, with the proviso that there is no single list of indicators or profile on the basis of which a possible jihadist can be recognized, during awareness training and on the intranet, staff of the Immigration Services are provided with a list of indicators which ‘require alertness’. Reference is made to certain types of behaviour (e.g. denying shaking a female staff member’s hand, avoiding eye contact), specific language (Salafist jargon), or specific characteristics with regard to appearance (certain types of clothing, tattoos) which may give away that someone is a jihadist. On the intranet and during trainings, it is at the same time emphasized that all these factors should be seen in conjunction (interdependently) and that these may ‘of course’ also be an indication of something other than jihadism or terrorism. Staff members are furthermore advised to trust their ‘professional intuition’ or their ‘gut feelings’, to discuss suspicions with their colleagues, and to make their suspicions as concrete as possible before issuing an alert (R3).

A similar message is conveyed during trainings for staff of the Reception Agency (R5). These trainings, however, focus more explicitly on factors which can possibly indicate processes of radicalization, rather than identifying incoming jihadists as such (which is more the focus of trainings provided by the Immigration Services). It is, for example, emphasized that people who radicalize may stop drinking alcohol, isolate themselves, and/or start working out their bodies very actively. Unlike the Immigration Services, the Reception Agency does not provide a list of indicators on its intranet.

Staff members of the Immigration Services as well as the Reception Agency are explicitly told that in case of doubt they should always issue an alert. They are told that they themselves are not expected to assess whether something they deem remarkable or suspicious could be relevant in the context of detecting jihadists, or other issues such as human trafficking or an asylum seeker's possible involvement in war crimes. As one representative of the Bureau for Security and Integrity of the Reception Agency said, staff members are expected to issue an alert, while the determination of whether or not the alert is relevant for national security is the responsibility of other parties (R5).

Passive Detection in Actual Practice

Various respondents indicated that the information provided during the awareness trainings was useful and provided them with a 'perspective for action' (RF 42, RF43). The statements of some other respondents, however, illustrate that they had at times difficulties in translating the complex message they received during the training into actual practice. One staff member of a reception facility remembers that shortly after a training session many colleagues were extremely wary:

"We were told that if someone suddenly starts to work out very often, this could possibly be an indication of something. The result was that the everyone in the team was on edge when a resident started exercising." (RF30)

The above suggests that these frontline professionals may have had difficulties in actually utilizing the ambiguous messages delivered during trainings. The comments by another staff member, who took part in another training session, indicate that trainings were in some instances seen as being too nuanced or ambiguous:

"Last year we had a training, when it was all really in the news, when that video of Jihadi John was published. (...) In the morning we were shown short videos, for example of a man waiving an Islamic State flag inside an asylum centre, the afternoon session consisted of the instructors asking us 'what do you think you can do to detect certain possible signs' (...), while everyone was thinking 'I want to hear what we need to do'. (...) Finally, we had to come up with solutions ourselves... But I actually also don't know if there is much more to be said about it (...). After the training, the conclusion basically was that you cannot detect it. Everyone had questions and came for answers, but the overall conclusion was, you cannot see it. Someone may have a beard or wear a **djellabah**, but it doesn't mean anything. Afterwards everyone felt like, 'it was a nice training, but no answers...'" (RF42)

In the context of this study we have not been in a position to do a systematic analysis of the different types of signs that have over the years been forwarded to liaison officers as such information is confidential. But since various respondents provided illustrations of signs they had been given we do have some anecdotal information which gives an idea of the wide variety of the content of these signs. For example, when asked what type of signs (s)he would share, a representative of the Immigration Services who has a coordinating role in identifying threats to national security agencies and in that capacity screens social media profiles of asylum seekers, stated:

“For instance, you see a picture of a man holding hands with his lover. On another picture you see the same man with a Kalashnikov in his hand and in army fatigues. That’s a sign we will forward.” (RF33)

A colleague added:

“Or if someone ‘likes’ video clips of decapitations on Facebook or shares such clips.” (RF35)

An employee of the Reception Agency mentioned:

“We noticed that some people often gathered at a certain caravan [the type of housing at that asylum centre]. (...) When you entered the caravan you noticed they were watching a clip on an iPad and then suddenly stopped. If they would be watching some sort of TV show, you’d not expect them to stop watching. So if they suddenly stop the clip, you get the feeling ‘something is not right here’ (...) Another example: Last year I received a message from someone living in the village next to the centre. He had noted that someone from the reception centre often went to the fitness centre in army fatigues and told me the man was exercising very intensively, almost every day. I reported this.” (RF28)

Staff members working at another reception facility remembered that they were approached by a resident who told them that a group of other residents came together each evening to watch video clips. The staff members themselves already thought these residents were behaving awkwardly and started to monitor them more closely:

“It occasionally happened that those residents gathered at the square, or were hanging around in front of the reception. They had an awkward way of acting, distancing themselves from us. They were checking out staff of the reception centre, rather than the other way around.” (RF43)

“One of them was always standing outside, on the balcony. We at times do general inspections of the rooms and ... we also wanted to check his apartment. (...) They were not happy with this. One quickly ran to another room to do something. That is very awkward, these are all possible signs.” (RF42)

Examples of signs that, according to our respondents, relate to possible recruitment activities at reception centres include a report that residents were transported with minivans from a reception centre to a mosque in the south of the country which is known to be very conservative (R5). In 2015 an employee of a reception centre reported that asylum seekers were told that they could get on a bus to Paris to demonstrate against the Iranian government for five Euros. For the Bureau of Security and Integrity of the Reception Agency, this report was a reason to inform the liaison officer:

“I said ‘those people can be bombarded with whatever message for five hours.’ My grandmother was once foisted a far too expensive anti-rheumatic blanket in a similar vein. I thought: ‘this might be a strategy.’ That message has eventually been shared with all the other organisations involved in the immigration process.” (R5)

Relevance of the Alerts

The above examples illustrate that the liaison officers of the Dutch Immigration Services receive a potpourri of alerts, ranging from hearsay information that an asylum seeker has started exercising intensively, the presence or approval of certain pictures on asylum applicants’ social media profiles, to information about organized transports to conservative mosques. Based on their professional experience, liaison officers may decide not to forward a given alert to the Security Services, but instead forward it to other relevant

bodies, such as a specific unit dealing with identifying possible war criminals, to exclude them from refugee protection.[21] Yet, since late 2014 the liaison officers do not take too much risk in this regard and in principle refer all alerts that are possibly related to jihadism to the Security Services (R3).

The number of alerts that the liaison officers referred to the Security Services has, over the past three years, increased significantly. In 2015, there was almost a four-fold increase compared to 2014 and an almost six-fold increase compared to 2013.[22] This could be explained by either the increase in the number of asylum seekers, or the increased awareness on matters of national security amongst frontline professionals – or by a combination of these factors. Whether, and to what extent, these alerts are of any use to the Security Services is difficult to assess. For the time being, the increased number of alerts has, according to the liaison officer of the Immigration Services (R3), not led to a significant increase of individual official notices (*individuele ambtsberichten*) by the Security Services.[23] Such adverse security assessments, based on alerts from frontline professionals working with asylum seekers are, as a respondent of the AIVD mentioned, ‘the odd one out’ (R11). Providing an individual official notice is typically only possible if such alerts can be combined with other tangible intelligence, and as asylum seekers are new to the Netherlands, information from the alerts often cannot be linked to any existing intelligence. It is furthermore often not allowed, or not possible, to request additional information about asylum seekers from foreign services, such as the country of origin. For this reason, alerts from frontline professionals working with asylum seekers often do not give the Security Services much perspective to act directly (R11).

However, the number of negative security assessments is certainly not the only criterion to ‘measure’ the usefulness of alerts. The Security Services indicate that they definitely do appreciate receiving these alerts, as these are stored for future reference. A respondent of the AIVD noted that alerts from staff members of the Reception Agency are generally regarded more useful than alerts received from frontline professionals working at the Immigration Services, as asylum interviews take place in a formal setting in which applicants are more likely to provide politically correct answers. Professionals working in reception centres have contact with asylum seekers over a longer period of time and more often get in touch with them when they are ‘off guard’ (R11).

Can and Should all Alerts be Stored?

Although the Security Services indicated that they welcome alerts as these can be stored for future reference, it is questionable to what extent they are always allowed to do so. On the basis of the Law on the Intelligence and Security Services (WIV), information relating to someone’s religion may only be stored in addition to other data, and only in so far as it is inevitable for the purpose of the data processing.[24] The Security Services acknowledged that they are not allowed to store an alert which exclusively refers to someone’s religious beliefs, but interpret the WIV in such a way that they do feel free to store indications that someone holds a radical conservative interpretation of Islam, e.g. combined with the fact that he comes from Syria and has travelled with a false passport (R11). A question that is open to debate, is where to draw the line in this respect. How much or what type of additional information ‘suffices’ to store information about someone’s religion? As described above, some alerts (merely) refer to the fact that asylum seekers are transported to a mosque which is known for propagating a conservative interpretation of Islam. If an asylum seeker from Syria makes use of such transport, would that fact alone be sufficient to be registered and stored in the systems of the Security Services? And what if the asylum seeker originates from, say, Afghanistan or Tunisia (countries the attackers in the two most recent attacks in Germany originated from)? With the widely differing profiles of people involved in recent attacks,[25] answering such questions is increasingly difficult. Whether or not this issue is specific to the Dutch context we do not know. However, we can hardly imagine this is not a point for discussion in other jurisdictions.

Apart from the question whether the Security Services *can* store information from alerts, it is also debatable whether the Security Services actually *should* store all information they receive, even if they are allowed to do so. There is an intrinsic tension in weighing public safety interests against the privacy of the person concerned and the potentially negative consequences counter terrorism measures may have.[26] What exactly are the implications when the Security Services store someone's details for future reference? How exactly could that affect his or her future legal proceedings or perhaps his or her career? If frontline professionals working with asylum seekers are told that in case of doubt they should always issue an alert, one could argue the Security Services have an extra responsibility to treat information from those alerts with great caution. If a well-meaning frontline professional reports that asylum seeker X is acting 'awkwardly' because he goes to the gym every day, the possibly positive consequences of storing such information for the Security Services' information position should be weighed against the possibly negative consequences for the individual's career. As of yet, it is unclear whether and how such a balancing test is carried out. An additional repercussion of enhanced information storing is that it may also have negative consequences for the Security Services themselves. With that, it becomes more likely that perpetrators of future attacks are to be found in one or another database, without having been closely monitored. Should an attack takes place and it turns out the attacker 'was known to the Security Services', this might lead to a damaged reputation and loss of trust in the Security Services.

Conclusion

Taking the Netherlands as a case study, this article discussed some of the challenges raised by training frontline professionals working with asylum seekers to detect jihadists or processes of radicalization. On the one hand, politicians and society at large expect frontline professionals to proactively identify possible jihadists. As these professionals often only have short contacts with asylum seekers, providing them with concrete tools such as indicators on how to identify a possible jihadist appears to make good sense. On the other hand, experts in the security domain – including those developing such trainings – are well aware of the limitations and risks associated with the use of such tools, namely an increase of false positives and stigmatization.

The result is that frontline professionals are given complex, but ambiguous and multi-interpretable messages. Caseworkers of the Immigration Services, for example, are provided with concrete indicators of possible jihadism related to specific behaviour or appearances, but are also made aware of the limitations of these indicators. In addition, it is emphasized that they should trust their professional intuition or 'gut feeling', discuss suspicions with colleagues and that, in case of doubt, they should always issue an alert. Although this study could not make a systematic analysis of the type of information which is in actual practice shared with the Security Services, anecdotal information by our respondents indicates that there is wide variation in the content of the alerts.

Beyond the Netherlands, the jihadism-asylum nexus will undoubtedly continue to feature prominently in discussions on counter-terrorism policies. The EMN-questionnaire referred to earlier, illustrates that various European countries seek to train frontline professionals in detecting possible jihadists hiding among bona fide incoming migrants. Measures typically include awareness-raising campaigns (e.g. United Kingdom, Belgium) and specialised trainings for frontline professionals to identify potential threats (e.g. Belgium, Finland, Germany, Norway).[27] However, as this article demonstrates, developing appropriate tools and training is far from easy. Providing such trainings should only be done if it is useful, effective, and/or efficient. There is a potential for conflict and confusion amongst relevant actors regarding the usefulness, necessity, and desirability of providing (concrete) indicators to frontline professionals as guidance in identifying possible jihadism.

Having assessed the Dutch situation, we have no doubt that all parties involved – from those developing the training programmes to the frontline professionals issuing the alerts, all the way to the Security Services who are tasked to interpret the alerts – sincerely and seriously try to find a balance between the importance of detecting possible jihadists on the one hand and the risk of stigmatizing (certain) asylum seekers on the other hand. Yet precisely because the issue is so complex, it is striking to note that so far very few empirical and/or comparative studies have been undertaken to properly evaluate the effects, benefits and costs of the available training offered and tools provided.[28] This is not exceptional. Eijkman & Roodnat recently argued that countering terrorism as well as countering (violent) extremism has been the subject of thorough empirical research to a very limited extent.[29]

To improve the effectiveness of awareness trainings on the detection of jihadism - in the Netherlands, but certainly also in other countries - it is imperative to engage in more empirical research which can answer, amongst others, the following questions:

What type of signs do frontline professionals typically share with intelligence and security services?

How do these alerts relate to the information provided during trainings or in tools such as indicator lists?

Are there situations of ‘over-reporting’ and what consequences does this have?

What type of alerts have proven – or are considered by the Security Services – to be the most relevant?

How often is information from alerts *not* stored and for what reasons?

Are there any concrete examples of alerts having led to stigmatization or other negative consequences?

Such questions are not only relevant in relation to the asylum-jihadism nexus, but could indeed also be asked with respect to awareness programmes for teachers, social workers, or probation officers. To our knowledge, empirically grounded evaluation studies of awareness trainings on jihadism and/or radicalization that seek to answer such questions do not, or hardly, exist. Illustrative in this regard is that the two available evaluation studies in the Netherlands on awareness training elaborate the content of the trainings and participants’ reflections on the trainings (whether they believe the training is useful), but are silent about the actual effects and pros and cons of the trainings themselves.[30]

We are aware of the tremendous complexities connected to a study into the questions raised above. First and foremost, all the relevant information that needs to be analysed is, for various legitimate reasons, strictly confidential. If not carefully edited, a publicly available publication on this issue could have serious security implications and such a study is politically highly sensitive indeed. Defining the relevant concepts will be challenging: when, for example, can an alert be considered to be a form of ‘over-reporting’ or a ‘false alarm’? Yet such complexities should be no excuse for not engaging in such a study altogether. Whatever the set-up of such a study and whoever will perform it – perhaps insiders who already have a security clearance are even better positioned than external researchers – empirical and evidence-based studies that evaluate the effects of available training programs and toolkits are direly needed. Hundreds, if not thousands, of frontline professionals currently receive training on how to identify jihadism, but we know little about the results. Only sound evaluations allow us to learn lessons for more finely-tuned approaches in the future.

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Notes

- [1] In 2015 the belief that it would be unlikely that terrorists would make use of the migration influx was e.g. expressed by EU counter-terrorism coordinator Gilles de Kerchove. See Adéla Denková, "EU counter-terrorism czar: Terrorists among asylum seekers? Unlikely", *EurActiv*, Czech Republic, 9 September 2015. URL: <<http://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/interview/eu-counter-terrorism-czar-terrorists-among-asylum-seekers-unlikely/>>. For a changed perspective after the November 2015 attacks in Paris, see e.g. "German intelligence head admits 'misjudgment' on 'Islamic State' strategy", *Deutsche Welle*, 10 April 2016, URL: <<http://www.dw.com/en/german-intelligence-head-admits-misjudgment-on-islamic-state-strategy/a-19176809>>.
- [2] "German train attack: IS releases video of 'Afghan knifeman'", *BBC*, 19 July 2016, URL: <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36832909>>.
- [3] P. Oltermann, "Berlin attack: security services feared suspect would commit 'act of violence'", *The Guardian*, 22 December 2016, URL: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/21/berlin-attack-german-police-leads>>.
- [4] A. Ringstrom & J. Hellstrom, "Suspect in Stockholm truck attack admits terrorist crime", *Reuters*, 11 April 2017, URL: <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-swe-den-attack-suspect-detention-idUSKBN17D0UD>>.
- [5] See e.g. with respect to threat 1.) "German spy agency says ISIS sending fighters disguised as refugees", *Reuters*, 5 February 2016, URL: <<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-germany-security-idUSKCN0VE0XL>>; threat 2.) "Changes in modus operandi of Islamic State terrorist attacks", Europol, Review held by experts from Member States and Europol on 29 November and 1 December 2015, The Hague, 18 January 2016, p. 3, 5, URL: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/changes_in_modus_operandi_of_is_in_terrorist_attacks.pdf>; and threat 3.) "Norway's PST wary of asylum centre radicalization", *The Local*, 31 March 2016; URL: <<http://www.thelocal.no/20160331/norway-intelligence-agency-closely-watching-asylum-centres>>. All three threats are acknowledged in the July 2016 Threat Assessment by the Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV), see: "Samenvatting Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 42, juli 2016", Bijlage bij Brief van de Minister van Veiligheid en Justitie, Kamerstukken 29 754, nr. 390, 11 July 2016, p. 5.
- [6] See e.g. "RAN POL's Guide on Training Programmes for Police Officers in Europe". London: The Institute for Strategic Dialogue, September 2016; The role of civil society in counter radicalisation and de-radicalisation, PPN Working Paper, 2010; Y. Meah & C. Mellis, *Recognising and Responding to Radicalisation: Considerations for Policy and Practice through the Eyes of Street-Level Workers*. 2008, Amsterdam: RecoRa.
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- [20] R. Feddes, L. Nickolson & B. Doosje, "Triggerfactoren in het radicaliseringsproces", Expertise-unit Sociale Stabiliteit/Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2015.
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- [22] Absolute figures are not publicly available. It should be noted that these signs relate to national security in the broadest sense, not to jihadism specifically. It should also be taken into account that the number of asylum applications in the Netherlands between 2013 and 2015 has quadrupled.
- [23] In the Netherlands, being considered a threat to national security can be a reason to deny or revoke a legal status on the basis of Article B1/4.4 Vc 2000. For more information, see M.P. Bolhuis, H. Battjes, & J. van Wijk, "Undesirable but Unreturnable Migrants in the Netherlands", *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, forthcoming; URL: doi: 10.1093/rsq/hdw019.
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- [25] For instance, the attacks in Paris in November 2015 were committed by both French nationals and recently arrived immigrants.
- [26] See: Q. Eijkman & J. Roodnat, "Beware of Branding Someone a Terrorist: Local Professionals on Person-Specific Interventions to Counter Extremism", *Journal*

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[28] For a critical review of evaluations on the effects of awareness trainings in the Netherlands, see: J. van Wijk & M. Bolhuis, 2016, op.cit., pp. 84-85.

[29] Q. Eijkman & J. Roodnat, "Beware of Branding Someone a Terrorist: Local Professionals on Person-Specific Interventions to Counter Extremism", *Journal for Deradicalization*, Spring 2017 (10), p. 177.

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