

**TP5 Lone actors and Mental Health**

**Meeting 2, 2025**

# **Mental Health and Lone Actors: How are they connected?**

**3-4/06/2025**

**Helsinki (Finland)**

## **DISCUSSION PAPER**



EU Knowledge Hub on  
**Prevention of  
Radicalisation**



**European  
Commission**



# Discussion Paper

## Mental Health and Lone Actors: How are they connected?

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### 1. Introduction

Understanding mental health in radicalisation processes is key to build proper responses from the EU and different actors in Member States, especially when it comes to lone actors. The concept of mental health encompasses a broad range of psychological conditions and experiences, from diagnosable psychiatric disorders to temporary emotional distress and non-normative cognitive patterns. This variability raises critical questions about what constitutes a "mental health issue" and how such conditions are socially and clinically defined. Distinctions between individuals with diagnosed disorders and those experiencing acute psychological instability have profound implications, particularly when discussions of mental health intersect with concerns about public safety and security.

Narratives which tend to conflate all mental health conditions with potential dangerousness can contribute to the stigmatisation of individuals living with mental illness. This stigmatisation is not only ethically problematic but can also undermine public health and safety by deterring individuals from seeking help. Effective





communication about mental health must therefore be grounded in evidence, sensitivity, and a commitment to reducing stigma. Thus, a more nuanced approach is required to distinguish between individuals who pose legitimate security risks and those who do not.

Despite existing efforts in the area, enhancing collaboration between mental health professionals and security authorities is essential. This includes the development of clear risk assessment protocols, joint training initiatives, and interagency dialogue aimed at balancing public safety with the protection of individual rights. In this vein, fostering such cooperation is critical to ensuring both ethical integrity and practical efficacy in managing the complex and often tense relationship between mental health and security.

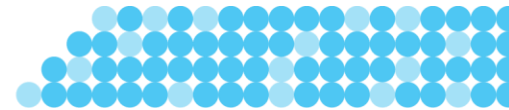
The Thematic Panel on Lone Actors and Mental Health Issues, part of the EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation, seeks to focus on gaining a better understanding of mental health issues specifically in the context of radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism. It will particularly focus on bridging gaps between research, policy, and practitioners in areas such as law enforcement, mental health, and social work sectors, to ensure a consistent contribution to coordinated and effective preventive interventions.

## 2. Objectives of the Meeting

This second meeting of the Thematic Panel aims to provide a collaborative and interdisciplinary platform to:

- **Understand the definition of mental health issues in the context of radicalisation, extremism and terrorism**, clarifying whether it encompasses clinically diagnosed conditions, temporary or severe mental instability, and/or significantly non-mainstream worldviews.





- **Differentiate delusional disorder from other mental health conditions**, outlining the specific diagnostic criteria and symptomatic distinctions.
- **Examine the criteria for distinguishing between individuals who pose a security risk and those who do not**, within the context of mental health assessments.
- **Explore the risks of stigmatisation** when narratives associate individuals with mental health issues with potential security threats by exploring and utilising strategic communication approaches
- **Explore effective and responsible strategic communication responses** for discussing the intersection of mental health and security in public discourse.
- **Identify good practises and pathways to enhance cooperation between security authorities and mental health professionals**, promoting joint protocols based on scientific evidence, ethical standards, and human rights considerations.

### 3. Call for Active Participation

Understanding mental health issues in radicalisation processes requires a multidisciplinary and collaborative effort. No single sector — whether law enforcement, health, or social services — can address this issue alone. This second meeting is an opportunity to bridge knowledge and practice gaps, supporting the development of strategies and practices for identifying and preventing violent acts.

The format will be highly participative, aimed at ensuring that participants' expertise and background strongly contribute to shape both the outcomes of this meeting and the overall work of the Thematic Panel.

Participants are strongly encouraged to come prepared to share their experiences, challenges, and ideas, and to actively engage in discussions aimed at co-creating knowledge and solutions.





In sum, we look forward to your active participation and contribution to this important conversation in order to deepen together our understanding of mental health issues and lone actors, but also to co-design effective strategies for prevention, identification and early intervention.

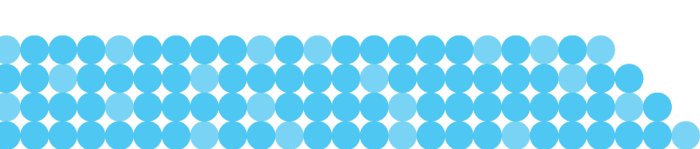
## 4. Key Themes

The second meeting of the Thematic Panel on Lone Actors and Mental Health issues will therefore explore the connection between lone actors and mental health, delving into the distinction between different mental health conditions, the role of strategic communications, security risks, and the cooperation between professionals and authorities. In this sense, three key themes are addressed with different guiding questions:

### **GUIDING QUESTIONS:**

#### 1. Mental health in lone actor offenders: conditions, diagnoses and its relation to extremism

- What do we mean when referring to mental health issues in lone actor offenders? How to act in accordance with the do no harm principle.
- Links between mental illness and extremism.
- Are we referring to cases where a person has been diagnosed with a mental health condition, individuals who are temporarily or severely mentally unstable, or those presenting with sub-clinical psychological issues?





- What is the difference between delusional disorder and other mental health problems? How can we distinguish between delusional disorder and other extreme beliefs?

## 2. Strategic communication and mental health issues

- How should strategic communication on the topic be developed in order to avoid reinforcing the idea that people with mental health issues are potential security risks ?
- How to avoid situations—by using strategic communication—where concerns are raised that ethnic or religious background influences whether the motive is seen as terrorism or mental health issues

## 3. Security risks and cooperation between authorities

- How can we distinguish between individuals who pose a security risk and those who do not?
- How are mental health issues are considered in programs aimed at preventing extremist violence?
- How should cooperation between security authorities and healthcare professionals be improved? What are the ethics behind data sharing and collaboration?
- What is the impact of national legislation and practices on multi-agency cooperation?

# 5. Format and Methodology

The event is structured as a fully participative and practice-oriented meeting, designed to foster dialogue, reflection, and co-creation of knowledge through the contributions and expertise of thematic panel members participation.





The meeting will consist of:

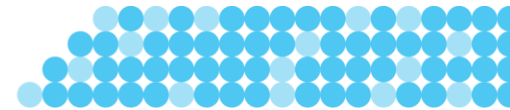
- Leading researchers' presentations to set the scene with key concepts and data, evidence-based knowledge and current research findings.
- Plenary discussions to share insights from group work and engage in collective analysis.
- Collaborative synthesis sessions to formulate next steps for the Thematic Panel and practical recommendations in strategies and practices that will be included in the panel's final report.

## 6. Expected Outcomes

By the end of this meeting, we aim to achieve several outcomes contributing to the overall objectives of the Thematic Panel on Lone Actors and Mental Health issues:

1. A **better understanding of mental health issues** – the role that it plays in radicalisation processes, especially in the cases of lone actors.
2. **Clarification of key definitions** and typologies to inform future research and policy.
3. Gathering **further insights on how strategic communication can be used for avoiding misunderstandings** when it comes to individuals with mental health issues.
4. Mapping of **practical gaps in prevention, detection, and intervention efforts**, especially across sectors.
5. **Concrete recommendations and conclusions** to strengthen strategies, policies, and practices in addressing the challenge of lone actors and mental health issues. Participants' thoughts and ideas for the next event, which will focus on how lone actor activity can be prevented, also taking into account mental health-related issues.





## Further Reading

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