



The landscape of security and crisis management research is regularly referred to as fragmented. As with many communities, the virtual world echoes the physical world and the online presence is equally as disjointed. There is an abundance of information available online but it can be difficult to locate and a structure is needed for the online presence that echoes that required by the users in the 'real' world. There is a wide range of users interested in accessing the valuable information being generated by the community including: Policy makers, Scientists, Industry (including SMEs), Training and Operational Units, NGOs, and the general public. The CoU web portal aims to provide a gateway to the information available in the security research landscape and communicate to the wide range of users in languages they understand. A temporary web platform was built in 2016 to provide information on the CoU events and a brief background of the initiative. Version 2.0 of the web platform will be launched by the end of 2017 and will be a comprehensive resource developed based on the feedback from the CoU members themselves.

Introduction

DG Home commissioned the web portal to help guide users through this fragmented landscape of security and crisis management-related research. Specifically, the web portal aims to:

- Provide an interface that the different user groups can relate to;
- Enable users to find information quickly by providing a logical structure linked to the policy challenges¹;
- Communicate information and resources in a clear and accessible language;
- Signpost users to relevant contacts at EU and Member States level;
- Provide an online platform that enables users to network and contribute to the development of the CoU.

Relevance

In the fast paced world we now live in, people want information at their fingertips and relevant to their needs. Often, the issue is not the amount of information that is available – we are increasingly overloaded with information – it is ensuring that the information relevant to our needs is easily accessible. This is particularly important for the CoU users where information is regularly being produced through reports, studies, tools, etc.

Needs and challenges

The CoU workshop highlighted some of the challenges users face when trying to access information relevant to their needs:

- Project information can quickly become outdated in project databases e.g. CORDIS;
- Project deliverables are often difficult to locate and project websites can expire shortly after projects end;
- Information on exploitation of projects, strengths/weaknesses, and synergies with other projects, would be useful;
- Information should be simplified, where possible, in order to be accessible to practitioners and those not familiar with the terminology used at EU level or users outside of the policy sphere;
- Terms relevant to the policy and scientific community are also needed to appeal to those users and assist with the search functionality;
- Designing an architecture that meet the needs of all users involved in the CoU is challenging. A number of approaches have been explored for the categorisation of website content including: thematic e.g. climate change, type of resource e.g. legislative, research, study, etc. The website should support a number of taxonomy terms that are designed to appeal to the relevant users whilst avoiding alienating other users groups;

¹ i.e. tags appropriate to the different languages used by the different users and glossary of terms for those that are more policy/scientific related.

- There is a vast amount of information but no single entry point that connects user to the information available;
- Reaching out and engaging those at MS level in their native language can be difficult, particularly at regional/local level. This can be difficult to achieve when collating resources and the cost of human translation is incredibly costly when developing a pan-European resource. Whilst it is noted that machine translation is not the ideal solution, it does however provide some assistance for users looking to get a gist of the information that is available.;
- Engaging practitioners – Simplifying the information exchange was highlighted here. A pilot project is underway in Finland and aims to assess the needs for a national support platform. This pilot platform demonstrated during the workshop aims to engage end users to feedback on projects through a simplified interface that end users can understand and find easy to use. The tool asks a number of evaluation questions that can be then used to assess projects and fed back to the relevant authorities.

Previous research carried out during phase 1.0 of the web platform echoed these comments and also highlighted the desire for improved networking – knowing who’s who in the community at EU and MS level. An online networking tool was also demonstrated – the Promis platform – which aims to bring knowledge from the knowledge provider to knowledge user through online collaborative communities.

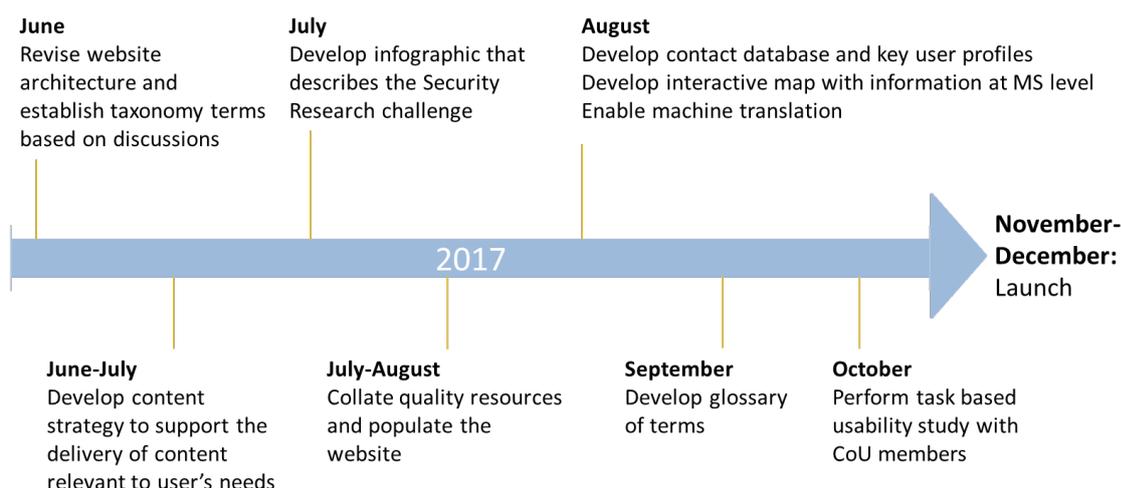
Some of the issues around the quality of project information available can be difficult to address, for example, the responsibility of deliverables is with the projects themselves. However, a good starting point is to provide access to a comprehensive database of the projects – both open and closed - and these will be made available from the DRKMC website via the CoU web platform, and categorised accordingly to the needs of the user.

“Urgent need for a centralised and easy accessible site”

CoU Member

Way forward

Version 2.0 of the CoU web platform will provide an interface to the plethora of information available to the CoU members and use a simplified language that should help reach out to wider members of the community. The site will work with existing platforms to avoid re-inventing the wheel, whilst signposting to complementary tools that may be useful to users at EU and MS level. The structure of the website will be linked to the security research policy challenges, whilst using a set of taxonomy terms that different users can relate to, providing multiple access points to the relevant information dependent on the user’s needs.



Key contact

We would like members of the CoU to feedback on the development of the web platform over the coming months. If you are interested in being involved, please email: nikki.labrum@ecorys.com