



Discussion Paper

RAN HLC

I. Refugee-related polarisation

The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) has identified the following main **challenges**.

1. The fallout from the refugee and migrant crisis, coinciding with terrorist attacks, is exacerbating polarisation within a number of Member States. This could lead to the creation of a **fertile breeding ground for reciprocal or cumulative radicalisation**, in which right-wing extremism, extremist jihadism and left-wing extremism feed off each other and fuel one another. National and local government actions, policies and communication — or the lack thereof — may also be exploited by extremists to fuel the dynamics of reciprocal radicalisation.
2. Right-wing extremists capitalise on polarisation by recruiting and mobilising forces. **Hate crimes and hate speech are on the rise, as is right-wing violent extremism.**
3. **Refugees and migrants**, often threatened and maltreated before arriving in the European Union (EU), are vulnerable and **at risk of being radicalised** by jihadist recruiters and online propaganda.
4. **Terrorist groups will continue to exploit the refugee crisis in their propaganda**, seeking to portray Western mistreatment of Muslims, and inciting fear by alleging

that their supporters are being smuggled in amongst genuine refugees.

In view of these challenges, RAN has put forward the following **topics for further consideration**.

1. **National and local governments should develop a holistic approach** to countering violent extremism (**CVE**), and **address all kinds of extremism**. National governments should coordinate and facilitate relevant actions, and guide and authorise local governments and their networks to assess local situations and respond appropriately and proportionately.
2. **National and local governments should increase society's resilience** to extremist propaganda, whether jihadist or right-wing. They should also promote **inclusiveness** and ensure the successful **integration of newcomers**; such measures can help diffuse fears and address the problems that hosting communities face.
3. The state should be seen to be **upholding the law and enforcing fundamental rights** for all, and should take a robust stance against illegal activities of all extremist groups, including right-wing extremists. The police must be seen to offer protection to everyone: the hosting communities as well as refugees and migrants.
4. Practitioners working with refugees should **not only try to detect signs of radicalisation, but should also work to safeguard vulnerable communities**. Practitioners should team up with concerned relatives, leaders and others in



refugee communities, so as to boost their resilience. Practitioner training should embrace this wider scope.

II. Child returnees

RAN has identified the following main challenges.

1. **Daesh actively recruits child soldiers** to participate in warfare, carry weapons, guard strategic locations, arrest and punish civilians and serve as suicide bombers.
2. **Daesh is adept at indoctrinating children:** the group turns teenagers into soldiers, and younger children into loyal supporters.
3. Indoctrination and exposure to extreme brutality and harsh living conditions could **pose immediate as well as longer term threats**, both for the individual involved (due to trauma) and society at large (if the individual has been radicalised).
4. **Trauma awareness, a key skill**, has not yet been mastered by all individuals working with child returnees.
5. Child returnees and their families need to be given a **sense of empowerment**: the psychological response to (any) trauma is a sense of loss of control.

In view of these challenges, RAN has put forward the following **topics for further consideration**.

1. It is crucial to carry out **early intervention and identification of children at risk**, including identification of the potential for violent behaviour. Child development must be taken into account. Policymakers should favour and prioritise long-term rehabilitation in such cases.

2. Psychologists should address **identity and ideology issues**, and ensure they have a comprehensive grasp of the indoctrination experienced by the child. This also necessitates **close cooperation with community leaders**.
3. RAN and other practitioners should explore the availability of an **alternative community** for support, to help child returnees construct a new social identity. This community includes older children who serve as **positive role models**, but engagement with the ethnic community is also needed, so as to restore a sense of stability and belonging. The possible involvement of the family (or conversely, separation from the family) needs to be explored carefully, taking into account their role in the radicalisation or victimisation process, and should always prioritise the best interests of the child.
4. **There is a need to further develop trauma awareness training** and to assimilate lessons learned from working with child soldiers in other conflict zones.

III. Returning foreign terrorist fighters

RAN has identified the following main challenges.

1. An **unprecedented number of foreign terrorist fighters** have now returned to the EU, and more may follow in due course.
2. Due to their **battlefield experience**, such returnees present an additional security concern when compared to those with no experience of conflict situations.
3. Regardless of whether we believe that some of those going to Syria and Iraq had genuine good intentions, the fact remains



that we must take into account the **diverse nature of the returnees**. This relates to both the threat they pose and the possibility of reintegrating them.

4. Even returnees who *are* convicted will be released at some point: **reintegration is a therefore a key challenge**, and tackling radicalisation within prisons is vital. There is insufficient concrete guidance and knowledge on how to design reintegration programmes for returnees; it is also not known whether such programmes will reduce recidivism.

In view of these challenges, RAN has put forward the following **topics for further consideration**.

1. Measures should be put in place to ensure that returnees are handled in a way that eliminates the security risk they pose, while facilitating their reintegration back into society. Such measures should include **immediate engagement** with returnees from the relevant authorities, and a risk assessment, followed by appropriate intervention. Adequate **information exchange and cooperation mechanisms** need to be in place to guarantee proper follow-up.
2. Policymakers should ensure **effective reintegration, disengagement and rehabilitation programmes are in place** that are tailored to the specific profile of each returnee, based on more in-depth evaluations of existing programmes.
3. Given the scarcity of reintegration programmes specifically addressing the challenges related to returnees, **lessons learned from general deradicalisation programmes** should be assimilated and

applied when engaging with returnees. Such programmes should include the following components: (a) carrying out a **risk assessment** to determine the degree of adherence to an extremist narrative, individual needs and social networks; (b) building a **relationship of trust** between programme staff and clients; (c) exploring **partnerships with families**; (d) ensuring **staff are well-trained**; and (e) developing **operational flexibility** to adapt to unforeseen circumstances.

4. Returnees who have distanced themselves from terrorism (**known as formers**) could be helped to become **credible voices in counter-narrative campaigns**; at the same time, due care must be taken to gauge their sincerity.

IV. Local prevention framework and guiding principles

RAN has identified the following main **challenges**.

1. Local municipalities, supported by national governments, are key defence fronts against radicalisation or violent extremism. **Very few municipalities** have created a **holistic, multiagency and multipronged local action plan** to deal with radicalisation and violent extremism. Most municipalities are focused on training for awareness-raising, but still need to organise a process for handling returnees.
2. Multiagency cooperation may be hindered by **legal barriers to information-sharing (particularly in relation to the sharing of personal data)**



as well as a **lack of cooperation between different agencies.**

3. Local authorities need **to engage with local communities on issues other than security and counterterrorism. Without this partnership, local prevention will not work.** Local communities are best described as a complex ecology, constantly changing, dynamic and rich in diversity. Community engagement needs to reflect this mosaic through related channels and initiatives.
4. The focus on foreign terrorist fighter returnees **needs to be broadened to address entire families** returning from Syria/Iraq, including traumatised adults and children.

The RAN Centre of Excellence has set out the following **guiding principles.**

1. Policymakers should **prioritise the creation of local prevention action plans,** and provide adequate expertise and resources to **create tailor-made toolboxes.** Coordinated multiagency interventions must provide targeted interventions on a case-by-case basis.
2. Policymakers should **assign national, regional and local CVE coordinators** to effectively manage prevent coordination.
3. Policymakers at national, regional and local levels need to **set priorities depending on the specific circumstances** they are facing, and **invest in the necessary expertise and capacity;** these circumstances could include foreign fighter returnees requiring significant **trauma resource specialists,** as well as traumatised adults and children. Policymakers can create **platforms** where

local authorities, public-private partnerships and civil society representatives **collectively brainstorm for solutions** to violent extremism issues.

4. Policymakers at national, regional and local levels need to **strengthen societal resilience** as the overarching prevention strategy, whilst ensuring that integration efforts are seen to be independent of counterterrorism measures.