

EX POST PAPER

Trends in Prevent

As discussed by working groups at RAN Plenary

Introduction

The Plenary meeting in Brussels on 15 November allowed for an exchange of experiences, plans and outcomes between the different RAN working groups. It offered RAN participants an **opportunity to meet outside of the normal working group format**, and to discuss not only topics relevant to the respective working groups, but cross-cutting issues as well. Participants also shared their views on current working arrangements, and offered suggestions for improvements or additional actions. The RAN Plenary furthermore helped the RAN Centre of Excellence to **set priorities and identify trends in Prevent for 2018**. During the meeting, participants looked into **new and upcoming challenges** and discussed the draft plan of activities for 2018.

Each RAN working group identified both existing and new topics that will become increasingly important in 2018. These themes are **presented in this ex post paper and feed into the Annual Activity Plan** for 2018, which **has been approved by the European Commission**.

General comments on RAN

The Commission is very much impressed by the work RAN is doing, as well as by the commitment of all practitioners across the RAN network. This network is unique in bringing together many different practitioners from all relevant sectors across the European Union.

Hans Das of the European Commission Directorate General for Home Affairs presented some general challenges to the Plenary. The terrorist threat is higher than ever due to the threat of attacks that originate from within Europe, and the return of foreign fighters and their children.

When looking at further challenges RAN is facing, Hans Das indicated it needs to work on how its practices can be transferred to adjacent fields and other geographical contexts. This would make RAN's contributions even more valuable. Bringing together the work of RAN and that of other EU-funded projects is also challenging, but it is only by working together that the best results are possible. Finally, in the future, RAN may work more on engagement with priority third countries and share its knowledge, tools and experiences. It should however be taken into consideration that what works in Europe does not necessarily work in other contexts.

Panel discussion on challenges to the prevention of radicalisation in 2018

During a panel discussion, three researchers, familiar with the work of RAN, discussed the likely challenges for 2018.

The panel discussion covered trends and main concerns on radicalisation and how to deal with these. The global coalition has come together very effectively, resulting in Daesh losing on the battle field and decentralising. Despite this, the organisation remains well structured, which makes it difficult to counter this and to protect vulnerable citizens. For the foreseeable future, there will presumably be less direct recruitment, but more self-selection and indirect recruitment (responsive terrorism). More ideologically influenced copy cats and lone actors are expected. For the future there is a clear determination within RAN to continue the work already done in this area. At the same time, changing attack strategies and attacker motives also ask for different responses.

The panel also observes a rise in far-right extremism in Europe, as well as a tendency for the far right to be even more extreme in its ideals and actions; RAN should therefore focus more on this topic and on finding more bottom-up approaches to address this issue. There is violence and activism among extreme right-wing groups, but these tend to take place under the radar, and are seldom prosecuted, or labelled as hate crime. Right-wing extremism is also fuelling Jihadi extremism, and left-wing extremism, as well as copying legal protest strategies from the latter. There is a certain interdependency between these groups, leading to reciprocal radicalisation. In a number of EU Member States the refugee crisis, in combination with terrorist attacks, is also reinforcing existing and growing tensions, alongside polarisation. Refugees therefore make up a vulnerable group who might be both targeted by right-wing extremist groups, and vulnerable to Daesh propaganda. Large groups of refugees are not being helped, are being denied asylum, or are even being convicted. They are also

not always welcome in their new local Muslim community, therefore, these refugees do not have much to lose.

Terrorism is always connected with propaganda and this will not end if Daesh disappears from the battlefield. As a terrorist group, Daesh has the best communications ever witnessed – they appeal to emotions by using mainstream multimedia channels, music, pop culture etc. This strategy fits well in today's complex information environment, in which many more actors and forces are able to propagate their message than previously. Furthermore, while the production of Daesh propaganda receives a lot of attention, the sympathisers who disseminate such propaganda should not be overlooked, since individuals do not radicalise alone. There is always a connection to broader narratives, shared by broader communities beyond merely radicalised people.

The research panel stressed a need for more engagement between practitioners and researchers, focusing on evidence-based and action research. Impact measurement is needed and this can be achieved by evaluating CVE practices. Practitioners and researchers should not only exchange and disseminate knowledge, but should focus on collaborating on research. One open question for further research is why the density of radicalised individuals is larger in some geographical areas than in others.

Trends and topics of interest in 2018

During the breakout sessions, the RAN working groups presented their draft plans and asked for input from participants. Some topics overlap between different working groups, and will be addressed in joint working group meetings.

RAN Police and Law Enforcement (POL)

One priority for 2018 is the **role of police online in preventing and countering violent extremism**. Online propaganda and recruitment has been flagged by many as a strong asset for extremist groups. Police officers should understand the scale, impact and nature of extremists' online activities.

A second topic is how police can deal with the **rise in right- and left-wing extremism, along with reciprocal radicalisation** in general. In this context, RAN POL will also study whether there is a connection between right-wing extremism and hooliganism. One challenge in preventing young people from being recruited by right-wing extremists is that they often do not want to report this and lack trust in the police. Young people are therefore a target group that could potentially be a focus for RAN POL.

Thirdly, POL finds it important to benefit from lessons learnt in **adjacent fields**, and in particular within **crime prevention**. The crime-terror nexus is a point of interest.

Optimising cooperation between the police, prisons and probation (PPP) in order to enable a smoother transition from prison to rehabilitation in society is a final topic for POL. This will be discussed in cooperation with the RAN P&P working group.

Other suggestions raised by participants during the break-out sessions covered:

- More focus on **how community policing rules regarding PVE are applied throughout Europe**. In some countries, community policing is a low priority due to the high safety risk and the subsequent focus on counter-terrorist measures. In these countries, it would be interesting to bring together counter-terrorism police and community police officers.
- Include **multi-agency cooperation and governance** in relation to police. Focus on cooperating with communities and religious leaders, as well as on the information exchange between police officers and mental health workers. In the latter, the (limited) options for exchange within the legal framework should be taken into account.
- Focus more on **cooperation between police officers and researchers on a local level**, since it is important to thoroughly understand the psychological side of radicalisation.

RAN Education (EDU)

Primary, further and higher education are confronted with extremism in different ways; and the types of contribution they can make to preventing and countering extremism will be explored in 2018. One participant suggested taking into account the influence of peers, since they have a stronger influence on (vulnerable) youngsters than teachers. Furthermore, informal discussions on handling difficult conversations between teachers and students are important. As for primary education, RAN POL will look into extremist influences and how to approach young children who are affected. The need to take into account the role of parents was also mentioned, since there is often a correlation between children displaying problematic behaviour and the way in which their parents are raising them.

The rise of **right-wing extremism** and the way in which this affects schools has been identified as an important topic. It is however difficult to focus on right-wing extremism without focusing on left-wing extremism as well.

Finally, bringing **strong voices** from victims of terrorism into the classroom is considered valuable, since their alternative narratives can be very effective in raising awareness and empathy among young people. This is however politically very sensitive: in some countries, religion cannot be discussed in schools, and introducing these people to potentially vulnerable youngsters would be rejected.

Another suggestion from participants was to enhance **cooperation between education and (mental) health**, since doctors know a lot about the families they treat. This is complicated by the problems encountered when sharing information among different practitioners. How to do this is therefore an interesting topic for 2018.

RAN Communication and Narratives (C&N)

On the agenda for 2018 is a more in-depth discussion of the **psychological and neuroscience perspectives on how extremist propaganda works and how to effectively counter it**. Any work in this area must focus on a very specific target group, and in particular on how people in this group react, what makes them resilient to certain propaganda, and the differences (e.g. in the stage of radicalisation) between individuals within the target audience. The credibility of the messenger is important for the audience, but the attractiveness of the narrative is of even more importance. Furthermore, there should be a focus on neuro linguistics, cognitive behavioural and social psychology, as well as on cultural and social anthropology.

As for the role of **'informal actors'** (such as family members, friends and neighbours) in preventing violent extremism, credibility and personal relationships are key. Discussions drew attention to a link between the role of these actors and anti-establishment sentiments.

Participants often see discrepancies between **online efforts to drive offline interventions**. They referred to a 'say-do gap', in which organisations promote counter narratives online, but lack a response strategy and call for action. Participants suggested that those running campaigns examine the desired action more carefully at the beginning of the process, and that they also make sure this action is in line with the aims of an organisation.

Finally, the importance of taking young people's **perspectives** into account and conveying their messages was discussed. It was concluded that young people could be credible messengers on social media and also stay on top of trends. In this respect, there is an important connection with the Education Working Group, since teachers are working with both parents and children, and are in a position to understand and engage with problems on either side.

RAN Youth, Families and Communities (YF&C)

In 2017, RAN YF&C provided recommendations on how community voices can be strengthened. By cooperating with RAN LOCAL and discussing this topic with both community leaders and representatives of local authorities in 2018, it can create an opportunity for actors from both groups to build strong and effective collaboration for the prevention of radicalisation. However, participants reminded those present that there is rarely a connection between communities, and that YF&C needs to think carefully about which communities they will involve.

YF&C also decided to focus more on **family support** in 2018 and to evaluate existing practices and interventions. This received positive feedback as there are many different and specific approaches to family support throughout Europe; most are initiated by volunteers who work with good intentions, but lack professional guidance. One participant mentioned that in many family work projects, there is a focus on the EU definition of the nuclear family, even though 'the family' is much broader in many cultures. It was therefore suggested to focus specifically on the role of the extended family.

On **gender diversity**, and specifically on **working with men in prevention and disengagement from violent extremism**, it was questioned whether enough is known about the different roles of men specifically in order to distinguish between the genders when dealing with prevention work. Participants also recommended paying better attention to the importance of the father figure role for vulnerable youngsters.

Refugees are considered to be a group vulnerable to radicalisation and in which discrimination is believed to play an important role. **Working with refugees and their local environment** is deemed important, especially in relation to increased polarisation in Europe. Participants referred to the impact of recruitment networks on young migrants, and how they become radicalised, and suggested this should be taken more into account when talking about refugees.

A final important point of focus should be **how to deal with trauma**, specifically with regard to those parents who transfer their feelings of hatred to their children. It was furthermore suggested that attention should be given in general to the impact of trauma on first-line practitioners as they are at risk of 'compassion fatigue' and could benefit from psychosocial support to counter this.

RAN YOUNG

Besides focusing on the **evaluation of the RAN Collection** and **collaborating with another European youth initiative**, an important point of focus for RAN YOUNG within 2018 will be **how to hold difficult conversations**. This is a difficulty that first-line practitioners deal with on a daily basis, and a topic on which young people's perspective is considered to be of particular value. Both first-line practitioners and the young people to whom they talk can experience various topics as either sensitive or difficult. The RAN YOUNG participants can add value to the RAN network as a whole regarding access to, and understanding, people vulnerable to radicalisation.

Finally, RAN YOUNG will hold a meeting on **political youth engagement**. Within the meeting, youngsters and policy-makers will have an opportunity to meet and exchange ideas, which could lead to the messages of young people being considered during policy-making. Beforehand, the youngsters will learn, in a dedicated event, both how to get their messages across and how to use their voice to generate impact. Guidance will come from RAN C&N practitioners in a joint meeting.

RAN Health and Social Care (H&SC)

RAN H&SC seeks to provide a more comprehensive approach to the role that health and social care practitioners can play in preventing and countering radicalisation at the various levels of intervention. The working group will discuss how to deal with **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), stress and trauma** as a (mental) health practitioner. The choice for PTSD as a key topic is based on assumptions about returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and their families' mental health. At the Plenary it was suggested not to focus only on PTSD, but also on trauma, anxiety, stress and other factors. Mental health professionals need to be more aware – and ultimately equipped – to deal with these matters in relation to FTFs.

Another challenge for the health and social care sector is how to bridge vastly different structures in which health & social care practitioners operate, and to find common ground. RAN H&SC will focus on embedding social workers and health workers into new or existing institutional structures. The goal is to bridge the gaps with more evidence-based approaches on **multi-agency structures**.

The Plenary was also an opportunity for RAN H&SC to discuss the role of social workers in the **integration and inclusion of refugees**. The link between radicalisation and social inclusion with specific reference to refugees was questioned and discussed.

Also on the agenda in November were **evidence-based approaches to prevention activities that support health and social care workers**. The working group would like to invite practitioners, policy makers and academics to participate in discussions on this topic.

RAN Local Authorities (LOCAL)

RAN LOCAL plans to investigate **adjacent fields** in 2018, such as youth crime prevention, and specific prevention strategies and/or exit strategies for criminal youth groups and sects. What can we learn from the strategies, interventions and underlying assumptions within these fields? The break-out session participants also pleaded for another **RAN Local Academy: a table top meeting focusing on multi-agency approaches**, especially for local municipalities who are just starting to develop their local CVE approach. A much-discussed topic was the proposed meeting on 'political will'. The importance of

political will was not questioned; however, discussions addressed how to frame this correctly and effectively for a RAN LOCAL meeting. The meeting will thus focus on how to **ensure political support**. The perspective of CVE in other prevention areas and sectors, such as education, youth work etc., also drew comments. CVE should not be a leading topic within these areas, but CVE work should nonetheless be carried out through existing structures within these sectors.

RAN EXIT

The stakes are high and the pressure intense when it comes to exit programmes. **Methodologies** should therefore be improved and shared. Differences between extremist groups are also growing, there has been a rise in both right- and left-wing extremism, something which currently is not sufficiently addressed by exit facilities. The first of the EXIT working group meetings will therefore deal with **left-wing extremism**. Does left-wing extremism require a specific approach? What does it look like and to what extent would exit programmes differ from re-socialisation programmes targeting other ideologies? The first RAN EXIT Academy was a success, therefore the working group will organise a follow-up and more in-depth **Exit Academy on training and methods for dialogue**. In the same way as RAN Local, EXIT sees the importance of **learning from adjacent fields**. EXIT aims to learn from the theoretical framework developed in response to **gangs**, as well as to gather relevant lessons on methodology and inspiring practices. Other topics discussed at the plenary were: conspiracy theories to be addressed in EXIT work, collaboration with the media, and the skills and competences required by EXIT workers.

RAN Prison and Probation (P&P)

For 2018, RAN P&P sees a challenge in dealing with the returnees who have entered the prison system – it is a difficult and diverse group. The risk of people becoming radicalised in prison is an ongoing concern for the prison system, especially now that returnees are also in prisons.

The discussions also focused on the need for proper **assessment tools** for the P&P system. Vera 2 and ERG22 are being used in prison and probation settings, but not in the same way, and there are other tools being used around Europe. RAN P&P therefore plans to create an overview of which assessment tools are currently used throughout the EU and how they are (being) implemented. RAN P&P also wants to explore how **family and friends can be involved earlier in re-socialisation processes**.

The third topic for 2018 will be emphasising the importance of **prisoner society**. Having a good atmosphere is a prerequisite for preventing radicalisation and working on exit strategies. External influences from outside the prison, such as attacks and polarisation can also adversely affect prison society.

The following issues were also raised:

- the ongoing problem of overcrowded and disorganised prisons;
- cooperation with the police and local authorities on re-socialisation, and on sharing information about prisoners;
- the creation of a multi-agency team in each prison (or region) in order to evaluate prisoners.

RAN Remembrance of Victims (RVT)

The RVT working group would like to improve the way in which the voices of victims are heard in PVE. The working group aims to help individuals to improve their testimonials, while also providing tools for victims work on testimonials themselves. The second topic for the RVT working group is the **prevention of re-victimisation**. Specific situations, such as the provision of testimonials, or dealing with national support systems, criminal process or even the media, can lead to individuals re-living the attack. RVT will discuss what re-victimisation is, how it can be prevented, what to do when it happens, and the role of victim organisations. Besides these topics, the RVT working group will organise a meeting after March to evaluate the 2018 **Remembrance Day** and to prepare for the Remembrance Day of 2019. During the break-out session, RVT discussed proposals for a joint meeting with the EDU working group. The main topics discussed were:

- how to create testimonies that will interest and have an impact on youngsters;
- finding a balance between testimonies from victims and formers;
- safety for victims when giving testimonies at schools, and the role of teachers;
- pedagogical aims, and the needs of the educational system and its teachers.

Member States Panel

Because of the huge diversity in the root causes of radicalisation, a large variety of Prevent efforts is required. Recognising radicalisation at an early stage, for example in prison, among youth and in vulnerable groups with lack of perspective, is key. RAN aims to contribute to these efforts by evaluating best practices, translating papers into other EU languages involving EU Member States more prominently, and engaging more with the MENA region and the Western Balkans. This panel gave Member States the opportunity to feed into RAN's Annual Activity Plan for 2018. Overall, Member States praised RAN and its contributions, and many consider RAN to be the most prominent of EU tools and a 'guiding light for other EU efforts'. Although all EU countries operate in different contexts, making the local level key in approaches, all Member States share common concerns, which often mirror those set by RAN for 2018.

Besides Prevent efforts, Member States also stressed the importance of resocialisation, and of supporting families of radicalised individuals so as to avoid reciprocal radicalisation.

RAN deliverables

The RAN Returnee Manual and the Member State workshops on returnees are appreciated by Member States for their provision of practical guidelines and tools for dealing with a specific topic. Member States invited the RAN CoE to produce more focused and practical toolkits, and to invest more in impact measurement. The RAN CoE could function more as a production hub for the European Commission and Member States.

Counter narratives

The influence of propaganda and online extremism are also considered huge challenges by Member States. Many countries have plans to invest more in the production of counter narratives and online tools. This is key in combatting online extremism and is helping to increase resilience among vulnerable

people. Engaging with target audiences such as Muslim communities could be valuable in the production of effective counter narratives. However, it is not only practitioners who should engage with communities — policy-makers should devote more attention to involving communities in their prevention strategies.

Engagement with all relevant stakeholders

Policy-makers and practitioners are encouraged to exchange more; bridges should be built between them and they should 'meet each other in the middle'. A communication gap between these two groups necessitates Member States listening more to practitioners, learning from their knowledge and experiences, and in turn receiving clear policy recommendations drawn from the experience of first-line practitioners. One possible way to do this is to develop a national or regional centre and set up mobile teams. To stimulate exchange between policy-makers and first-line practitioners, the Commission has set up the High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation (HLCEG-R). The objectives of this group are to:

- improve cooperation and collaboration among the different stakeholders in the field of preventing and countering radicalisation, and in particular with the involvement of Member States;
- identify current and future priority areas aiming at preventing and countering radicalisation;
- present concrete options for more structured cooperation mechanisms at EU Level.

In line with this, the RAN CoE has planned six 'policy and practice' events for 2018. The first will take place on 4-5 April and will be co-organised with the Bulgarian Presidency.

There is also a need for more engagement with researchers, and a particular need for evidence-based research. Impact measurement is needed, and should be combined with an evaluation of CVE practices. Practitioners and researchers should not only exchange and distribute knowledge, but really collaborate on 'action research'.

Europe and its countries must therefore invest more in prevention and should not work in isolation. More coordination, cooperation and sharing between all the different stakeholders (practitioners, academics and Member States) in a spectrum of sectors and multi-agency structures is necessary to increase efficiency. Involving mental health workers, families of foreign terrorist fighters and the private sector more prominently was proposed.