EX POST PAPER

A holistic local approach to preventing radicalisation in Helsinki

In this paper, the Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence (RAN CoE) shares the findings of the 'Local CVE approach of Helsinki' RAN study visit, held on 8 and 9 June 2017.

Helsinki developed its local prevention of violent extremism (PVE) approach following publication of the 2012 Finnish National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism. Despite having a solid multi-agency structure in place, the city struggled to implement some of the measures. If determined strictly by number of violent extremist incidents, violent extremism is a relatively minor issue for Helsinki.

The municipality feared that without clear evidence, labelling cases and signs as extremist would stigmatise individuals and prove counterproductive. However, the city must deal with underlying issues and challenges that can feed into the process of radicalisation: increased hate speech, polarisation and youth marginalisation. To tackle these problems in their early stages, Helsinki developed 'Safe Helsinki', taking a holistic approach. This ex post paper will elaborate on this holistic approach, as well as compare it to a specific CVE one, and discuss its (dis)advantages.

The paper is intended for local coordinators tasked with PVE, organisations involved in the multi-agency PVE approaches and others active in this field.

Acronyms

RAN CoE	Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence
CVE	Counter(ing) violent extremism
FCA	Finn Church Aid
NAP	National Action Plan
NETW	Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PVE	Prevention of violent extremism
RAN	Radicalisation Awareness Network
SUPO	Finnish Security Intelligence Service

Radicalisation and violent extremism in Helsinki

In order to better understand the local PVE approach of Helsinki, it is useful to first elaborate on the national challenges concerning radicalisation and violent extremism.. Islamic-inspired extremism was most visible several years ago, with 80 people leaving for Syria and Iraq ([1]). The number has dwindled in the past year as Daesh, under military pressure, has begun to lose ground on its strongholds in Iraq and Syria. This drop in numbers is reflected across Europe.

In the EU, there is growing concern over returning fighters ([2]). Finland has 20 returnees, of whom only a handful have returned to Helsinki. Each returning individual is assessed and discussed on a case-by-case basis. At this point, there is no indication that any of these returnees poses a security threat. Apart from these foreign fighters, there are no recorded incidents related to Islamic-inspired extremism.

Nevertheless, the threat of terrorism has increased from 2014 levels. The *Helsinki Times* notes that according to the Finnish Security Intelligence Service (SUPO) ([3]), this is principally due to the threat posed by individuals or small groups supporting violent jihadist ideologies.

There are also growing concerns about far-right extremism. The same article refers to the Nordic Resistance Movement, known for spreading national-socialist propaganda. Its activities have regularly been associated with criminal offences, most commonly assaults, including a deadly assault at Helsinki Station Square. The Ministry of the Interior points out that while such groups do not put national security at risk, they may cause problems locally and represent a threat to certain individuals and minority groups.

Additionally, Finland is seeing an increased incidence of hate, violent speech and false news reports on social media. These phenomena, combined with polarisation, can cultivate radicalisation. Left-wing extremism is considered a marginal phenomenon, according to the biannual overview of violent extremism by the Ministry of the Interior.

School shootings

Finland has fortunately remained untouched by terrorist attacks, to date. However, the country has suffered other tragedies on home soil. The country has experienced three school shootings — two in the last decade.

The Raumanmeri school shooting of January 1989
A 14-year-old student at the Raumanmeri secondary school in Rauma fatally shot two of his classmates.

The Jokela school shooting of November 2007
An 18-year-old student killed eight people before shooting himself, at Jokela High School in Jokela.

The Kauhajoki school shooting of September 2008
Less than a year after the Jokela school incident, a 22-year-old student shot and killed 10 people at Seinäjoki University of Applied Sciences.

These school shootings also influenced the Helsinki's local CVE approach.

([1]) Öhberg, T. (2016, December 22). A foreign fighter with Finnish nationality conducts a suicide attack in Iraq. *Finland Today*. Retrieved from
 http://finlandtoday.fi/a-foreign-fighter-with-finnish-nationality-conducts-a-suicide-attack-in-iraq/
([2]) Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). (2016). RAN Policy Paper 'Foreign fighter returnees & the reintegration challenge'. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_foreign_fighter_returnees_reintegration_challenge_112016_en.pdf
([3]) Teivainen, A. (2017, February 8). Ministry of Interior: Extremism and false news increasingly common in Finland. *Helsinki Times.* Retrieved from http://www.helsinkitimes.fi/finland/finland-news/domestic/14526-ministry-of-interior-extremism-and-false-news-increasingly-common-in-finland.html

National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism

To deal effectively with the challenges mentioned above, the Finnish government devised a National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism (⁴). The National Action Plan (NAP) framework was used to develop Helsinki's local approach.

The national plan dates back to 2012, but was updated in 2016. Nationally, the Ministry of the Interior coordinates PVE. Other authorities remain responsible for actions and development within their purview, under the Government Rules of Procedure. Municipalities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and communities participate in implementing the action plan, in line with the principles of cooperation.

Box 1 Objectives of the Finnish NAP for PVE

National short-term goals for preventing violent radicalisation and extremism (end 2018)

1. National and local structures and procedures based on multi-professional cooperation are in place, allowing authorities, organisations and communities to prevent violent radicalisation and extremism.

2. The volume of ideologically motivated crime will continue to decrease, year by year.

3. The number of individuals travelling to conflict areas to engage in combat/violence will start dropping from its spike, 1 November 2015.

4. Individuals returning from conflict areas are identified, and those who have committed crimes are brought to justice. All returnees are systematically targeted with individually tailored measures which reduce the risk of violence and help improve their ability to cope.

5. The police will efficiently detect and investigate hate crimes. Victims of hate crime will be supported and the impacts of crime on the victim's reference group will be identified.

National long-term goals for preventing violent radicalisation and extremism (end 2025)

6. The number of people who feel personally or collectively threatened by violent extremist movements diminishes.

7. Young people refuse to join violent extremist movements or groups. Influencing society and decision-making through legal means is felt to be effective and rewarding.

To successfully accomplish the objectives set out in Box 1, the Ministry of the Interior initiated a total of 36 measures (NAP, pp. 19-29). While most measures fall under the responsibility of the national government, they have direct implications for Helsinki's local approach.

(⁴) Ministry of the Interior. (2016). *National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism.* Ministry of the Interior publications 17/2016. Helsinki. Retrieved from http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/75040/Kansallinen_vakivalt_radikalisoituminen_eng_NETTI .pdf

Helsinki's local approach

When judged by number of incidents alone (⁵), violent extremism is deemed a relatively minor issue in the municipality. Although the number of people that left for Syria and Iraq is relatively high per capita, the municipality does not view religious-inspired extremism as a major threat. There is no structured network of extremists and recruiters active in the city, so a 'lone wolf' attack, whether ideologically inspired or not, is considered the greatest threat. The incidents Helsinki has dealt with are primarily related to right- and left-wing extremism, usually as a result of right- and left-wing group clashes during demonstrations (⁶).

Helsinki struggled to implement some of the NAP measures in 2013. The city was responsible for introducing a multi-agency approach to collect and discuss signs and cases related to radicalisation and violent extremism. Setting up a network to include the police, social and healthcare services, the educational sector, youthwork and several NGOs was straightforward; the city has a long history of multi-agency work, and the municipality has always cooperated closely with the police.

However, the newly formed network had trouble finding relevant cases. The municipality argued that pushing too hard to find cases would be counterproductive. This lesson was learned with the measures deployed to prevent school shootings: a focus on signs of possible school shooters led to the general public becoming considerably anxious and 'detecting' signals excessively. The result was not a safe and peaceful school environment, but rather a stressed society and stigmatised children. Helsinki believes that labelling cases and signs as extremist can be stigmatising and counterproductive, and should therefore be undertaken with a great deal of care.

The multi-agency setup did provide a platform to discuss many other signs, underlying issues and challenges that might contribute to the radicalisation process. Rising hate speech, polarisation and youth marginalisation and the increase of so-called illegal immigrants are examples of developments of concern that could feed into radicalisation (⁷) (⁸). If these are not tackled at an early stage, they could feed into violent extremism as well. This focus on early prevention, alongside a fear of stigmatising children, has resulted in Helsinki adopting a wider prevention approach rather than one specifically targeting radicalisation and violent extremism; VE is just one of the issues this approach addresses. This holistic approach, called 'Safe Helsinki', helped the professionals involved in the network cooperate, as the wider approach touched upon their day-to-day work.

(⁵) Violent acts motivated by either political or religious extremist agendas.
(⁶) Seven detained and brawls at Independence Day marches – neo-Nazis, far-right and counter-protesters clash in Helsinki. (2016, December 6). *YLE UUTISET*. Retrieved from http://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/seven_detained_and_brawls_at_independence_day_marches__neo-nazis_far-right_and_counter-protesters_clash_in_helsinki/9337178
(⁷) Finnish govt condemns 'extremist' anti-migrant street patrols. (2016, January 7). *Yahoo News.* Retrieved from https://www.yahoo.com/news/finnish-govt-condemns-extremist-anti-migrant-street-patrols-213230984.html
(⁸) Interior Minister: 300 asylum seekers in Finland have links to terrorism. (2015, December 10). *YLE UUTISET*. Retrieved from http://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/interior_minister_300_asylum_seekers_in_finland_have_links_to_terrorism/8520152

'Safe Helsinki': key partners and organisations

Figure 1 Chief 'Safe Helsinki' partners and organisations in the prevention pyramid
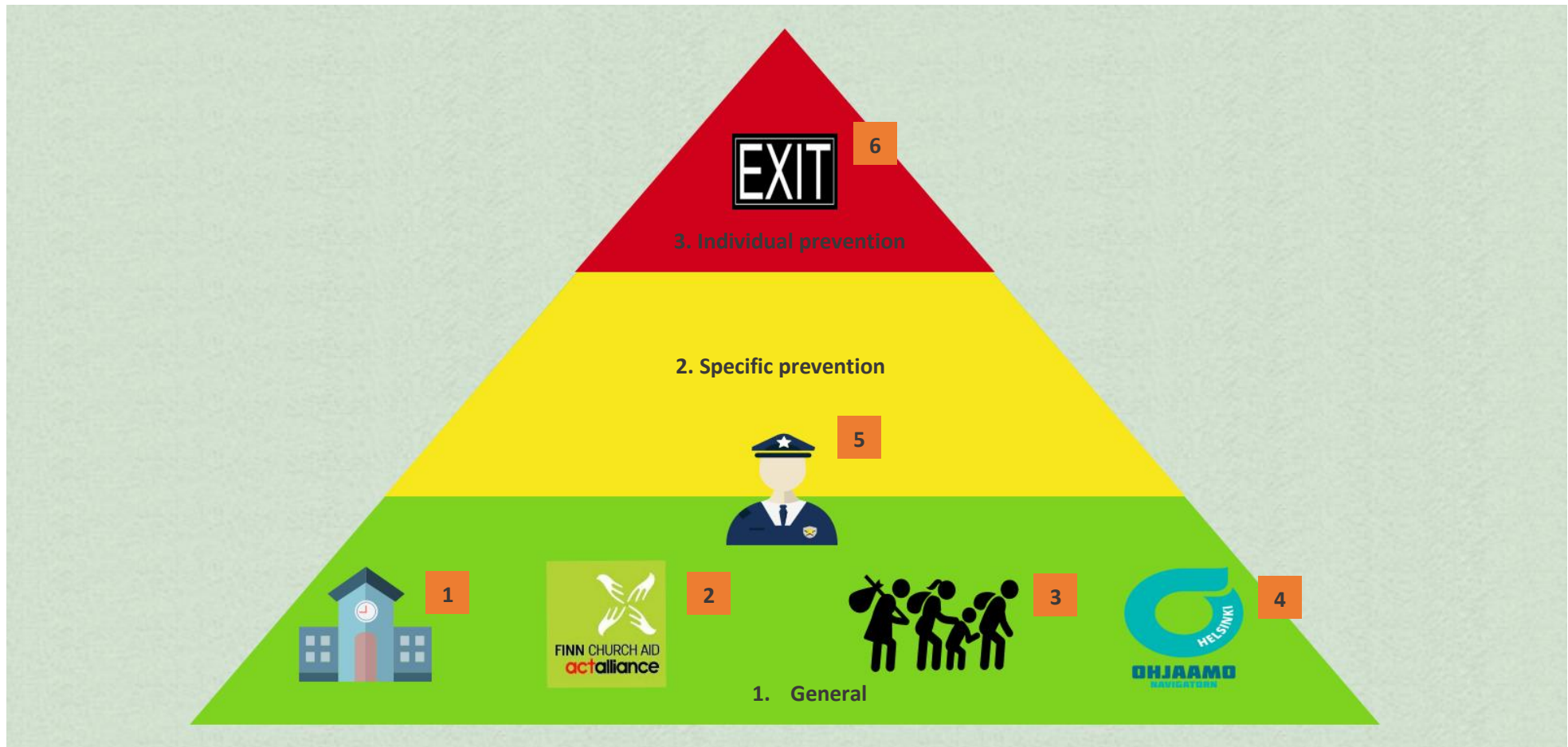
The prevention pyramid

To put Helsinki's local approach into perspective, we have used Deklerck's prevention pyramid, as it clearly demonstrates the different levels on which prevention measures could be organised. Deklerck's pyramid is traditionally used for preventive actions in schools, but it could be used to rank local PVE actions as well. Deklerck sets out five types of preventive levels on which actions can take place. The lower layers can accommodate a wide range of prevention measures. The higher the pyramid layer, the more specific and limited the level. The measures are then increasingly specialised towards a specific target group. To display the different initiatives of the Helsinki approach, we decided to use levels 1, 2 and 3 of the prevention pyramid. A more detailed explanation of the prevention pyramid is available in the RAN LOCAL ex post paper titled 'What projects and initiatives should be supported by local authorities? And why?' (9).

1 *Education*

The education department in Helsinki is a multifunctioning network of services for all citizens, with a focus on providing beneficial learning and future skills for all. The purpose of the education approach is to create a learning environment in each community by providing equal opportunities for learning and well-being. Essentially, the preventive work is already contained in the structures of the welfare state. In practice, this work is about promoting student welfare and critical thinking, creating equal opportunities and preventing polarisation.

Local preventive work in the education sector.
This holistic approach covers all kinds of problems, including marginalisation and crime prevention.

Guidelines
1. Reinforce the awareness of frontline workers and enhance the skills of experts.
2. Promote equal opportunities for leisure activities.
3. Local projects work alongside networks (find solutions to local needs).
4. Bring services and activities to communities and schools as local network centres.
5. Create projects to empower groups with special needs.
6. Demonstrate a shared commitment to local development.
7. Take immediate action when extremist phenomena or actions are observed. Maintain close connections to police (prevention unit) and SUPO for consultations.
8. Find local solutions together with networks: police, schools, social workers, third sector.
9. Prevention work is a shared responsibility. In schools, support services work in close cooperation with teachers.
10. Read research and reports on local risks, weaknesses and possibilities (e.g. a national survey on student welfare also provides local information).

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(9) Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). (2016). RAN LOCAL ex post paper: 'What projects and initiatives should be supported by local authorities? And why?'. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-local/docs/ex_post_ran_local_athens_23-24_05_2016_en.pdf

2 **Finn Church Aid (FCA)**

The FCA is a Finnish NGO providing humanitarian assistance and advocacy in over 20 countries on 4 continents. The FCA also coordinates a network for religious and traditional peacemakers ([10]). Since 2014, the FCA and the Secretariat of the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers (NETW) have had a standing Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of the Interior of Finland. This memorandum serves as a framework for cooperation that builds trust and establishes good practices to develop collaborative methods for authorities and communities seeking to prevent violent radicalisation. The role of the FCA and the NETW is to utilise international experiences and good practices in Finland. They facilitate trust-building, mutual learning and collaboration building between Finnish authorities, religious communities and actors, in developing community-based solutions for preventing violent extremism.

The FCA and the NETW are currently partners in the National Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism for implementation of the following two action points.

1. Reach Out: a project developing a family support model for families and communities affected by violent radicalisation, and sharing best practices across different localities in Finland.
2. The Shoulder to Shoulder model: various local religious communities work together against Islamophobia and to improve social cohesion. This model has been endorsed by both authorities and religious communities. It was originally developed in the United States.

3 **Monik ry (multicultural NGO)**

This NGO was founded in 2011 by young people with an immigrant background. It provides employment, education and leisure opportunities and activities for vulnerable youth with an immigrant background, a group particularly at risk of being marginalised ([11]). It works in close cooperation with Helsinki's services (such as the youth department and the Navigator Centre) and offers a low-threshold entry point for young people into municipality and government services. Additionally, Monik ry offers expert advice to local and national government officials on issues related to young people with an immigration background.

4 **The Navigator Centre**

This centre provides a multi-agency low-threshold service for young people under the age of 30. It combines social, health, employment, education and youth work services in one place to help youth find their path and to 'navigate' forward, decreasing the risk of marginalisation and vulnerability. The Navigator Centre is an example of Helsinki's commitment to increase services based on multi-agency work and partnerships. Vulnerable young people usually need help with several issues simultaneously, on various levels. Worrisome behaviour often conceals multiple underlying concerns that should be tackled in a multi-professional way. The centre offers easy access to all the required levels and types of support, in one place.

([10]) See https://www.kirkonulkomaanapu.fi/en/donors/international-networks/network-religious-traditional-peacemakers/ online.
([11]) 23 % of minority youth are currently outside education or employment; the corresponding number for ethnic Finns is 4 %.

5 *Helsinki police department*

The Helsinki police department has a unique preventive police unit which combines traditional community policing with new ways of building trust and partnerships with local communities and partners. Among other things, they carry out street work with vulnerable young people, and partner effortlessly with NGOs and volunteer workers as well as municipality services. The Anchor Team is a multi-professional team comprising police officers, social workers and psychiatric nurses. It offers a low-threshold service for young people and families who come into contact with the police, as well as other vulnerable individuals such as lone actors. The police department has also added a new unit to tackle online hate speech, a continuum of the internet police work they have been carrying out for nearly a decade.

6 *Radinet (Missio and Aggredi)*

The Radinet project aims to develop an NGO-based exit intervention for radicalised individuals who wish to withdraw from extremist thoughts and violent activities. The exit model is created for individuals who are radicalised or at risk of becoming radicalised, and possibly, violent extremists. The Radinet exit model will meet European recommendations and follow good practices [12] [13]. Radinet is a nationwide project with two full-time employees in Oulu and Helsinki. In Helsinki, Radinet collaborates with the NGO Helsinki Missio and Aggredi, specialised in working with long-term violent offenders. Aggredi also works with clients at risk of carrying out school or mass killings.

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[12] Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). (2016). RAN EXIT ex post paper: 'Setting up an exit intervention'. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-exit/docs/ran_exit_setting_up_exit_intervention_berlin_13-14_022017_en.pdf

[13] Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). (2016). RAN EXIT ex post paper: 'Minimum methodological requirements for exit interventions'. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-exit/docs/ran_exit-ex_post_paper_london_15-16032016_en.pdf

Chances and risks of the holistic approach to preventing radicalisation

During the study visit, participants were asked to record both the chances and the risks of a holistic CVE approach as compared to a specific CVE approach.

Chances	Risks
- No stigmatisation. - This approach does not feed into polarisation, which can give rise to radicalisation. - Partners engage more easily in cooperation when the approach has a more general focus; the word radicalisation often serves as a deterrent for professionals and the general public. - Holistic approaches are needed to solve problems on a structural level; specific approaches are needed to solve problems on an individual level. - All partners relate to the holistic approach and work with the same objective.	- Less specialised professionals. - Denial of the radicalisation issue. - No specialised answers to questions on radicalisation. - Less protection of professionals working with radicalised individuals. - No readiness to act if a crisis occurs. - The Helsinki approach features a wide range of low-threshold services, easily accessible to clients. However, there appears to be a lack of outreach work to locate individuals who do not come across the services themselves.

Participants were also asked which elements of 'Safe Helsinki' they believed might prove useful for their own local approaches.

Which elements of the Helsinki approach could prove useful in your local approach?

- **Close cooperation needs time investment**
  When the approach is formulated in a more holistic way, more partners will be willing to cooperate in the prevention network.
- **More focus on underlying issues of radicalisation**
  In Helsinki, emphasis is placed is on factors that give rise to radicalisation, rather than the issue of radicalisation itself. The focus on social well-being, deterrent factors and lowering the risk of vulnerability to radicalisation seems self-evident, but this is not always reflected in local approaches of other EU municipalities. It is crucial to invest in interventions aimed at removing the climate and circumstances that give rise to radicalisation, in order to prevent these processes as early as possible. We need to see the whole picture!
- **Rotating police officer responsible for contact with prevention network partners**
  These police officers alternate and rotate every 2 years, disseminating related knowledge within the police departments and helping to structurally embed the prevention aims within the police organisation.
- **Police dialogue with young people**
  A specialised police team has been set up to engage with young people and improve the police image. This is a highly sustainable policy that offers considerable value in the long term.
- **NGO involvement**

In Helsinki, many key tasks (of the local approach) are entrusted to NGOs. It is highly challenging — and not always beneficial — for a municipality to single-handedly take on all key tasks of the local radicalisation prevention approach. Therefore, robust cooperation with NGOs and with closer contacts of the target group, and divisions of responsibility may be advantageous for the involved parties and the desired impact.

- **The 'next generation project'**
  In Helsinki, refugees and new citizens are the subject of a great deal of attention and investment. In many countries, these individuals constitute a 'forgotten' group of society. Generating opportunities for them to become valued and valuable members of society is something many countries can benefit from.
- **Urban planning and social housing policy**
  For a balanced distribution of diverse communities, Helsinki's policy dictates that all neighbourhoods be allocated the same distribution of foreign populations and low-income communities. Every neighbourhood is obligated to allocate an equal percentage of its houses to migrants. This prevents the occurrence of large concentrations of minority ethnic communities in the most deprived areas.

Conclusion

The Helsinki approach to PVE stresses early prevention. The municipality aims to tackle underlying issues and challenges that can feed into the process of radicalisation in advance. By emphasising a holistic approach that concentrates on early prevention, the city is able to make more specific and individual-based CVE and PVE measures redundant. This approach is preferred, because Helsinki believes that specific and individual CVE measures can have a stigmatising and counterproductive effect.

Participants agreed that a holistic prevention approach is ideal — when it proves sufficient to prevent extremism from developing. Unfortunately, in many cities, a holistic approach alone is not enough if there are many cases of radicalisation requiring individual intervention. Cities grappling with active networks of extremists involved in recruitment and other extremist-related activities will need specific interventions. It is therefore crucial that the approach be tailored to meet the specific needs of the local approach.

However, participants do believe that regardless of the local situation, investment in general prevention must be maintained at all times. Solving underlying problems and resolving issues that may contribute to radicalisation calls for a holistic approach and programmes targeted at general prevention.

To conclude, holistic and specific prevention approaches are not incompatible or mutually exclusive, nor is either approach superior to the other. Both approaches are suitable for specific situations, and municipalities should ideally develop a flexible stance that can alternate between a holistic and specific emphasis based on the given requirements and context.