**PROPOSED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE**
**HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE**

**FROM THE RAN PREVENT WORKING GROUP** *(DECEMBER 2012)*

*"The views expressed in this document are purely those of the RAN working group and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the European Commission"*

## 1. Introduction

Prevention is the only long term solution to violent radicalization. Delivering counter-narratives and including people is crucial to a preventive approach. The ones who are best positioned are practioners and volunteers that work 'on the ground' and who are able to connect to vulnerable youth.

The working group brings together front line practitioners (individuals, police, third sector organizations and agencies) working 'on the ground' with vulnerable people (under the age of 26) who may be vulnerable to becoming involved in extremist behaviour and political violence.

The aim is to establish a network of practitioners across Europe expert at delivering interventions for young people vulnerable to becoming involved in politically violent behavior. To pool experiences, knowledge, lessons learnt and good practices and disseminate it e.g. through a practical document for other practitioners in Europe.

## 2. Best and worst practices, related to the focus of the WG

Areas of best practice include:
- Empowering local actors and experts who know the context and/ or individuals well as opposed to 'parachuting' experts in to deliver interventions.
- Early intervention and prevention – programmes that challenge negative ideas and attitudes towards groups at the earliest possible stages in schools/ youth groups/ community settings.
- Involving 'formers' in the process of preventing violent extremism is recognised as an important and successful component.
- Ridiculing the narratives, the ideology and the conspiracy theories of the extreme right in other to make them less attractive among the youth and take away the trendy appeal of the extreme organizations.

Areas of less-effective practice include:
- A 'counter narrative only' approach – this can succeed in reaffirming further entrenching the position of individual or seen as replacing one narrative with another. This does not address the root cause or wider social issues.
- Interventions that do not allow the 'difficult conversations' to take place around foreign policy, home social welfare policy etc.
- *Too much* statutory control and regulation which leads to the inhibition of creativity and responsiveness of those specialist non-statutory organisations.
- The "repressive and legal tools only" approach, to be found in some of the Central and Eastern European countries. This is based on the "legal fetishism" and bureaucratic approach of the post-communist countries. The approach is based on the false belief that banning radical right organisations and police operations can solve the overall problem – the state is omnipotent. This approach denies the importance of NGOs in prevention as well as the important of the "social demand" for radicalism that needs to be challenged with education, community work and counter-narratives.

## 3.    Policy recommendations, from the perspective of the WG

**3.1    Early intervention is crucial to achieving wider success – programmes to challenge ideas and attitudes at the earliest possible stage in schools/ youth groups/ community settings.**
The RAN Prevent group highlighted the need for this work to take place at the earliest possible stage. In some Western member states –the words 'prevention' and 'violent extremism' have come to be associated with something more sinister than challenging racism and social exclusion as and when they occur. It was highlighted by the group that it is a climate in which attitudes and ideas about 'out-groups' are allowed to develop that must truly be tackled in order that these attitudes and ideas are prevented from gaining precedence and credence amongst peer groups.

It is the work of teachers, youth workers, and community workers and alike in challenging those attitudes and behaviours that is crucial. There are however some significant challenges in achieving this:

i.    Some are not sure what their responsibilities are in relation to this work
ii.   People lack confidence to be able to challenge attitudes and ideas that emerge as they feel that they lack of 'a 'counter-narrative' or the true facts.
iii.  There is a perceived (*and real in some cases*) lack of tools to be able to implement effective workshops/ activities/learning programmes
iv.   Structures and systems to support teachers/ workers who are delivering this work (e.g. policies and procedures to support their interventions)

**Recommendations:**

There needs to be moves towards
- Embedding the aims and objectives of 'prevent' into education/ youth support providers to provide clear guidance on what expectations are for the role of these agencies in preventing violent extremism
- Clear and effective guidance as to the point at which referrals (for intervention) are made or concerns are raised about individuals who are considered 'high risk' and susceptible
- Adequate resources and educational materials to enable effective delivery
- A collection of counter-narratives (using historic materials, researches, etc.) to use in debates. Practitioners need effective counter-arguments in order to have the courage to challenge extreme views. (See recommendation 4.4)
- Training for those who are '*frontline*' in working with young people to increase capability, confidence, capacity and confidence

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- Regular seminars/ conferences/ trainings that can increase people's contact with developments and practice. *These need to be aimed at and available for those who are frontline and not just those in strategic roles\**

## 3.2    Organisations outside of the 'statutory' bodies to deliver this work

*The case for the NGO/ Civil Society organisations:*

The RAN Prevent working group acknowledged that the work of prevention is a broad and dynamic field. There is a need for prevention at the earliest possible stage where anti-locution may be taking place to the 'pre-criminal' space where individuals may be moving towards physical violence. To that end, the types of intervention required are varied, diverse and sophisticated and different agencies may be required to intervene dependent upon the needs of the groups/ individuals.   An additional consideration, is that in the 'pre-criminal' space it is not possible to force individuals to become involved in projects or initiatives that aim to de-radicalise or challenge attitudes and behaviours. At the most 'extreme' end however, where individuals may have developed ideologies, narratives and behaviours that indicate that they are moving towards discrimination/ physical violence – interventions are vital, and should take place *ideally* with the buy-in (voluntary participation) of the individual rather than being 'forced' to attend by statutory referral from agencies including police, schools, youth offending agencies, social services etc.

Amongst the reasons why individuals become radicalised, there is often disaffection towards the state. A deep mistrust of the state can exist which may lead to a complete lack of willingness for individuals to engage with activities or initiatives at all. Relationships of trust can more easily be built by NGOs and civil society organisations. These organisations are generally consistent in the face of the changing political governance of states. Furthermore, they do not have the same reporting requirements (*from a security perspective*) that the statutory sector may have and are able to facilitate the confidential and 'safe' interventions that are required, without the fear of breaching an individual's trust.

In addition, these organisations are often specifically set up to deliver 'this' work. They are therefore able to be flexible and responsive in their approach whereas larger, more bureaucratic organisations may face greater challenges due to the 'broader' nature of their function/ role e.g. social workers whose remit it is to safeguard – not to provide counter narrative.

*The importance of empowering local actors and experts- instead of 'parachuting' experts in to deliver interventions.*

The working group discussed the fact that often the best interventions take place where there are local actors involved who know the individuals/ groups that are vulnerable and who are aware of the wider issues in communities that are increasing levels of disaffection and frustration. The Western European sub-group reported that there are often local actors and agencies undertaking prevention work (or work contributing to prevention) who are able to provide ongoing support.  Some of the key drivers for radicalisation are the lack of identity, belonging, role models and a sense of participation  for the individual at risk and therefore a consistent, local actor can be key in providing for some of those needs and filling those gaps.

In most of the Central and Eastern European countries, however, where the community work is less developed, the capacity and the willingness of the municipalities to challenge radicalisation is weaker. NGOs are under-financed and have less expertise in this field and therefore strong support and trainings from high-scale experts of de-radicalisation and prevention is crucial. Even if the local actors build the capacity to take the lead in dealing with those whom are vulnerable to or are radicalised- those organisations who are well equipped and have the expertise to so do should be tasked to provide

strong assistance in learning best practices and new approaches until that capacity and confidence is built.

**Recommendations**:

- That NGOs and civil society organisations are supported to deliver this work, taking into consideration the fact that they are well placed to acquire trust and deliver tailored interventions with specialist expertise.

- That funding is put in place to support the resourcing of these organisations and to embed their work into cross-sector approaches to preventing violent extremism.

- That local actors are engaged in the delivery of the work, and where possible – are capacity built to enable them to do that.

### 3.3    Ensuring that there is a 'joined up' approach to diagnosis and delivery – statutory and NGOs

Whilst the working groups advocates strongly for the involvement of civil society groups and NGO's in delivering interventions; it also recognises the centrality and importance of the state's. A concern in this area of work is that in some member states, the work of the statutory organisations and NGOs can contradict or undermine the work of the other; often without realising that this is the case. There are also issues in some member states around the tendency for the statutory sector to 'diagnose' issues and make referrals for individuals without consulting those experts in the civil society groups and NGOs.

Those who are at risk of becoming radicalised or involved in violent extremism often have a variety of issues that need to be addressed and this means a multi-agency approach to dealing with these issues. Without a joined up approach to delivery - there is a danger that individuals may suffer from '**initiative overload'** because the efforts of one agency are being duplicated by that of another. This can also lead to a greater risk off 'drop out' and disengagement if individuals become disaffected. An additional risk is that agencies are not consistent with the messages that are being delivered to those individuals/ groups with whom they are working.

**Recommendations:**

- That there is a multi-agency approach to working with genuine engagement between the statutory sector and NGOs/ civil society organisation. Real consideration needs to be given to the needs, approaches and experience of the NGOs/ civil society organisations with an emphasis on 'doing with' rather than 'doing to' those organisations in terms of policies and procedures.

- That mechanisms are put in place to ensure that civil society organisations/ NGOs are involved and included in institutional decision making and are considered a significant partner rather than featuring as an 'after thought' or an agency to refer to at a later stage. This will also assist in ensuring that there is effective handover of participants should individuals be referred on to other agencies.

### 3.4    Effective, well researched counter-narratives needed

The working group recognised the importance of counter-narrative in the role of preventing violent extremism. Concerns were raised about the number of narratives that exist and their diverse nature

dependent upon the type of 'radicalisation' e.g. Far right/ Islamic/ Roma etc. There is also a recognition that within different types of extremism -there is also the potential for variations on those themes with new narratives occurring in different threads at a rapid pace.

Practitioners report a lack of understanding as to what those narratives are and a lack confidence in how to tackle them. There is also a concern however that those materials and narratives that are developed to counter them– need to be thoroughly researched with training and guidance on how they can be delivered in conjunction with other types of intervention.

Early suggestions are that in Central and Eastern Europe - **'ridicule the radical'** is a method that is being utilised to try to dissuade and turn individuals away from radical groups. Using methods such as 'you tube' adverts (see for example a German spot used in Slovakian prevention campaigns as well: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EI6mfwLMwdc), films and poster campaigns featuring amongst some of the methods that are being used in Central and Eastern Europe to challenge attitudes and positions.

"Ridiculing", however, is a strategy for prevention that needs to be examined and investigated thoroughly. *The extreme right lives and dies by provocation*. As demonstrated by a number of examples, fear-mongering and diabolising the far right extremists may often backfire and could in fact increase the relevance and reach of these organizations.

**Recommendations**:

- That counter-narratives are well researched and produced providing references and clear instructions on how they can be delivered as part of a wider package to countering extreme views/ ideas/ attitudes

- Resources and materials are developed to provide clear guidance to practitioners/ front-line deliverers

- Training programmes are in place to develop people's understanding, knowledge and capacity to deliver these narratives
  Making their ideas the subject of ridicule (the far right's simplistic, bombastic and single-minded ideology offer an excellent target) may be a much more effective strategy than all the efforts to sow fear.

### 3.5    Involving 'formers' in the process of preventing violent extremism

The involvement of those formerly involved in violent extreme groups was recognised as an important and valuable component of processes. The voices of those who have experience of being involved in these groups provide an important and often unrivalled perspective into the reasons why people become involved. Their involvement in processes which are aimed at increasing the knowledge of professionals, policy and decision makers and front-line practitioners alike is key as this enables people to gain an insight into motivations and influencing factors. RAN Prevent heard of how 'formers' have been involved in trainings, seminars and conferences alike in some members states.

There is also another role for former perpetrators in the work with young people themselves.  Those individuals that are vulnerable to becoming radicalised and involved in violent extremism have often been targeted and influenced by persuasive and charismatic individuals. To hear about the reality of involvement from those who have 'been there' and experienced the reality and then come through with a positive message about turning away from violence is not to be under-estimated in terms of the impact that it has on individuals.

There are challenges in some member states in terms of the issues surrounding the 'ethics' of having 'formers' involved in this work. In addition –there are issues around risk management and a concern that they may promote the 'wrong' message or have a negative influence on individuals. This is not just a consideration for those involved in delivery, but is something which, in some member states – is actually dictated by those in governments and statutory agencies who ultimately 'block' the involvement of formers in this work where projects are government funded. Working group members argued that there is a need to recognise that many of those organisations delivering this specialist work are professionals who often have robust quality assurance measures in place to safeguard and manage risk in such situations. The Voices of those involved in the practice must also be listened to and considered as well as expertise acknowledged and respected.

**Recommendations:**

- Trust agencies to be able to manage and minimise risk of having formers involved in the work

- If capacity is low – work to increase that so that agencies and organisations learn to manage that risk where appropriate

### 3.6 Opportunities for sharing grievances in a safe space

RAN Prevent's group sees a challenge around the ability of people to express their grievances. For many of those who became involved in or who were drawn towards violent extremism, the process is often the result of a myriad of issues, often including a dissatisfaction with domestic/ foreign policy. As a result of some of the EU's Western MS move towards inclusive and cohesive communities, the use of negative 'hate' language or criticism about individuals and groups is often considered to be taboo and is even punished (*example is children making racist comments in school and being excluded from the classroom or Muslim criticising Western foreign policy towards Palestine/ Israel and being chastised for criticising such policy decisions*). There is an overwhelming tendency to ignore, chastise or exclude people when such narratives are promoted/ comments made. Labelled as racist or discriminatory, individuals are dismissed as extreme and unwelcome. The vulnerable individual, who has a real or perceived grievance based on his own experience, often develops then a sense of injustice. Preventing individuals who are already excluded, isolated and whom harbour a sense of injustice from sharing these views, does not address the root cause though. This is particularly important when people become involved in extreme groups while such stories are utilised to reinforce a notion of 'us and them' scenario which can further entrench positions.

There are additional benefits to allow these 'difficult conversations' to take place as they can prevent attitudes and ideas becoming entrenched at an early stage by promoting a culture of honesty and openness. Naturally, such grievances should be challenged, but the challenge should be constructive and sensitive recognising that combative, dismissive behaviour could result in further entrenchment.

**Recommendations:**

- Develop the capacity and confidence for facilitators to hold 'difficult conversations'

- Promote structures and processes that allow criticising foreign and domestic policy and promote rather than inhibit discussion

**3.7    Need for more comparative data, more political vigilance and a political framework**

In some EU MS, the problem is that both the will and the expertise is missing for the effective counter-strategies against radicalisation. More study is needed to better understand the phenomenon, especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

The typical problems are the following:
- Lack of enough recognition of radicalisation
- No common definition on the problems, extremist groups, victims and vulnerables
- Racist and right-wing  violent and terrorist acts are  not always recognised and often registered as acts of violent extremism
- Dealing with the symptoms only (the supply side)  and not the roots of the problem (demand side)
- Need for tolerance education and democracy education. NGOs could be involved in such activities.
- Authorities do not always treat NGOs as partners (widespread suspicion)
- There is no obvious political and state 'model' on how to deal with radicalism (repressive/restrictive ), the responses of the state actors (police, courts, government) are ad hoc.
- No reliable comparative data exists.
- Institutional prejudices should be challenged.


**Recommendations:**

- The EU could make a Framework Strategy (similar to the Roma Framework Strategy) on to how to deal with radicalisation.
- A task force could be set up within the Commission in order to find more comprehensive solutions that enjoy broad political support when elaborating the Framework Strategy.
- Pooling experiences of different international organisations that are dealing with such issues (including Council of Europe, UNDHR, etc.) could be helpful in preparing the programme and have a broad support for the goals and tools laid down in the strategy.
- Internationally recognized experts and NGOs can provide support for the preparation of national framework strategies
- Try to establish a good monitoring system and analysis of the situation (without just putting this task on the MS) in order to be able to assess the depth of the problems in a given MS.
- Launch targeted program of dealing with institutional prejudices (in police, courts, immigration officers, etc.) with special trainings, exchange programs, more rigorous selection mechanisms.
- The Police needs extra vigilance: organise 1-1 meetings. mentoring and coaching for police-forces (at local level and develop toolkits or tasks-to-do lists  that will leverage the learning at local level
- Use of global grants should be encouraged for NGOs where the state is not helpful enough in providing support. It can reduce the dependency of NGOs from state actors.


**4.  The role of local actors in preventing violent extremism, from the perspective of the WG**

The importance of the role of local actors was mentioned in detail in policy recommendation 3.2 in this report. The RAN PREVENT working group made the following significant observations on this issue:

**'Local issues is a local problem and needs local solutions'**

There is a very real need to engage, where resistance or apathy may exist - with those in the communities that are experiencing issues and problems. The working group discussed issues of inclusion and participation and highlighted the need for local actors to be involved in delivering or at least supporting and collaborating with the interventions. There are numerous benefits to this:

- Local actors have an in depth understanding and knowledge of the issues facing their community – including who the 'excluded' are

- Relationships of trust already exist or are often easier to establish and maintain

- Ability to maintain a long term physical presence

- Higher stakes and interest in seeing positive community relations
- Local actors may be able to offer sustainable support networks and opportunities to those who have been involved in prevention programmes/ interventions

## 5. <u>The role of diasporas in the process of violent radicalisation, from the perspective of the WG</u>

Much of the debate on diasporas and conflict has centred on the question of whether their interaction with home countries exacerbates conflict or contributes to the processes of conflict resolution. The dominant research and policy paradigm has focused on the negative security role of diaspora communities both in their homelands and on international security. Some analysts have pointed to the negative influence of diaspora groups in fuelling conflicts in their homelands by supporting warring groups and adopting militant and hard line positions which protracts conflicts and complicates the process of peaceful settlement (Lyons, 2004). Lyons therefore sees a need to engage with diasporas and transform them from 'hawks into doves'.

Since 9/11, governments and policy makers in Western countries have also targeted certain diaspora communities as potential threats to international security. However, this has also served to alienate some of these communities and driven others to extremism. Research has also shown that diaspora communities are not only impacted by foreign policy interventions, they also help to shape and influence it (Demmers, 2007).

For each member state represented, there were examples of positive engagement and lack of/ challenges in engagement with diaspora. Working group members shared examples of initiatives where community engagement with the diaspora has been successful in delivering positive results including positive role models, strong and authoritative voices and high levels of participation amongst even some of the most under-represented groups (e.*g. Pakistani Muslim women in a UK based project*) are examples whereby members of the diaspora have taken the lead in communities leading on initiatives of leadership and conflict resolution.

The group did however also share examples of where there has been a lack of engagement with the diaspora and reported that where there is lack of engagement and participation, divisions and tensions with other communities are increasing all the time fuelled by national policy and media influences as well as social. In addition, although diaspora communities are sometimes presented as homogenous entities, there are lots of divisions within these communities, mirroring the internal political and ethnic divisions in their home countries and any initiatives or interventions targeting these communities have to take this added complexity into consideration.

The group discussed the importance of working with these communities and in particular, those communities where individuals from or even those who are '*fighting in the name of*' their particular communities are those becoming radicalised. The working group concluded that it is of increasing importance for those communities to be aware of their importance and responsibility in tackling these issues as it is felt that in attempts to softly engage – diaspora communities are not always aware of the seriousness of the issues at hand or indeed the ways in which they can exacerbate matters or assist in healing.

### 6. The role of communication on the Internet and elsewhere, from the perspective of the WG

The internet and the social media is a useful source of radicalisation and de-radicalisation at the same time. Some research[1] suggests that the social media, that is closing the youth in a small social-political environment, can contribute to the radicalisation of the youngsters. The main problem is that youngsters that are using the internet and social media channels several hours a day are lacking the critical thinking skills that would be needed to judge the credibility of the sources they use and regard even the most extreme opinions as 'facts'.

As RAN@ is extensively dealing with such issues, we would just come up here with a few recommendations that can be relevant from the perspective of prevention:

**Recommendations:**

- More research would be important to assess the specific impact of Social Media channels on radicalisation (on a personal level-case studies and not just on a social level)
- Elaborating efficient prevention tools on the social media (e.g. using some "ridiculing" materials and examining their impact in some pilot projects/focus groups/experiments).
- Increasing and promoting best practice to improve the "digital literacy" of the youngsters that can make them more resistant to online and social media propaganda and try to make steps to make it part of the national curriculums.

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[1] http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/truth-lies-and-the-internet