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CONCLUSION PAPER
RAN Practitioners Study Visit
15-16 March 2023, New York City, USA

Racially and Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism (REMVE)/Violent Right-wing Extremism (VRWE) in the US and EU

Key outcomes

Following lethal terror attacks, for example, in Christchurch, New Zealand (2019), Halle, Germany (2019), Hanau, Germany (2020), Buffalo, United States (US) (2022) and Bratislava, Slovakia (2022), carried out by lone-acting male perpetrators ([1]), the racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE)/violent right-wing extremism (VRWE) ideology has become increasingly important on both the US and European preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) agenda. As today's ideological and demographic profile of REMVE/VRWE actors has become broader, more differentiated and global, **international exchange aiming at improving the prevention and countering of REMVE/VRWE online and offline is essential to identify effective approaches**.

As the REMVE/VRWE environment rejects democratic societies and invalidates democratic and human rights-based institutions, practitioners responding to the threat need proper and accurate information to support their work. The current trend points towards more international and transatlantic cooperation between REMVE/VRWE groups, making the **cooperation and sharing of responses and practices between EU and US practitioners highly pertinent and it should continue**.

Key takeaways of the 2-day study visit include:

Both US and EU practitioners face **similar challenges**, both related to content and to carrying out the actual P/CVE work. A few examples:

- It is necessary to better involve mental health practitioners in P/CVE. The US has gaps when it comes to mental health, psychological and social systems and the capacity of these segments to talk to each other. Similarly, within most EU Member States (EU MSs) cooperation between the health and security sectors is hard to establish.

- Grievances of radicalising or radicalised persons are often genuine and need to be acknowledged. The act of listening can turn these problems into an opportunity to empower and encourage healthy engagement with legal/political/social systems to change things for the better. Compassion paired with accountability needs to be made the standard. While empathy is crucial, radicalised persons also need to own and take responsibility for their own actions.

- Practitioners are looking into smarter ways to use online approaches in their P/CVE work. US practitioners seem to have more experience with working with persons in online settings, such as online mentorship

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([1]) While acting individually, the perpetrators however frequently radicalise in online spaces and thus not in isolation.

provided by formers as well as trained mental health professionals. As underlined during the meeting, the technical infrastructure exists to reach individuals online at a large scale and offer them opportunities to opt in to prevention and exit programmes, whether on- or offline.

- Practitioners agreed that working in a multi-agency approach / in a cross-sectoral manner with, for example, law enforcement, civil society organisations (CSOs), schools, mental health professionals, is needed but not always easy to establish. Many of the US practitioners expressed a wish to have a network system like the EU's Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) that would allow for more collaboration and exchange opportunities in the US and internationally.

- While a lot of knowledge and P/CVE-related resources exist in the US context, they are disjointed and do not yet complement each other.

- The concept of supporting persons in rehabilitation and reintegration after being radicalised/incarcerated differs across the Atlantic. More exchange to learn from each other's approaches and initiatives could benefit the enhancement of exactly these efforts that play an important role in the prevention of recidivism and sustainable disengagement.

- The work in tertiary prevention and exit work heavily relies on risk and needs assessment. US, Canadian and EU practitioners could benefit from in-depth exchange on these risk and needs assessment tools and practices and exchange lessons learned in this context.

- Countering anti-Semitism in the context of CVE is still one of the most challenging aspects in prevention. It requires not only addressing explicit forms of extremism such as well-known anti-Semitic, white supremacy or right-wing ideologies, but also the underlying dynamics of dehumanisation and justification for violence.

Highlights of the discussion

Following an overview of definitions and developments in REMVE/VRWE across the US and EU, participants jointly took stock of established practices as well as continuing challenges across primary, secondary and tertiary prevention before specifically looking into P/CVE structures in the context of law enforcement, mental health, rehabilitation and on the local level. The meeting built on a shared understanding that P/CVE requires a whole-of-society approach and therefore differs from existing counterterrorism-related efforts.

Taking stock

- Across the US, Canada and Europe, definitions of the phenomenon at hand vary. Next to REMVE/VRWE, Canada and Australia refer to ideologically motivated violent extremism, while the United Nations in a report published in 2022 refers to terrorism "on the basis of xenophobia, racism and other forms of intolerance, or in the name of religion or belief", motivated by far-right or extreme right-wing ideology ([2]).

- Efforts in the sphere of **tertiary prevention** aim at disengaging and/or deradicalising persons (both motivated and unmotivated to make a change) considered radicalised, who are engaged in extremism and/or have been convicted of terrorism-related charges, with the goal of rehabilitating and reintegrating them into society.

- By understanding radicalisation as a process of socialisation and addressing the social and contextual factors that contribute to it, more effective strategies to disengage individuals from extremist feelings, thinking and behaviours can be developed. This may include promoting positive social influences, fostering inclusive identities, challenging extremist ideologies, addressing group dynamics and promoting social norms.

  o **Exit Sweden**, **Exit Germany** and **Exit USA** are CSOs that have been dedicated to disengaging extremists from REMVE/VRWE for more than 20 years.

  o Active both within and outside of the judicial system, organisations working in tertiary prevention generally aim at highly individualised support of their clients. This includes:

    ▪ psychosocial support, for example, in the form of building new networks, re-establishing contact with friends and family, psychotherapy, etc.; as well as

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([2]) See: https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/news/secretary-general%E2%80%99s-new-report-highlights-new-emerging-form-%E2%80%9Cfar-right%E2%80%9D-terrorism

- ▪ functional support in terms of taking up education and finding employment and/or housing.
  - o In the US, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, telehealth services have become prevalent. These services extend into tertiary prevention. The CSO **Life after Hate's** Exit USA programme works with such an approach, offering an online one-on-one peer–mentor programme (see section on relevant practices).
  - o While the prevalence of CSOs in the exit field has grown across the EU over the past decade (³), it generally constitutes a nascent area of engagement in the US at this moment.
- CVE efforts can benefit from drawing lessons and insights from adjacent fields, such as gangs. While the dynamics and context of gangs and violent extremism may differ, there are common elements when it comes to working with people affected, for example, understanding root causes, building trust, adopting social, economic and psychological aspects of the client, and offering support for rehabilitation, deradicalisation and reintegration into society.

- **Secondary or selective prevention** aims at working with persons demonstrating signs of radicalisation, who may for example seek out extremist content online or engage with members of extremist groups.
  - o Ways of engaging in this sphere include engaging clients in one-on-one discussions as well as training **the immediate network** (parents, teachers, social workers, sports coaches, etc.) to identify signs of radicalisation. In the US, this is also referred to as engaging **bystanders**, who are considered most likely to notice a shift in behaviour but the least likely to report something (e.g. as they might be afraid of law enforcement. To have a chance at disengaging a client, two things are crucial:
    - ▪ building a trusted relationship in order to have difficult conversations (not necessarily about ideology);
    - ▪ engaging the client in a pro-social vs anti-social activity and thus offering them a social connection elsewhere.
  - o When faced with a radicalised individual, whether at school or in the workplace, the rational choice is often to discharge someone the teacher or management consider an extremist.
    - ▪ When people are excluded as an easy fix, while this might solve the immediate problem for the institution, it does not address the larger societal problem and might increase the chance of the individual ending up before their computer with additional free time to descend even further into the ideology.
    - ▪ Many practitioners working with radicalised individuals report the challenge of keeping their clients employed. By engaging in dialogue with the employers and motivating them to see the benefits of decreased social exclusion for the individuals, a more successful reintegration and rehabilitation can take place.
    - ▪ The responsibility for the decision to keep a radicalised individual included in school or the workplace should not be placed on the shoulders of one single individual but requires shared ownership on the local level.

- **Primary or universal prevention** aims at fostering soft skills (such as media-literacy, negotiation skills or conflict resolution) across the general public that form the basis of socially engaging with each other peacefully and democratically. Examples of primary prevention projects are:
  - o The Dutch project **Dare to be Grey** and the Swedish **Tolerance** project (see section on relevant practices).
  - o The US campaigns **If You See Something, Say Something®** and **Safe2Tell** (see relevant practices) are situated between primary and secondary prevention as while they aim to raise awareness about (among other things) radicalisation, if correctly identified may lead to opening a case for secondary prevention engagement.
- Similarly, primary prevention may also include basic awareness training for first-line practitioners.

(³) See: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/whats-new/publications/role-civil-society-organisations-exit-work-may-2022_en

- With regard to public awareness campaigns, practitioners agreed that credible messengers are crucial and that federal government institutions are oftentimes not perceived as such (⁴), as well as that while addressing the general public, primary prevention still benefits from being rooted in the local context.

- Since primary prevention is quite broad, perceiving as primary prevention adjacent efforts such as countering domestic violence can help streamline and bundle efforts. The US faces issues in primary prevention as school settings are increasingly politicised, making it hard to engage students in K-12 (⁵). However, projects are building out information and tools for those outside of school, but it's still hard due to cultural opinions around mental health and free speech.

Law enforcement

- Police most often play a key role in P/CVE. The shift in attention towards REMVE/VRWE therefore requires training to get police officers informed about narratives, symbolism and structures of REMVE/VRWE actors.

- Existing threat assessment and risk management mechanisms, including structured professional judgment tools, need to be tested and applied to increasingly detect new and ideologically less straightforward cases. Canadian law enforcement practitioners utilise the Violent Extremism Screening Analysis.

  o When discussing the issue of threat assessment, practitioners mentioned that perceptions of threat levels seem higher with regard to Islamist extremism than to REMVE/VRWE and that this stems from a sense of otherness that is present in relation to Islamist extremism but not necessarily in REMVE/VRWE, as it is easier to see the threat in others than in oneself.

- The global scale and interconnection between REMVE/VRWE actors, both on- and offline, increasingly requires cooperation and information exchange across national borders, which is currently still an obstacle.

- Existing legislation in the US does not allow to prosecute domestic terrorist organisations in the same way as foreign terrorist organisations.

  o Despite some leading figures having been convicted in relation to the 6 January 2021 uprisings, members of the Oath Keepers are not indicated on any official list, as they have not been labelled a terrorist organisation.

  o The Buffalo shooter was the first case to be charged with domestic terrorism motivated by hate in the state of New York under a 2020 statute, which was implemented following the terrorist attack in El Paso, Texas in 2019.

  o In the US, **Fusion Centres** are state-owned and operated centres serving as focal points on the state level for the receipt, analysis, gathering and sharing of threat-related information between various entities, including the federal, state and local levels. They will, for example, receive information from prisons on releases of individuals who had been convicted of terrorism-related charges.

- Overall, cases of high-profile bad policing have eroded trust in the US police in recent years. Meanwhile, anti-authority narratives are prevalent across the US, Canada and the EU.

Police and mental health

- While practitioners highlighted the benefit of cooperation and exchange between law enforcement, social work and mental health practitioners, they also noted a hesitancy/resistance to such cooperation particularly from social workers.

- Both Canada and France have created positions for mental health professionals within police departments.

- Across Canada, different pilot projects have been launched, including the Mobile Crisis Response Team in Elgin County and the Town of Aylmer, the Mobile Outreach Support Team in St. Thomas and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police's Police Mental Health Outreach Team in Surrey.

- Practitioners agreed that law enforcement officers would generally benefit from receiving basic training in cognitive behavioural therapy.

(⁴) For further information on counter- and alternative narrative messaging, see: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2021-07/ran_activities_in_cn_overview_paper_en.pdf
(⁵) Meaning students in kindergarten aged 5–6 years old through 12th grade, when students are around 17–18 years old.

Mental health

- The mental health sectors in both the US and the EU are marked by structural labour shortages, limiting the availability of professionals to engage in the P/CVE sphere.

- Stigmatisation still plays a role when it comes to mental health and may discourage individuals from seeking out care. At the same time, tying mental health issues to terrorist activities and vice versa increases the fear of mental health professionals to engage with (violent) extremist clients.

- Practitioners noted a hesitancy from mental health professionals to engage with ideology. Therefore, in order to engage with the target group appropriately, mental health professionals could benefit from basic training related to extremist ideology.

  o When it comes to working with clients in the P/CVE sphere however, working on personal issues related to social and family life may be better points of initial reference as opposed to ideology.

- Learning from experience in adjacent fields such us drug abuse, practitioners noted that it is crucial to take into consideration a depressive state they referred to as 'the void' that may surface after disengagement.

Rehabilitation

- The Violence Prevention Network, a CSO in tertiary prevention in Germany, offers not only counselling but also individual training, group training, workshops on political education, transition management, and stabilisation coaching in prison and probation.

- In addition, a national network has been expanded in Germany since 2017 working on radicalisation prevention and deradicalisation in prison and probation facilitated by a network of civic actors working only on this topic. In comparison, there are still no rehabilitation programmes in this field in the US.

- Former ([6]) violent extremists often have unique insights and perspectives on the drivers and dynamics of radicalisation and extremism.

  o Parents for Peace is a community-based organisation that focuses on building resilience, promoting positive parenting practices by engaging parents and families in efforts to protect their children from radicalisation and extremist ideologies.

  o What does it take to rehabilitate someone? ([7]) Rehabilitation is a challenging and ongoing process that requires a multidimensional and multidisciplinary approach.

Local

- Taking stock of multi-agency cooperation in the context of behavioural threat assessment management and extending this approach to radicalisation involves collaborative efforts among agencies and stakeholders. This specific approach typically assesses and manages individuals who may pose a threat to themselves or others due to concerning behaviours.

- Building networks and multi-agency approaches requires clearly defined roles and responsibilities, a transparent framework for decision-making, coordination, and accountability among the participating agencies and stakeholders. But also needed is encouraging a sense of ownership and responsibility among agencies, organisations and individuals involved.

The online sphere

- In the context of marketing algorithms, this requires acknowledging the risks and negative effects associated with the algorithms' amplification of extremist content. It highlights the need for increased transparency, accountability and responsible use in the online sphere. Marketing algorithms, designed to target specific audiences with tailored content, can contribute to spreading extremist ideas and narratives online. Examples include reinforcing echo chambers and filter bubbles, personalisation of extremist messaging, the manipulation of emotions and behaviours, and the exploitation of especially vulnerable populations.

([6]) See: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-01/ran_paper_involving_formers_in_exit_work_11112021_en.pdf
([7]) See: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2020-06/ran_rehab_manual_en.pdf

- Working with individuals both online and offline is crucial in preventing radicalisation. Online engagement can help to reach individuals who may be at risk in the privacy of their online spaces, providing them with resources, support and alternative perspectives. Building trust and rapport online can also enable offline interventions, such as one-on-one counselling, mentoring and community-based programmes.

Recommendations

- The 'do no harm' principle emphasises the importance of avoiding any actions or interventions that may unintentionally contribute to further harm or negative consequences, while pursuing efforts to prevent violent extremism. Ensure that interventions are respectful, inclusive and effective in addressing the complex and multifaceted issue of violent extremism.

- By integrating primary prevention efforts into the field of CVE and drawing on lessons from adjacent fields such as countering domestic violence, it is possible to adopt a proactive and preventive approach that addresses the underlying drivers of violent extremism and builds resilience within individuals and communities.

- Building practitioner networks can be a valuable strategy in CVE as it enables collaboration, information sharing and mutual learning among practitioners working in the field. By building effective practitioner networks, practitioners can leverage collective knowledge, experiences and resources to develop innovative and effective strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism. Such networks can contribute to more coordinated and comprehensive CVE efforts at local, national and international levels.

- Fostering exchange between police and mental health professionals can be an important strategy by addressing the mental health aspects of radicalisation and supporting early intervention and prevention efforts. For example, foster interdisciplinary communication, promote cultural sensitivity and inclusivity, share resources and expertise, and promote confidentiality and privacy.

- The civic front should be as comprehensive as possible, including CSOs, media, religious communities, social services, health services, schools, families, local communities, sports groups/associations, minority groups, politicians, youth assembly groups, business groups, survivors/victims groups and associations, free legal aid providers, police, judges/prosecutors and others. Key documents (strategies, policy papers, action plans) are lacking, while relevant approaches (such as capacity building), indicators, and reports (monitoring reports, data analysis, yearly data, etc.) should be established.

Relevant practices

The Canadian triaging approach is a holistic and collaborative approach that aims to prevent and counter violent extremism by addressing the root causes of radicalisation and promoting behavioural change. It recognises the importance of assessment, intervention and community engagement in creating a comprehensive and effective strategy.

Dare to be Grey started as a group of students in the Netherlands in 2016 as an innovative practice that promotes critical thinking, empathy and dialogue as effective tools for countering extremism. By encouraging individuals to embrace complexity, challenge binary thinking and become active agents of change in their communities, the project aims to foster a more inclusive and resilient society.

Exit USA was founded by former violent extremists based in the US and focuses on assisting individuals who are seeking to disengage from extremist ideologies and groups. The programme employs a comprehensive and individualised approach to help individuals transition out of extremist movements and reintegrate into society.

Motivational interviewing is a client-centred, goal-oriented counselling approach used to enhance intrinsic motivation and change behaviour. Developed by psychologists William Miller and Stephen Rollnick, motivational interviewing is often used in the fields of addiction treatment, health behaviour change and mental health.

The Redirect Method is an open-source methodology that uses targeted advertising to connect people searching online for harmful content with constructive alternative messages. Piloted by Jigsaw and Moonshot in 2016 and subsequently deployed internationally by Moonshot in partnership with tech companies, governments and grassroots organisations, it uses pre-existing content made by communities across the globe, including content not created for the explicit purpose of countering harm, to challenge narratives which support violent extremism, violent misogyny, disinformation and other online harms.

The See Something, Say Something method is a community-based approach that encourages individuals to report suspicious or potentially dangerous behaviour or activities to appropriate authorities, such as law enforcement or security personnel. It is often used in the context of public safety and security, with the aim of preventing crime, terrorism and other harmful acts.

Safe2Tell is an anonymous reporting system in the US that allows students, parents, school, staff and community members to report concerns about potential school safety threats or other risky behaviours. It is a programme designed to provide a safe and confidential way to report information that may help prevent violence, self-harm, or other harmful incidents in schools or communities.

The field of social diagnostics offers valuable tools and instruments that to date have been largely overlooked in the context of practical P/CVE. Nonetheless, these instruments can complement security-focused risk assessments with a much-needed social perspective on the individual needs and resources of a person by: 1) providing concrete support for intervention planning; 2) providing guidance on a person's progress; 3) ensuring transparency of decision-making, supplementing processes of risk assessment and assisting in multi-agency communication; and 4) advancing a holistic understanding of a person's needs, vulnerabilities, resources and risks – when carried out alongside psychodiagnostical risk assessment.

The Tolerance project is a pedagogical model for use in schools that aims to prevent the recruitment of young people to extremist organisations, as well as combatting intolerance and racism in general. The Tolerance project is usually led by a multi-professional team of teachers, social workers and youth workers. A typical group consists of about 25 students from different social, ethnic and educational backgrounds who are usually from different schools within the same municipality.

Follow-up

As the threat from REMVE/VRWE environments continues to pose a threat in the EU and in the US, further attention to their prevention and responses should be given to ensure professionals are accurately equipped. During the meeting, there was a strong interest in continuing the exchange and cooperation between RAN Practitioners, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and US practitioners.

Further reading

RAN cross-cutting thematic event, 2021: Lone actors – Jointly taking stock of recent developments and combining knowledge

RAN Prevention of radicalisation (2023)

RAN FC&S Conclusion paper, 2021: Violent right-wing extremism in communities

RAN Conclusion paper, 2022: Conspiracy narratives and anti-government sentiments in relation to (V)RWE and other forms of extremism

Mattsson, C., & Johansson, T. (2020). Talk is silver and silence is gold? Assessing the impact of public disengagement from the extreme right on deradicalization. *Journal for Deradicalization, 24*, 79-112. https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/385

Moonshot & Anti-Defamation League, 2021: White Supremacy Search Trends in the United States

Moonshot CVE Report, 2021: From Shitposting to Sedition. Tracking and countering conspiracy theories, disinformation and violence around the 2020 presidential election

Anti-Defamation League, 2019: Hate on Display. Hate Symbols Database

Counter Extremism Project, 2020: Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Connectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures

The Soufan Center, 2019: White Supremacy Extremism: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement

The Soufan Center, 2021: Quantifying The Q Conspiracy: A Data-Driven Approach to Understanding the Threat Posed by QAnon

United States Secret Service, 2021: Mass Attacks in Public Spaces: 2016 - 2020

RAN EDU Ex-post paper, 2019: Far-right extremism in the classroom

RAN LOCAL Conclusion paper, 2022: Preventing possible violence based on anti-government extremism on the local level

RAN H&SC Ex-post paper, 2019: Grooming for terror – Manipulation and control

RAN Centre of Excellence, 2019: Factbook – Far-right extremism

RAN Spotlight, 2020: Violent right-wing extremism in focus

RAN FC&S Conclusion paper, 2021: Violent right-wing extremism in communities

RAN small-scale expert session, 2020: The Role of Hotbeds of Radicalisation