

# EX POST PAPER

## Engaging with communities in P/CVE

### Introduction

The involvement and the support of communities are **fundamental to the success of campaigns and programmes aimed at preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE)**. On the other hand, prevention and deradicalisation can only succeed with **the approval and support of the local administration and at policy level**, since they are the major funders and agenda setters with regards to this issue<sup>(1)</sup> This paper will discuss how these actors can best collaborate.

In terms of prevention, **communities can offer a sense of belonging and challenge radical ideologies**. Indoctrination works best when there are no contradictions from the immediate social environment — activating community voices to counteract radical messages therefore helps reduce extremism and polarisation. Communities can **provide early warning**, by identifying potentially vulnerable individuals. Research has shown that community engagement can assist police and intelligence agencies and can provide opportunities for action against the root causes of violent extremism<sup>(2)</sup>. At the intervention stage, communities can **help conceptualise and deliver campaigns**, as that radicalised people are more likely to listen to voices from

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<sup>1</sup> RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices, [Preventing radicalisation to terrorism and violent extremism: Community engagement and empowerment](#), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Pilkington, H., 2018, [Violent extremism: how communities can help counter it](#).

their own community, given their sense of belonging<sup>(3)</sup>. Additionally, community engagement offers legitimacy and credibility to local campaigns and initiatives. Community engagement can also **provide potential entry points to individual networks** in order to reach persons at risk. It is helpful in a broader respects as well, **such as strengthening social cohesion and democracy**.

There are several interpretations of **the word 'community'** and several criteria to delineate it, such as location, identity or type of organisation<sup>(4)</sup>. For the purposes of P/CVE, it is important to work with a pragmatic concept of community that corresponds to the intersubjective perception of belonging and can encompass various sizes and features. Whatever definition is used, the overall framework of community engagement must be embedded in a **multi-agency approach** and include the **whole of society**. Positive change in this field can only be brought about through the involvement of various professionals on an equal footing and with the participation of both local administration and civil society actors<sup>(5)</sup>.

Building on previous RAN meetings that debated the topic in various formats and outlined lessons learned, the **RAN meeting of 28 September 2018 in Berlin** took up specific priority issues in the area of community engagement and P/CVE and discussed them in detail. Representatives from 26 Member States were present, and the meeting represented **the first opportunity for policy-makers, practitioners and community representatives to meet and discuss** these topics together.

This aspect was the **unique added value of the meeting**, which allowed practitioners and community representatives to directly discuss how policy can assist them in this area, while enabling policy-makers to clarify the priorities and challenges with regard to this topic for people in the field. This ex post paper presents the **issues** discussed in the light of research, policy and practice, as well as examples of **projects and practical experiences**. Finally, it outlines some of the remaining **challenges** along with **recommendations** for further action.

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<sup>3</sup> RAN YF&C event ex post paper, [Strengthening community resilience to polarisation and radicalisation](#), London, Borough of Hounslow, 29-30 June 2017, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this topic, see the RAN event ex post paper [Engaging with communities, Collaboration between local authorities and communities in PVE](#).

<sup>5</sup> RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices, [Preventing radicalisation to terrorism and violent extremism: Community engagement and empowerment](#), p. 7.

## Approaches to community engagement in the EU

Community engagement is not a 'one size fits all' approach. It can take many shapes, and it varies depending on who supports and initiates it, and to what purpose. Some form of community engagement is present in all EU countries; but the execution varies greatly per Member State. According to the *Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process* of the Council of Europe<sup>(6)</sup>, cooperation can involve information sharing, dialogue, consultation and partnerships. Cooperation with communities occurs in the form of dialogue, financial support or training, but there are relatively few examples of actual common endeavours in P/CVE.

With regard to the **types of actors** involved, the entire range is observed — from broad, **multi-agency and whole-of-society** approaches to **cooperation with individual NGOs**, or **one-to-one** rapports such as in the case of community policing. Relatedly, community engagement can cover **a broad range of issues** or **specifically extremism-related issues**. It can also focus on particular ideologies.

Overall, initiatives are managed **centrally** or **locally**, and the kinds of actors involved can be predominantly employees of the administration or predominantly members of the community, depending on national traditions and experiences in these fields. In all programmatic documents and individual initiatives, the crucial role of **science and research** and the importance of partnering with members from the respective community has been acknowledged.

In some countries, such as **Malta**, community engagement is not specifically related to security issues, but to integration. Here, it has been acknowledged that building contacts with

community leaders can contribute to social cohesion and that it is the responsibility of government to ensure the security and well-being of all communities. **Sweden** also applies a broader approach, and the policy for civil society aims to improve the conditions for civil society as an integral part of democracy. Additionally, there is recognition of the fact that civil society organisations (CSOs) often have specific knowledge and other opportunities to reach individuals and groups in society.

Before going into the specific issues which were discussed during the meeting, a number of existing practices relating to more general approaches in to community engagement are briefly presented below:

In the German district of **Charlottenburg-Wilmersdorf**, several **topics** for community engagement have been identified. These topics notably include antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Roma sentiment, right-wing extremism and Islamism, as well as more generally networking and awareness raising throughout civil society, participation and promotion of diversity, along with the development of new participation formats for civil society. The steering committee appointed is broad, with the participation of youth organisations, neighbourhood initiatives, religious communities, representatives of senior citizens, children and youth, as well as police and local administration<sup>(7)</sup>.

The **Dutch** broad approach to community engagement unfolds through multidisciplinary case management, with active engagement focusing in particular on **resilience and early warning**, as communities are one of the actors asked to flag radical behaviour. It is aimed at

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.coe.int/web/ingo/civil-participation>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.demokratie-leben.de/pfd-be-charlottenburg-wilmersdorf.html>

keeping vulnerable groups and individuals ‘on the right path’<sup>(8)</sup>.

In **Slovakia**, the city of Banská Bystrica devised a **strategic document** on the basis of **multi-agency cooperation and community empowerment**. The working group was composed of members from universities, theatre, museums, student council, experts, etc., and the actors were schools, universities, youth and the public, the idea being to fight extremism in the city strategically and in a long-term manner.

**Community policing** is a particularly successful practice in terms of prevention (for more information see the RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices, Preventing radicalisation to

terrorism and violent extremism: Community engagement and empowerment<sup>(9)</sup>.

While the topic of community empowerment is not new in the RAN community of practitioners, policy-makers and researchers, two major areas — each with three related issues — were identified as requiring in-depth discussion:

- Choosing partners from civil society and how to build and maintain trust; in particular: vetting procedures, stigmatisation and loss of credibility, and working with faith communities.
- The preconditions for successful community engagement — particularly, safe spaces, reciprocity and sustainability, and responding to a crisis.



Figure 1 Step-by-step model on community engagement, RAN CoE

<sup>8</sup>[https://english.nctv.nl/binaries/LR\\_100495\\_rapportage\\_EN\\_V3\\_tcm32-251878.pdf](https://english.nctv.nl/binaries/LR_100495_rapportage_EN_V3_tcm32-251878.pdf), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-best-practices/docs/community_engagement_and_empowerment_en.pdf)

[do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-best-practices/docs/community\\_engagement\\_and\\_empowerment\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-best-practices/docs/community_engagement_and_empowerment_en.pdf)

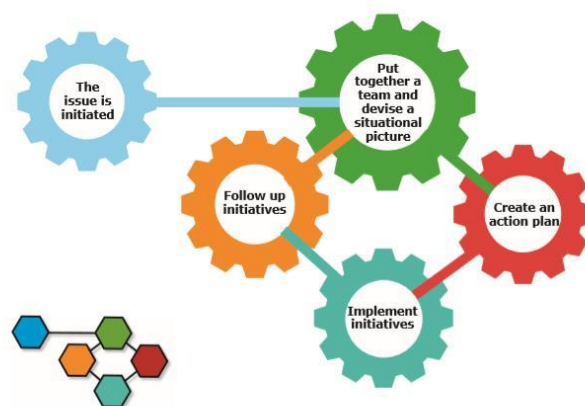
### ***Choosing partners from civil society: building and maintaining trust***

To engage with communities, a selection process will have to occur. It is therefore important to know whom to choose, for what purpose, and how to assess potential risks and negative side effects. This step requires careful consideration in terms of **vetting** procedures, potential risk for **stigmatisation** for the respective community, and the possibility that the local points of contact might lose **credibility** once they engage with authorities. The **engagement of religious communities in P/CVE** is particularly sensitive, and specific issues arise in this context.

To guide community involvement in P/CVE, practical manuals have been produced by RAN and several Member States. The **RAN model of step-by-step community engagement** (see figure 1, page 4) foresees several steps: preparations, establishing contact, selecting partners, dialogue and collaboration, and responding to a crisis.

Issues associated with choosing the right partners are not just specific to step 3 but relate to all steps. Before choosing someone, authorities need to figure out what they want to achieve in the first place and what the situation in the field looks like — thus the step of mapping and preconditions. Clearly, before choosing the appropriate partners, first contact will need to take place in order to assess the suitability of particular organisations for the objectives at hand, among other considerations. Finally, the manner in which dialogue and collaboration are carried out and crises are addressed, will influence the probability that civil society and local authorities will choose to continue to cooperate and the probability that others will follow.

The **Swedish** Agency for Youth and Civil Society has recently produced a guide outlining how public authorities can work with civil society to prevent violent extremism. This guide, named ***Crack the code***, presents a few examples of cooperation between local authorities and civil society, including religious communities<sup>(10)</sup>. The steps outlined are initiation of community engagement, putting together a team and devising a situational picture, creating an action plan, implementing initiatives and carrying out follow-up initiatives.



*Figure 2: Cooperation model from Crack the Code*

In general, it needs to be clear from the very beginning that such processes are lengthy, complex and certainly not linear. Mechanisms of dealing with drawbacks, stalemates and crises — such as loss of credibility or trust — need to be established well in advance

Three important topics related to the issue of choosing partners from civil society were discussed at the meeting: vetting procedures, avoiding stigmatisation and loss of credibility, and working with faith communities.

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.mucof.se/sites/default/files/publikationer\\_uploads/crack\\_the\\_code.pdf](https://www.mucof.se/sites/default/files/publikationer_uploads/crack_the_code.pdf)

### Vetting procedures

Vetting procedures are necessary to prevent the use of public money for purposes contrary to the promotion of democracy and the prevention of extremism. This necessity has been proven by cases of misuse throughout the EU. Vetting procedures are not always required in the first stages of community engagement. **However, the more intense and participatory the cooperation, the greater the need — and when funding is involved, vetting becomes a must.**

Recently, based on the observation that the word ‘vetting’ can be experienced as stigmatising and therefore be counter-productive for cooperation, initiatives have been developed around the concept of ‘due diligence’, whereby openness is advised with regard to due diligence processes being carried out<sup>(11)</sup>. Another alternative term proposed during the meeting to replace the word ‘vetting’ with is ‘**assessing your partners**’.

**In practical terms**, vetting can involve looking up information online and in the media, and it can focus on sources of funding, extremist or polarising statements, ideology, leadership or track record. Vetting can also involve looking into previous experiences and should include an analysis of the kind of NGOs under consideration, their interests, activities and political agenda. Participants made a several of additional recommendations:

- In order to identify the right partners, going into the communities and understanding their issues is an important first step.
- Subscription to democratic values is a precondition, especially when funding is involved.

- When carrying out vetting procedures, avoid publicity that might result in a backlash against communities involved.
- Background checks can in some cases also be carried out with the help of intelligence services.
- There needs to be clarity with regard to the level of collaboration — which can range from information sharing, consultation, dialogue or partnership . Vetting is most important if the collaboration envisaged is a partnership.
- Partners who do not fulfil the criteria set out in vetting procedures can still be involved in dialogue and exchanges.
- Vetting must be done with the aim to prevent all forms of extremism.
- Transparency is important to establish the objective of the collaboration, how work will be carried out, the rules for vetting, and also with regard to informing participants who come out the vetting procedure negatively.
- The nicest people are not necessarily the best partners — critical voices are important and good cooperation skills outweigh different opinions and backgrounds.

In **Denmark**, a number of municipalities have developed guidelines and schemes for cooperation with civil society, which outline the necessary consensus on norms and values. Examples include a value framework established for the anti-radicalisation initiative of the municipality of Aarhus and the Charter for Democratic Values for anti-radicalisation efforts adopted by the municipality of Copenhagen<sup>(12)</sup>. Mosques working within the City of Copenhagen on prevention of extremism have signed the charter. The City has been clear about its agenda, and there is a process of co-creation and up-skilling the leadership of the mosques. The values set out by the Charter include the right to liberty

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<sup>11</sup> ESCN, Insight Paper: Building effective CVE partnerships (June 2018 — paper available on request from [info@escn.ibz.eu](mailto:info@escn.ibz.eu)).

<sup>12</sup> <https://stopekstremisme.dk/en/offers-and-tools/the-toolkit/cooperation-between-authorities-and-civil-society>

and freedom of thought, equality, dignity and rights irrespective of gender, sexual orientation, skin colour, etc.

The vetting practice of **Finland's** Ministry of the Interior involves several steps and considerations: identifying the objective and change pursued by engaging partners; identifying the stakeholders, their resources, access and credibility; and establishing common ground and principles for joint action — in which transparency and open communication are key. This approach clearly differentiates between dialogue and partnerships, and it aims to be inclusive, while acknowledging that there are different options for cooperation and partnerships. It has also identified a number of principles for communication: communication should be open and vetting should be a standard procedure with clear criteria, to be carried out in collaboration, with references to be cross-checked. The principles also call for the vetting process to be concluded with a formal memorandum of understanding outlining the benefits for all parties. Importantly, it has been pointed out that CSOs also carry out their own assessments on whether to collaborate or not and have their own guidelines and procedures for this purpose.

### Stigmatisation and loss of credibility

Stigmatisation can occur by exclusively focussing on certain communities to the extent that they are explicitly associated with extremism and terrorism. The effects of stigmatisation do not only

**diminish the chances of effective P/CVE**, but also reduces civil involvement in general <sup>(13)</sup>. There are various ways to minimise the risk of stigmatisation:

- Use language that does not contribute to stigmatisation and loss of trust in the authorities<sup>(14)</sup>. Use general and inclusive language when discussing extremism, by referring to extremism in general and/or all types of extremism.
- Increase trust through workshops, common projects and 'information hubs' in order to develop a coordinated approach<sup>(15)</sup>.
- Bring people together from various societal groups and backgrounds<sup>(16)</sup>.
- Target groups rather than communities<sup>(17)</sup>.
- Refer to communities as part of the solution rather than as part of the problem.

During the meeting, additional insights were provided. Firstly, individual programmes are not enough; they should go hand in hand with a **strengthening of the existing structures** such as school, youth centres and psychological support services, and it is worth investing in these. Secondly, to gain credibility with specific communities, one should **begin by addressing aspects that are important to these communities first**— be it for example traffic safety, parking or housing, and then move on to P/CVE issues.

In other words, the first question should be: how credible are we in our work towards

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<sup>13</sup> Acik, N. and Pilkington, H., 2018, [Youth mobilisations of 'suspect communities' UK](#).

<sup>14</sup> RAN YF&C event ex post paper, [Strengthening community resilience to polarisation and radicalisation](#), London, Borough of Hounslow, 29–30 June 2017, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices, [Preventing radicalisation to terrorism and violent extremism: Community engagement and empowerment](#), p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Eggert, J. P., 2018, [The roles of women in counter-radicalisation and disengagement \(CRaD\) processes: Best practices and lessons learned from Europe and the Arab world](#). Berlin: Berghof Foundation.

<sup>17</sup> Ranstorp, M., Gustafsson, L., Hyllengren, P. and Ahlin, F., 2016, [Preventing and countering violent extremism, An initial rapid evidence assessment and analysis plan examining local authority action plans and programming elements](#), Swedish Defence University, Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies (CATS), p. 5.

communities? For example, in **Northern Ireland** it was pointed out that after 40 years of endemic relentless violence, the culture of violence is still pervasive, there are still communities where the police are not welcome and where paramilitary organisations act as vigilantes. This situation requires the development of more trusting relations with the police force and the statutory bodies, genuine multi-agency approaches, action to fight stigmatisation, and financial support for communities in need.

Other observations included:

- Care should be taken not to link labels such as refugees, Muslims, migrants, radicalisation, etc.
- It is important to have honest conversations and allow for complex identities.
- Discussions need to be carried out with the communities rather than about the communities; an inclusive approach is needed.
- Engagement needs to be continuous and not just after an event or crisis occurred.
- Let communities define the problems, not the extremists.

The Social Stability Expertise Unit in the **Netherlands** offers authorities, communities and professionals practical advice on reducing radicalisation and social tensions in the country. Its work is based on the premise that resilience can only be ensured through a network of civilians, communities, local professionals and government. In addition to organising activities such as training events and workshops, the unit has produced guidance on building local social networks. These networks are broad, and include (representatives of) religious or migrant community organisations, associations such as sports clubs, as well as (young) individual members. Diversity and representativeness in the network are key. They

produced a guide with practical advice and tips and tricks with regards setting up a P/CVE network of key community figures. It discusses several stages of this process: the decision-making process, setting up a network, implementing and maintaining a network, potential pitfalls. Of particular importance seems to be the management of expectations and the effort to display correct images of reality.

### **Working with faith communities**

The approach to working with faith communities differs from country to country. When working with religious communities, the same basic principles apply as with other kinds of communities<sup>(18)</sup>. As always, clarity of purpose and some basic knowledge about the community in question are necessary in order to be able to engage in a fruitful dialogue, or at all. In general, inviting a very broad range of communities to work in P/CVE, including the church, means that others do not feel stigmatised.

In order to avoid stigmatisation and a loss of credibility, a member of the faith network (an imam for example), can be given the statute of volunteer acting on behalf of a local initiative. Additionally, in working on individual cases, the imam should not act alone but be teamed with a psychologist or social worker already working on the case, so that there is no individual responsibility for the imam only. Information sessions and 'open doors' events can be organised to get communities to know each other. These insights arise from the work carried out with communities by the CVE and De-Radicalisation Service of the city of **Vilvoorde** (Belgium).

In **Dublin**, an interfaith charter has been drafted, the support of the mayor and of the city has been secured, and a statement endorsed by all local faith leaders has been included. Importantly,

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<sup>18</sup> For practical advice, see the RAN LOCAL event ex post paper [How to cooperate with religious](#)

[organisations and communities within the local approach to radicalisation?](#)



emphasis was laid on human rights and helping Muslims develop an understanding of these human rights work within Ireland and how to benefit from those rights.

The **Italian** approach to working with faith communities builds on several insights, such as: religious communities perceive radical ideologies and calls to violence as a distortion of their religion, so that there is a common interest to work together in partnership; faith communities can play a central role in building resilience; they are not vehicles of radicalisation but vulnerable to radicalisation – language should be adapted accordingly; partnerships must rely on common interests and goals. Concrete practices at national level include structured dialogue with the representatives of most important Islamic centres and associations, a council for the relationship with Italian Islam – a permanent forum that includes scientists, and a national pact for an Italian Islam, which includes adherence to constitutional values and legal principles. ‘Italian Islam’ refers to respect for the values of the constitution, recognition as citizen, education and formation. The key concept is building trust with the Islamic community by giving its members responsibility (commitment in the public sphere, hospitals, schools and prisons), sharing common values, providing education (e.g. courses and training for imams) and fostering integration. At the local level, the approach involves worktables for dialogue, close relationship with the Islamic centres and a thorough understanding of the needs of communities.

**Greek** practice in working with faith communities places emphasis on equal treatment of all religions. The General Secretariat of Religious Affairs strives to supervise the religious education system and to connect religion and culture while at the same time promoting activities that support interfaith relations and counter intolerance. The approach, which is to be sustained over the long term, is aimed at ensuring a sense of security within communities and, above all, establishing a relationship of trust with the state, thereby

reducing the risk of religious radicalisation. Personal relationships are key. The approach also builds on existing experiences with the Jewish communities: Greece was the first state to return Jewish properties; organise seminars, conferences, programmes for teachers, projects for students, videos and educational trips to Auschwitz are organised; and there are Jewish schools in operation, to name just a few aspects. Without necessarily referring to a ‘Greek Islam’, there are also efforts here to **integrate, create and maintain local structures – rather than foreign funded ones, and to standardise approaches to religion and the management of religious affairs**. Practices such as these are useful and should be multiplied in the EU, given the numerous side benefits they produce – such as avoidance of stigmatisation, integration rather than exclusion, and the creation of local identities and feelings of belonging. Concrete examples in this context include Islamic religion teachers in mosques and schools, permits to establish and operate houses of prayers and temples, state funding for public covered areas for the great feasts of Islam, and a system by which refugees have access to well-respected religious ministers to practise prayer and preaching in Arabic. At the legal level, a recent law introduced the concept of the religious/ecclesiastical legal person. Another good practice is the **monitoring of incidents against all religious sites**, with an annual report. The aim of these policies is to ensure a sense of security within communities and establish a relationship of trust with the government.

A **Finnish** practice that was also presented is the ‘shoulder-to-shoulder work’ performed by Finn Church Aid – a peacebuilding and development NGO. This initiative, which facilitates dialogue and cooperation between religious groups – Christian, Jewish and Muslim, is part of the national action plan for the prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation and also meant to counter polarisation and tension in society. Concrete activities are meetings and events between different villages, communities, or symbolic gestures of good will, hospitality –

interfaith Iftar or Christian dinner, visits to mosques, collaboration with schools, training activities, and joint responses to vandalism and hate speech. Small gestures such as cleaning the wall of a mosque together can have a great impact. Authorities, local governments and other stakeholders have also been included. Some of the lessons learned following this project as part of this initiative are: **build cooperation that is helpful, relevant and rewarding for all sides** and does not just instrumentalise religious communities; create **structures** that sustain themselves after the project ends; opt for organized and systematic forms of collaborations; and lastly, for policy makers and NGOs; aim to represent **women** and a **broad diversity and plurality**.

### ***Preconditions for successful community engagement***

A meaningful collaboration between communities and authorities in P/CVE requires a range of measures and preconditions: clear objectives and reciprocity, a safe space to discuss sensitive matters, as well as political backing and adequate preparations to respond when a crisis occurs.

#### **Safe spaces**

The issue of safe spaces is one of the more advanced topics as it has been discussed in detail before. Three key features of a safe space have been identified in a previous paper<sup>(19)</sup>: a physical safe space; the right people to build relationships with; and the rules, agreements or rituals to guide the interaction — including the question of whether and how to involve the media. The same paper suggests a ‘going local’ kind of approach regarding the logistics. Other important criteria for

safe spaces are that they must be confidential, physically located in a neutral and discrete place, and not associated with police/security/social services etc.; easily accessible (local level, low threshold to join); home to an open, non-stigmatising and non-judgmental attitude and embraces support and understanding for different viewpoints and experiences. Safe spaces where communities come together, such as at festivals or sports events, have also been recommended in the literature<sup>(20)</sup>.

During the meeting, a series of lessons learned have been outlined:

- Place more emphasis on **building trust** initially.
- Embrace **transparency** and **openness** about P/CVE work and try to **dispel myths**.
- **Listen to concerns** and **react to them**.
- Create **memoranda of understanding and parameters** for work with communities and community groups based on the kinds of things on which there is agreement.
- Balance between engagement and stigmatisation.
- Work **broadly** to include **all types of extremism** in the P/CVE approach.
- Remain aware that **face-to-face contact** is key, including participation at prayers and events.
- Ensure safe spaces also exist at the macro-level, in the form of a **functioning liberal democracy** where CSOs are not viewed as suspect deviants but recognised as citizens and country nationals.
- Engage with Salafi organisations as well and include them in the conversation, as this is a way to challenge and discuss views. Dialogue does not mean collaboration.

<sup>19</sup> RAN LOCAL & YF&C event ex post paper, [Engaging with communities, Collaboration between local authorities and communities in PVE](#), Prague, 22–23 February 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Mayo, M., Blake, G., Diamond, J., Foot, J., Gidley, B., Shukra, K. and Yarnit, M., 2009, Community empowerment and community cohesion: parallel agendas for community building in England?, *Journal of Social Intervention: Theory and Practice*, 18(1), 23–43, p. 39.

- Investments in safe spaces should be made on **structural level** and not only projects — the Association of Viennese Youth Centres, for example, with its 300 employees and 40 venues open at least 5 times a week, is a long-term investment reaching 15 000 to 20 000 people.
- Discussions in safe spaces take time; they are dynamic and **change occurs incrementally**.
- There should be **different safe spaces at different levels**; importantly, **majority communities should also be involved** and issues relating to these communities should also be discussed.
- Safe spaces should furthermore be places to talk to the community and not (only) representatives, as the latter might not represent everyone.
- Whenever possible, all levels of the administration should be on the same side.

A series of **rules on creating safe spaces** have been established in previous meetings:

- Who: delineate the group, provide advance notice on who comes, transparency on who is there and who is not there;
- Where: a local and informal setting.
- How: use language that is understandable for all involved, try not to be too politically correct, involve a moderator and people who are known to both sides.
- What; stick to topics that are important to all involved, initiate the conversation by addressing everyday issues people care about instead of approaching the topic of extremism straight away.

Clearly, in selecting suitable activities, legal confines need to be observed.

An **Austrian** practice of a **transcultural competence** training starts from the premise that safe spaces are in the mind and builds on three components: The first is self-reflection, which involves having to deal with one's own position, aim for clear personal goals, target groups and

people, be aware of their philosophies, but start with oneself in order to trigger a change of perspective. The second component is communication methods (dialogue) and refers to the process of dealing with transculturality, with emphasis placed on the need to transmit self-security and transparency, clarify goals and establish security in the mind. Finally, evaluation and knowledge management — which constitutes the third component — involves optimising one's own steps and working goals, as well as establishing security and continuity of collaboration with people, in order to jointly shape the future society.

The method applied by the **Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism** to create a safe space for dialogue is a tool for municipalities targeting young people in marginalised communities. It is a way to test and try out attitudes in a safe environment and familiarise themselves with the rules of democratic dialogue. Preconditions a safe setting, a moderator which the youngsters trust and who knows their challenges, background and environment. Some of the topics discussed have included tensions between groups in the community, discrimination and stigmatisation.

### **Reciprocity and sustainability**

As mentioned above, there are different types of community engagement, depending on its intensity, which can range from a simple exchange to active inclusion. The type of engagement will depend on the issue and situation at hand, although partnerships can clearly ensure greater credibility and sustainability. Ensuring reciprocity and sustainability involves first of all the formulation of clear objectives. This means considering and **balancing the agendas of both communities and local authorities**. It is also important to aim for long-term engagement

rather than one-off initiatives; **community engagement should be an ongoing activity**<sup>(21)</sup>.

There are several ways to ensure reciprocity. As mentioned before in the case of Belgium, the approach to community engagement pursued in Augsburg (**Germany**) also acknowledges outlined the central importance of **willingness to explore to community concerns unrelated to P/CVE**, for example regarding parks or parking.

Furthermore, as emphasised by the approach followed in **Hungary**, consideration needs to be given to **everyday issues** — running water or access to education, as basic as these topics might be, as builds trust and opens doors. Again, engaging the church and youth organisations as well creates a positive impression and avoids stigmatisation.

Reciprocity also means **empowering and knowing each other**; this includes parallel tackling of extremism and crime, as often people with same vulnerabilities can go either of these ways. In terms of meaningful collaboration, **co-creation instead of pre-determination of objectives** is important, and **bringing people together through the issues that they care about** or that are **most salient** is key. Mutual respect is needed, as are professionalism and an appreciation of different skills.

In the **Finnish** experience, while there was no funding involved, communities were empowered through their participation in actually writing the national action plan 2016 to prevent violent radicalisation in cooperation with authorities, civil society and communities. The action plan targeted

the prevention of all forms of extremism, with different types of measures, and included a focus on human rights and the rule of law. Both large and traditional organisations and young and smaller organisations that reach specific target groups were included, as well as young people, women and religious communities and a network of researchers. Importantly, it was an opportunity to identify partners who did not just talk but also got actively involved.

### Responding to a crisis

From the perspective of community engagement, responding to a crisis involves dealing with rising tensions and fear within and between communities, media spikes, as well as repercussions that can include the use of violence. Typically, discussions so far have focused on the aftermath of terror attacks; recently, but also building on previous experiences, it has become clear that other types of incidents as well as increased levels of fear can also lead to backlashes against particular communities. Adequate responses to crises presuppose relationships of **trust** and tailor-made responses.

A series of other lessons learned have been collected over time:

- Offer assurance and support for communities.
- Consult communities in devising the response.
- Match messages of communities and authorities.
- Use standardised procedures and professional services<sup>(22)</sup>.
- Activate the 'silent middle group' to avoid an increase in polarisation or extreme voices taking over the discourse<sup>(23)</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices, [Preventing radicalisation to terrorism and violent extremism: Community engagement and empowerment](#), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> RAN LOCAL and YF&C event ex post paper, [Engaging with communities, Collaboration between local](#)

[authorities and communities in PVE](#), Prague, 22–23 February 2018, pp. 10–11.

<sup>23</sup> RAN YF&C event ex post paper, [Strengthening community resilience to polarisation and radicalisation](#), London, Borough of Hounslow, 29–30 June 2017, p. 4.

Responding to crises clearly requires **structures and relationships that are already in place**. You need to be able to reach out to a network and resources for initiatives. It is also important to be aware early on **what not to do** — reactions of force or other measures that can make things worse. **The media need to be trained** on how to support communities.

During the meeting, the response of the **city of Manchester** following the attacks of 22 May 2017 was presented and found to illustrate several of the points made above. There was a pre-existent plan to rethink the Prevent strategy<sup>(24)</sup>, engage with communities and address their grievances. Three major dialogue events were organised, in different locations. All sectors and agencies were invited along with citizens, and events were attended by up to 250 people. The topics of conversation were broad, including small issues, and the ‘Radequal network’<sup>(25)</sup> was launched. In the response, it was important to prioritise emotions rather than political speeches, and the leadership had two roles: pulling communities together and coordinating the various services and institutions. There was an understanding that communities needed to be at the heart of the effort, and the media played along in humanising the discussion and keeping the focus on social cohesion. Community recovery notably meant challenging extremism and engaging young people as well as faith and religious communities.

Among the terrorists responsible for the attack on 22 May was local citizen with a Libyan background, which resulted in a tremendous attention to the Libyan community. As a response the Libyan community organised three teams: a crisis team dealing with practical issues, such as damaged houses after police raids; a media team carrying

out damage control on how media portrayed the Libyan community; and a civic team responsible for meetings with the police, the local council, think tanks, etc. Importantly, the Libyan community also engaged in a variety of ways, such as meetings with officials, media presence, a video dedicated to Manchester Libyans, activities for girls, a women’s cultural event and a roundtable on identity.



<sup>24</sup> <https://esrc.ukri.org/public-engagement/social-science-for-schools/resources/prevent-the-uk-s-counter-terrorism-strategy/>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.makingmanchestersafer.com/info/18/radequal>

**Having outlined all these lessons learned, the meeting also highlighted several challenges that have yet to be tackled.**

*1. Ensuring scale and duration*

It is not enough to develop a few model projects, since they will not impact the entire community and the impact they do produce will not last. The aim needs to be developing long-term, large-scale partnerships. At the same time, most community engagement occurs on a project basis. This is a challenge first of all in terms of funding, and a matter of adequate mapping and planning. Secondly, evaluation is a must for these large-scale and long-term projects, in order to both justify funding and ensure incremental improvement.

*2. Not reinventing the wheel*

This is a related challenge and refers to the necessity to assess to which extent existing structures can be used as such or potentially adapted, or whether there is need for entirely new actors and approaches.

*3. Walking the walk vs. talking the talk.*

Trust and honesty are crucial for establishing partnerships and even for starting dialogues with communities. How can we ensure real conversations? How can we be sure, on the one hand, that civil society partners do indeed adhere to democratic values, and on the other, that governments do indeed aim to understand and help communities (rather than instrumentalising them for political purposes, for example)?

*4. Measuring the results?*

This is a challenge of a more general nature, and it was identified right at the beginning of the meeting. Why is it that so many young people are still attached to radical models, and why does our model not reach them?

**Recommendations**

- Use a holistic approach to community engagement: instead of focusing exclusively

on P/CVE issues, efforts to approach and communities and involve them in P/CVE have to address a variety of issues — more specifically those that the respective communities care most about.

- Work with all communities and against all forms of extremism to avoid stigmatisation.
- Invest in long-term agendas, strategies, programmes and structures instead of one-off initiatives.
- Evaluate all steps of the programme regularly. Are all relevant actors included? Is it working? Is it credible?
- Include newly arrived groups such as asylum seekers (in particular those that have failed to gain asylum) and refugees.