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CONCLUSION PAPER

*RAN FC&S Working Group meeting**22-23 November 2022, Zagreb, Croatia*

How can P/CVE practitioners address the effects of perceived (institutional, social, interpersonal) discrimination?

Key outcomes

The Families, Communities and Social Care (FC&S) Working Group convened a meeting on 22 and 23 November in which participants focused on 1) understanding how discrimination affects individuals' well-being and how this may contribute to drivers for radicalisation, 2) exploring the challenges that practitioners are encountering when the individuals/communities they are dealing with feel stigmatised or discriminated against, and 3) exchanging on practical methods, tips and practices for practitioners and institutions to identify these issues and address them. Participants at this meeting were P/CVE practitioners supporting individuals and wider communities who experience institutional, social or interpersonal discrimination, such as social and youth workers, community police officers, local coordinators and community mediators. The key outcomes of this meeting are:

- Discrimination can contribute to the radicalisation process as one of the drivers in the broader breeding ground of radicalisation. The 3N model in this paper will further clarify this.
- Practitioners have identified several challenges they face in their work, when they are supporting communities and individuals that feel discriminated against. They can be divided into three main questions:
 - 1. How to maintain and/or restore a trustful relationship?** Recommendations that were brought up relate to being open and honest, managing expectations, investing time in the relationship, and taking time to get to know each other.
 - 2. How to best support your target audience in these cases?** Recommendations that were brought up relate to empowering them to act and boosting their self-confidence.
 - 3. How to support practitioners themselves with the effects of discrimination on them?** Recommendations that were brought up relate to training and supervision on this theme, to help deal with these situations and overcome prejudices.

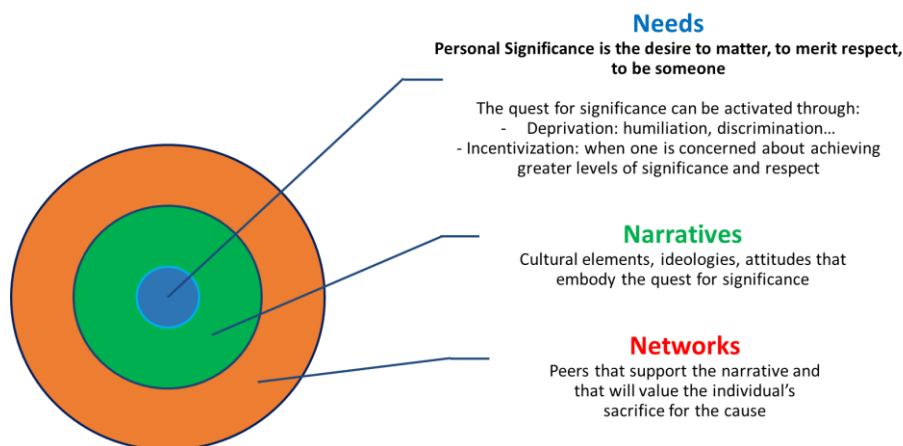
This paper outlines the highlights of this meeting and will delve into the challenges practitioners face when they work with individuals and communities that experience discrimination such as building trust, how to effectively support them, but also the effect it has on themselves as practitioners. It also outlines recommendations to overcome these challenges.

Highlights of the discussion

Discrimination and the broader breeding ground for radicalisation

The pathway towards violent extremism can best be conceptualised as a kaleidoscope of factors, creating infinite individual combinations. They are often complex, interlocking combinations which are social, political, and socio-psychological in nature, to name a few ⁽¹⁾. When taking a closer look at 'social factors' that could become a driver in this breeding ground for radicalisation, one of them is discrimination. Interlinked with discrimination and xenophobia is often a sense of alienation and/or injustice. It can be characterised by either a lack of attention (called ostracism), such as someone who is repeatedly ignored by his/her peers. A different nuance is negative attention (rejection). Whereas the first often leads to an adoption of self-promotion (i.e. reengagement in social contacts and thoughts about actions one should have taken (Molden et al., 2009)), rejection, on the other hand, makes individuals adopt a preventive approach (e.g. withdrawal from social contact and thoughts about actions one should **not** have taken).

Discrimination, social exclusion and the feeling of injustice can make it attractive for certain individuals to tend to meet their needs for affiliation and search for vital significance in extremist groups and make them more vulnerable to violent extremism or terrorist recruitment. To better understand how this process works, the 3N model of radicalisation has been identified. This model identifies the three categories that are involved in producing radicalisation processes: Needs, Narratives and Networks ⁽²⁾ (see also Model 1).



Model 1: part of a presentation by Josep García Coll (Euro-Arab Foundation for Higher Studies)

The process identified in this theory is the transition from Need to Narrative to Network:

- from individuals experiencing a **Need** because of a loss of significance (e.g. through discrimination or social alienation);
- to believing that violence is an acceptable way to restore that loss (**Narratives**);

⁽¹⁾ RAN ISSUE PAPER (2016). [The Root Causes of Violent Extremism](#).

⁽²⁾ Kruglanski, A. W., Bélanger, J. J., & Gunaratna, R. (2019). *The three pillars of radicalization: Needs, narratives and networks*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Kruglanski, A. W., Gelfand, M. J., Bélanger, J. J., Sheveland, A., Hetiarachchi, M., & Gunaratna, R. (2014). The psychology of radicalization and deradicalization: How significance quest impacts violent extremism. *Political Psychology*, 35, 69-93.

- to wanting to join a like-minded group (**Network**) ⁽³⁾.

To expunge this breeding ground, it is important to increase the resilience of individuals and communities that experience discrimination, and to know how to effectively work with people who feel discriminated against when you are a practitioner. The subsequent chapter will highlight insights on this topic from a practical perspective.

Implications of the effects of discrimination for daily practice and recommendations on how to deal with them

Participants at the meeting discussed how discrimination affects their work within both communities and as individuals. These challenges can be divided into three categories: 1) maintaining or restoring the trustful relationship with the individual or the community, 2) supporting the practitioner, and 3) supporting the target audience when they experience negative effects of discrimination (whether real or perceived).

Restoring a trustful relationship

Practitioners struggle with building trust with individuals and communities that have experienced discrimination, since these experiences have undermined their trust. The societal fear of terrorist attacks and the securitisation of counter-terrorism measures (and with this an intensified suspicion, discrimination and surveillance) could in some cases lead to certain communities or individuals experiencing a feeling of stigmatisation and discrimination by other groups or institutions. They may perceive discrimination through situations of harassment, prejudices or ethnic profiling. During the meeting, community police officers especially identified with the struggle of 'trust', since they are often seen as representative of the institutions people feel discriminated by. This issue has also been flagged by social workers, who are often seen by individuals as 'the system'. For example, families can feel discriminated against by the state when their family member loses his or her nationality because of engagement or suspected engagement in terrorist activities, or when they constantly receive visits from the authorities. The intense lack of trust makes it difficult for social workers to build, maintain or restore a connection with these individuals. Furthermore, practitioners themselves flag that they often feel left in the middle to navigate the agendas of both institutions and the individuals they support. In situations where they want to specifically support an individual/community by defending them, practitioners can consequently be perceived as troublesome by, for example, (local) authorities.

Recommendations

- Most importantly, **be honest and manage expectations**. Specifically when it comes to someone who feels discriminated against, be clear about your role and what you can do for them. Do not make promises you cannot keep.
- **Take the time to get to know each other.**
 - Show genuine interest and explore the culture and language of the individual or community you work with. Leave your desk and see what their life looks like.
 - Tailored to the individual you are supporting, engage in activities together such as sports or having dinner.
 - Keep in mind that getting to know each other works both ways, so share something about you, too. This is also helpful for you to be able to overcome stereotypes about you as a practitioner.
- Invest in **role models** if you feel like you are not the right person to take action. Connect with people they look up to who can have a positive influence.
- **Make them feel seen and respect their needs**. Offer them the support they are actually looking for. These can be practical things such as helping them to find a job or house. This requires building bridges with organisations that can help you with this.

⁽³⁾ Bélanger et al (2019) [Radicalization leading to Violence: A test of the 3N model](#). *Frontiers in psychiatry*, 10, 42.

- **Trust takes time.** This has implications for your work. For example, do not plan a meeting if you don't have enough time for them. Further, don't give up and accept that building trust is not always a smooth process and can include setbacks. Make a new plan and try again.
- When working on the ground in communities, actively **engage in dialogue** with communities/individuals that feel discriminated against. Ask them about their interests and needs. Ask questions such as: What happened?, How does it make you feel?, How does it affect you?, What's important for you now?, What do you need?
- **Be reflective** as a practitioner and invest in your awareness of potential unconscious biases.

Supporting the practitioner with their personal challenges when dealing with perceived discrimination

Besides the effects that discrimination has on individuals, practitioners need to deal with their personal challenges as well. Practitioners may find that they start to feel hopeless themselves, because they are not able to solve the larger, more structural problem around discrimination. As they state: "It becomes hard to find practical solutions that can support our clients: accommodations or jobs for families of asylum seekers are hard to find. These practical dimensions make it very difficult to do our job." These situations can be caused by discriminatory practices of certain institutions or be more general societal problems, but perceived as discriminative. Either way, it can affect practitioners: "We often feel like we are the bad ones."

Recommendations

- **Organise supervision** tailored to the needs of the practitioners in your organisation.
- Work together with the managers in your organisation to map difficulties that practitioners are facing related to discrimination: what are the main problems, and **with whom do we need to work in order to overcome the problem?**
- Proactively organise a **dialogue within your organisation** about discrimination. The goal is to raise awareness if, when and how colleagues (unknowingly) discriminate or stigmatise. Conversation starters could be prepared in order to discuss stories and cases (whether real or fictional) among colleagues. Examples are:
 - Jokes among colleagues: how does each colleague at the table perceive the joke?
 - Discuss unconscious biases: what unconscious biases do you and your colleagues have?
 - Reflect on your own practice: how do others adapt in situations characterised by cultural diversity and do we have culturally appropriate interventions?
 - Discuss specific topics, like the reception of Ukrainian refugees vs refugees from other countries.
- Invest in **cultural competencies** as a professional and take part in trainings on intercultural working.

Supporting the target audience to deal with the effects of discrimination

Lastly, practitioners face difficulties supporting individuals when they are dealing with the consequences of discrimination. These consequences can vary:

- practical issues, such as unemployment or poor housing;
- feeling hopeless, insecure or angry;
- being socially isolated;
- having a bad self-image;
- having severe distrust towards others/institutions.

When looking for solutions, practitioners ask themselves: how to boost their self-confidence and self-image, and help them to feel less hopeless? Also, practitioners seek practical ways to empower them to try to change the situation themselves. As practical help is at times not possible (see challenge above), other ways of supporting these individuals were raised.

Recommendations

- **Boost someone's self-confidence and support someone's quest for significance** when someone feels discriminated against. This requires finding the right partners, listening and being proactive. The example below was shared during the meeting.

"I was working with this guy in a youth prison. He felt discriminated by the society and its institutions and it was difficult for a lot of practitioners to work with him. I glanced at his wall and saw maps and asked what it was. He said "nothing, just drawings", and I asked to see them and they were beautiful drawings and I asked him why he was not pursuing that. We got him in contact with a software company that wanted to hire him because his drawings were so beautiful. The solution can often be found in the person him or herself, you just have to pay attention as a practitioner." – Youth worker

- Put your target group **at the centre** by listening and sharing low profile guidance: let them express their needs. Don't immediately approach them with the things you can do for them, but listen actively and pay attention to what they need.
- Give the individual an **active role** in finding a solution. This can be done through the idea of 'helping to self-help'. Encourage them to look at their skills and support them in this.
- If in line with someone's needs, encourage individuals to engage in **active citizenship** by, for example:
 - Linking them with organisations engaged in anti-racist, political or feminist activism. Support non-violent activism with a positive goal.
 - Linking them with organisations representing for example their diaspora communities in policymaking circles and activities related to the prevention of racism and xenophobia.
- Another positive way of empowering is to encourage them, if in line with their needs, to get involved in **language training initiatives** in diaspora languages.
- As practitioner, don't be afraid to **point it out** if an individual shows very negative behaviour as a consequence of feeling discriminated against. Keep the **balance** by showing that you respect the person.

Recommendations for (local) authorities

- Proactively invest in training on **intercultural working** (both for authorities and for relevant partner organisations) to empower authorities/practitioners to have intercultural and interfaith discussions.
- Political leaders have an essential role in creating an environment to carry out actions to **reduce prejudices** and local authorities have the responsibility to tailor these to local contexts and needs.
- When you want to take action, **discuss the power imbalance** between those whose life and opportunities are affected and restrained by discriminative policies and practices and those who are not affected, or discriminating/representing the institution with discriminative policies.
- Let institutions adhere to **procedural justice** to minimise discriminatory behaviour:
 - Have procedures in place that make decision-making objective and impartial;
 - Let the target audience participate in decision-making;
 - Look critically at the diversity within the organisation;
 - Make the target audience feel listened to, appreciated and respected.
- Encourage research initiatives that involve the **questioning and reassessment** of historical events in which European nations had a role (e.g. colonisation), with the collaboration of the diaspora communities.

- Work with organisations that **provide support** for communities or individuals that may feel discriminated against.
 - Proactively make an inventory of the challenges that practitioners encounter related to discrimination and link them to the right organisations to support them.
 - Support the creation of virtual and real-life networks that can assist communities/individuals with discrimination issues.
 - Support community organisations developing social cohesion and P/CVE initiatives. For example, set up a mentoring program where people can discuss their way to study/find a job with peers.

Inspiring practices

This section provides a snapshot of the approaches that were presented during this meeting.

Inspiring case: Addressing effects of perceived discrimination in dealing with returned FTFs

Albania has had to deal with over 144 individuals travelling to conflict zones. Right now they have seen 45 return voluntarily and 47 were repatriated through government led missions. Upon return, they faced social isolation, lack of attention from the authorities, and struggled to re-settle. No programs were dedicated to the returnees who came home voluntarily, but their places of residence were categorised as 'hotspots'. This had negative consequences and led to community resistance instead of a focus on community resilience.

Later on, the approach changed. The [Institute for Activism and Social Change](#) (AL) set up an approach that focused on fostering social inclusion and a sense of belonging and translated the process of rehabilitation and reintegration as a social investment for safer communities. The switch from 'security' to 'community interventions' reduced the refusal to speak, and heightened the willingness to participate and seek help. The provision of professional support brought solutions to medical conditions, psychological disorders, housing and schooling. To sum up, their approach encompassed the following.

- To **reduce stigma**, they combined an entry point with support to socially excluded families.
- To **build trust**, they identified the 'leader' in the families.
- To **ensure non-coercion**, they brought a multi-professional team (medical doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, educators, lawyers).
- To **ensure continuity and ownership**, they used a plan that was agreed upon by all stakeholders and case managers.

Other inspiring practices:

- [FRAK](#) (DK) believes that having a job is the key to a better future for young people. FRAK invests in making young people fit for work. When it comes to empowering young people that have faced discrimination, they believe that helping them to find a job and housing can also be an effective way of making them feel like they are part of society. Getting trust and responsibility in a job can help instil that feeling.
- [Depolarize.fi](#) (FI) uses restorative practices and mediation to deal with intergroup tensions and conflicts. Mediation techniques can help transform relationships between different parties, rebalance power and mitigate the consequences of discrimination by involving the community and supporting the ones that have been treated unfairly.
- **The SARA Model** is an effective method that contributes to problem-oriented policing used by community police, which can be useful and inspiring for social work as well when dealing with perceived discrimination. SARA consists of the following elements:
 - Scanning: identify the problem;
 - Analysis: assess the factors attributing to the problem;
 - Response: take action to identify the problem;
 - Assessment: determine if the action worked.

Further RAN reading

- RAN FC&S (2022). [Preventing Polarisation on a Local Level: Bringing Communities Together.](#)
- RAN H&SC (2019). [Alienation, Identity and Intercultural working.](#)
- RAN ISSUE PAPER (2016). [The Root Causes of Violent Extremism.](#)
- RAN ISSUE PAPER (2018). [Protective and promotive factors building resilience against violent radicalisation.](#)
- RAN Small-scale (2021) [P/CVE perspective on the vulnerabilities of asylum seekers and refugee communities, online meeting.](#)