22/12/2021
CONCLUSION PAPER
P/CVE perspective on the vulnerabilities of asylum seekers and refugee communities
18 November 2021, Digital

P/CVE perspective on the vulnerabilities of asylum seekers and refugee communities

Key outcomes

The RAN small-scale meeting on P/CVE and the vulnerabilities of asylum seekers and refugees took place on 18 November 2021. This meeting brought together first line practitioners with experience in working with refugee and asylum seeker communities. The goal was to explore the vulnerabilities of these communities related to radicalisation and recruitment, and the P/CVE efforts in arrival, transit, and destination countries.

Some of the key findings of the meeting are listed below.

- Many asylum seekers score high on risk factors that are considered to make them vulnerable for recruitment to violent extremism or radicalisation. However, only a few of them ever actually radicalises.

- Arrival, transit, and destination countries can all play a role in primary prevention and reducing the breeding ground for radicalisation, by giving asylum seekers the possibility to enter the asylum procedure, providing basic services like housing and treating them decently and with respect. However, the focus in arrival and transit countries at the moment seems to be more on CVE (detection of radicalisation or even of terrorists) than on PVE (lowering vulnerability and safeguarding).

- Many asylum seekers and refugees who fled warzones have experienced sometimes dangerous journeys, suffer from trauma and mental health issues. When vulnerabilities are not addressed, they might lead to harmful developments for these individuals, with radicalisation being only one of them.

Radicalisation Awareness Network

RAN

Practitioners

CONCLUSION PAPER
P/CVE perspective on the vulnerabilities of asylum seeker and refugee communities
Page **2** of **4**

This paper will first describe the main themes discussed during the meeting and relevant practices. Recommendations concerning the P/CVE perspective on the vulnerabilities of asylum seeker and refugee communities are outlined in the second part. The paper concludes with an outlook on future meetings on related topics.

Highlights of the discussion

The following insights and challenges were presented and discussed by experienced practitioners.

Vulnerabilities

- The findings of new research (pending publication) in Greece, show that a **large number of asylum seekers score high on known risk factors that could lead to vulnerabilities for radicalisation.** The examined list of variables includes mental health issues and emotional trauma, personal history details like early exposure to violent ideology, tortures and military training as well as personal beliefs and attitudes, like the fear of persecution. Another important factor is the host state's capacity and will to address refugee needs. It seems according to the analysis that in some countries of origin the detected type of vulnerabilities are significantly different compared to the whole sample. Even though these vulnerabilities are present, there was widespread consensus amongst participants that **only a very small number**, statistically insignificant but *socially significant*, actually radicalises ("the 0,01% problem" ([1])).

- These known risk factors that could lead to vulnerabilities for radicalisation **could also lead to other harmful developments**, such as mental health problems, criminality or being vulnerable to sexual exploitation and slave labour.

- Asylum seekers and refugees **not only suffer from primary trauma and mental health issues caused by experiences in their country of origin**, the experiences during the travel towards and through Europe can be traumatising as well. And even in the host countries new trauma can develop. Trauma like this does not necessarily manifest immediately after a traumatic event has occurred. In fact, it could take several months or even years before manifesting.

- Challenges observed in the mental health sector related to asylum seekers and refugees were: **lack of cultural sensitivity, a high threshold to receive counselling (you need to have serious psychiatric problems) and very long waiting lists**. This means that part of the refugees and asylum seekers that needs counselling will not receive this or have to wait very long. Furthermore, cultural factors are not always understood correctly. A consequence of these challenges could be that vulnerabilities increase.

Radicalisation

- **A clear view of the number of refugees and asylum seekers getting radicalised in arrival and transit countries seems to be missing.** Explanations are the temporary nature of their stay in these countries, the high workload of practitioners, political sensitivities, and a lack of awareness on the role that these countries could play in primary prevention. Furthermore, there is the impression that there is more focus on a security driven CVE or even CT approach than on a safeguarding PVE approach.

- There seems to be **more attention for the risk of radicalisation and recruitment in destination countries**. Participants mentioned that Salafis actively have been seen approaching young Muslim refugees and asylum seekers at reception centres, offering them support and inviting them to their mosques.

- There are instances whereby angry and aggressive behaviour of asylum seekers towards staff in reception centres is **initially labelled radicalisation, but turns out to be something else**. It could be, for example, an angry or aggressive way of expressing their frustration about the living conditions in reception centres and the long processing time related to the asylum application procedure. Furthermore, it can also be related to the challenges they face when integrating into a new society. In some cases, it

---

([1]) This percentage is not the outcome of a scientific research. In the meeting, this was a way to express how extremely small the chance is that, despite a lot of potential risk factors are present among many of them, a refugee or asylum seeker radicalises.

was observed that asylum seekers had been discouraged from integrating by others in their community. In other cases, asylum seekers or refugees who were labelled radicalised, were in fact suffering from serious mental health conditions. The driver behind their behaviour was not ideology and radicalisation, but unresolved mental health issues and trauma.

P/CVE

- In destination countries, the focus is more on P/CVE. In these countries there are more opportunities to **build relationships with keypersons and other members of refugee and asylum seeker communities**, which is a precondition to detect signals of radicalisation and recruitment.

- Arrival, transit, and destination countries can all play a role in primary prevention and reducing the breeding ground of radicalisation. This includes giving asylum seekers **the possibility to enter the asylum procedure, providing basic services like housing and treating them with dignity and respect**.

Relevant practices

In the meeting three different projects were presented – from government agencies to NGOs.

1. **Fedasil** (Belgium) stands for the Federal agency for the reception of asylum seekers. Fedasil provides training for staff at reception centres to help them identify signals of radicalisation and react appropriately. Furthermore, Fedasil supports staff dealing with radicalisation and guides radicalisation cases to the right institutions and authorities.

2. **Beratungsnetzwerk Grenzgänger** (Germany) is an information and advice centre for families, institutions, and practitioners who are dealing with religious extremism. They offer systematic counselling to people who are (potentially) radicalising, their family members, and to the professionals who are working with them, including the staff of asylum and refugee centres. They inform staff about signs of radicalisation, make people aware that they can contact them when they are worried about someone and support staff when they talk to refugees or asylum seekers that might be radicalised. Consultation is conducted by employees who speak the same language as the refugees or asylum seekers.

3. **"Integration auf Augenhöhe" (Integration at eye level)** (Germany) is a project co-created with former refugees and migrants. Former refugees and migrants were trained to become cultural mediators who promote democracy. A safe space for peer-learning and open dialogue was created where newcomers could speak openly (in their mother tongue) about values and the challenges they face. This included conversations about 'taboo topics', such as religion, sexuality and politics. The aim was empowerment of the participants, fostering knowledge and improving skills.

Recommendations

Recommendations for policymakers

- As soon as possible after refugees and asylum seekers enter Europe, there should be a focus on primary prevention and reducing the breeding ground: **provide them the opportunity to enter the asylum procedure, offer them basic services like housing, treat them with dignity and respect, and do not discriminate against them.**

- There should be **more attention on PVE and the safeguarding perspective in arrival countries**, and awareness should be raised on the role these countries could play in primary prevention.

- Provide **easier and earlier access to mental health care, with cultural awareness and skills**.

- **Strengthen cultural sensitivity** in mental health institutions and reception centres.

Recommendations for practitioners

- To pick up signals of radicalisation and recruitment, **connect with asylum seeker and refugee communities**. Identify key persons in these communities and focus on building trustful relationships.

- Do not only focus on trauma's coming from the country of origin, but also **trauma's that came after**. Keep in mind that it can take a while before they manifest.

- When setting up PVE programmes, make sure it's **peer-driven and work with people who speak the same language** as the refugees and asylum seekers to better connect with the target audience.

- Consider the **local circumstances** when setting up PVE programmes.

Follow up

- Conducting research and enhancing knowledge on individual and group resilience and protective factors of refugees and asylum seekers, during the asylum process and on a longer period after settling.

- In-depth search for PVE projects in arrival, transit, and destination countries.

Further reading

- RAN Policy Brief, Breaking the cycle, 17 January 2020.

- RAN Policy & Practice Event, Preventing radicalisation of asylum seekers and refugees, 11 December 2019.

- RAN Study Visit, PVE and CVE in and around asylum centres and within refugee communities, 13-14 December 2018.

- RAN Thematic Event, The refugee and migrant crisis: new pressing challenges for CVE policies, 8 May 2016

- Eleftheriadou, M., Refugee Radicalization/Militarization in the Age of the European Refugee Crisis: A Composite Model, 2018

Product of the Radicalisation Awareness Network **(RAN)**,
Based on a paper prepared by Steven Lenos and Esther Zuiderveld

European Commission