

*13/10/2021***CONCLUSION PAPER***RAN Plenary**Digital meeting*

RAN PLENARY

“10 YEARS OF RAN – LEARNING FROM THE PAST, PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE”

Introduction

This year's Plenary celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). The conclusion of an entire decade connecting and empowering more than 6000 first-line practitioners across the EU is a cause for both reflection and foresight. While much has been accomplished in the past 10 years, future challenges in the sphere of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) loom large, and demand continued engagement and further development of the network. The Covid-19 pandemic caused the RAN constituency to meet in a digital way again for the second time. It also influenced the selection of topics discussed. Due to the pandemic, for instance, the root causes for radicalisation grew and the landscape of extremism changed. This evolving situation also **resonates** in the topics and issues for **2022** mentioned during the Plenary.

This conclusion paper covers the main outcomes discussed during the RAN Plenary. It describes what themes will require the attention of RAN participants in 2022 and beyond.

Opening remarks by Olivier Onidi, Deputy Director-General for Migration and Home Affairs at the European Commission

- Addressing the audience, Deputy Director-General Olivier Onidi described RAN as a solid network, albeit practitioners do not always agree on the procedures or topics. He also noted the following:
- RAN does not only study issues, but also immediately takes action and starts looking for responses and solutions.
- As an overarching network, RAN provides the necessary input to make the best use of policy tools. There is a strong link between the practitioners and the policymakers. There are numerous examples of practitioners flagging a topic to be important and policymakers immediately putting it on the agenda.
- The work of RAN is known far beyond the EU and very much appreciated.
- RAN should not be risk averse. Instead, RAN should take risks. It is important that RAN continues to look at new topics, such as non-violent extremism.

Inspirational speech by Linda Schlegel: “Into the Dungeon? Gaming-related content, extremism, and P/CVE”

Linda Schlegel, Associate Fellow at modus – Centre for Applied Research on Deradicalisation, gave an inspirational speech on gaming and P/CVE. The lockdown measures aimed at combatting the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic have increased everyone’s online presence. This increase has also amplified the online dimension of radicalisation. One of the online activities that requires particular attention is gaming with 2.5 billion gamers worldwide. This does not, however, mean that online gamers are more vulnerable to radicalisation than others or that gaming content specifically is susceptible for the spread of extremist propaganda. Instead, it means that many people can be reached through online gaming. Therefore, we need to keep in mind that gaming-content has two sides:

1. **Misused by extremists:** Islamist extremists and violent right-wing extremists develop video games, modify existing games, use in-game chats, video game tournaments and gaming-adjacent platforms for recruitment purposes, to spread propaganda or ask for funding. Furthermore, they use gaming cultural references that are appealing to young people and gamification to motivate people to transfer their online activities to the real “battlefield”.
2. **Used in P/CVE:** Practitioners can prevent and counter extremist activities online by mirroring extremists: develop video games, be present at gaming platforms, create alternative streams and organise tournaments to reach and bond with people. Moreover, gaming references and gamification can be used in P/CVE communication and measures.

Overarching topics

This section reflects the outcomes of the Plenary's first break-out session. Based on the outcomes of the survey, the most important overarching topics were discussed during this session. During the break-out sessions, participants formulated recommendations for relevant Working Groups and other RAN activities. Various ideas were suggested. The nine overarching topics are outlined below.

Topic 1: Relation of conspiracy narratives and anti-government sentiments to violent extremism

- A Working Group meeting on gender and age aspects of conspiracy narratives and anti-government sentiments and how to improve critical thinking of parents was proposed for FC&S and Y&E.
- A VoT Working Group meeting with a focus on the role of victims and survivors when tackling conspiracy narratives that deny extremist attacks.
- Ideas for other RAN activities, exploring:
 - The link with left-wing extremism.
 - The (absence of) consequences for spreading conspiracies.
 - The political back-up of conspiracies.

Topic 2: Taliban/Afghanistan and other new developments in conflicts/wars outside of Europe, and their effect on P/CVE work in Europe

- A REHAB Working Group meeting to discuss returning violent right-wing extremists from Ukraine.
- A C&N Working Group meeting on collecting the different violent right-wing narratives regarding refugees.
- A Y&E Working Group meeting on refreshing the good work on improving critical thinking skills and methods to discuss sensitive topics in the classroom in light of the potential increase in racist rhetoric against students perceived as Muslim/Afghan/Middle Eastern due to the events in Afghanistan.
- Ideas for other RAN activities:
 - Looking at the possible impact of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) returning from Ukraine on the European Union and possible future attacks.

Topic 3: Polarisation and hate speech in (political and religious) groups

- A LOCAL Working Group meeting on identifying polarisation dynamics in the local arena.
- A FC&S Working Group meeting to build a skillset to address polarisation: non-violent communication, critical thinking, dialogue facilitation and media literacy.
- Ideas for other RAN activities:
 - Looking at how to counter hate speech and raise awareness.

Topic 4: Developments in Violent Right-Wing Extremism/VRWE (LOCAL, (trans)national, and/or online)

- A Working Group meeting for VoT and Y&E on using victim testimonies to prevent the radicalisation of young people.
- A POL Working Group meeting on right-wing extremism within the own organisation.
- Ideas for other RAN activities:

- Working with influencers and IT organisations that oppose right-wing extremism online.
- Looking at younger generations falling for right-wing extremism through gaming.

Topic 5: Returning FTFs and rehabilitation/reintegration of returnees (long-term approach)

- A Y&E Working Group meeting on preventing and countering the stigmatisation of returned children.
- PRISONS and POL Working Group meetings to train staff on the specificities of the target group and available reintegration programmes to motivate them and the target group to reintegrate back into society and prevent stigmatisation.

Topic 6: Mental Health aspects and psychological and neuroscientific mechanisms in radicalisation

- VoT and HEALTH Working Groups meetings on the impact of P/CVE work on victims and survivors of terrorism.
- Ideas for other RAN activities:
 - Creation of a 10th Working group on media and journalism.
 - Training on mental health and P/CVE for all practitioners.

Topic 7: Online/Digitalisation in P/CVE and the role of (social) media

- Y&E, FC&S and PRISONS Working Group meetings on exploring the online activities of young people, parents and prisoners and enhancing their media literacy and critical thinking.
- A HEALTH Working Group meeting on how to engage with isolated youth and how to manage their frustration.
- Ideas for other RAN activities:
 - Creating a handbook on how to include the online world in the normal curricula of teachers.

Topic 8: Professionalisation of P/CVE work (using evidence-based working, promoting self-care, improving collaboration, etc.)

- The REHAB Working Group creating and giving a training on the RAN Rehabilitation manual.
- Ideas for other RAN activities:
 - Translate papers in more languages to reach more practitioners on the ground.
 - Workshops on general monitoring and evaluation principles, with a focus on what to apply and how to use it. This could be prepared through a small-scale expert meeting in which M&E experts share and prepare case studies and meta evaluations.
 - Establish criteria and good practices on how to select the right type of training for the right type of professionals.
 - Connect RAN with other networks, into a broader international sphere (Middle East).
 - Organise RAN Train-the-trainer in different countries including follow-up and supervision supported by RAN Staff.

Topic 9: Role of gender in violent extremism and P/CVE approaches

- A C&N Working Group meeting on gender and the digital world: exploring (possible) differences in how they are recruited online, the different use of digital platforms by men and women and how interventions could consider gendered differences.

- A PRISONS Working Group meeting focused on gender-aware prison programmes. This could be a joint meeting with the HEALTH Working Group to explore mental health discussions around specific trauma therapy for returned females.
- All Working Groups should consider the regional and national differences when it comes to gender by exploring the following: How is gender included in narratives in different parts of the EU? Are practices currently Western-European centric and if so, how to apply regional expertise?
- Ideas for other RAN activities:
 - Explore in which way feminism and women empowerment is instrumentalised by extremists and the increased anti-LGBTQ rhetoric.

Focus of Working Groups in 2022

This section reflects the outcomes of the discussions in the second break-out session of the Plenary. It lists the themes the Working Groups wish to have on their agenda in 2022. This was based on the outcomes of the first break-out session and the survey results.

Communication and Narratives Working Group (RAN C&N)

Changing landscape of social media and extremism. Emerging trends in narratives should be monitored, both in how they are used by extremists, as well as how they could be used by first-line practitioners (examples include entertainment, education and gaming platforms). How extremist narratives become mainstream is also an important element.

Implement recommendations from emerging trends in the GAMMMA+ model. Looking at emerging trends and recent developments, there might be a need to update the Goal, Audience, Message, Messenger, Media, Action plus Monitoring and Evaluation (GAMMMA+) model, for example to include dealing with or using closed message spaces, new social media platforms and gaming-related platforms.

Improving online prevent work. Educating professionals, finding ways to bring practitioners online and to improve their online skills to better connect with their target audience. While improving online prevent work is relevant for the entire constituency of RAN, C&N could take a leading role in this. C&N can explore what it can mean for other Working Group constituencies to improve their online prevent work.

Working together with digital tools developed by CSEP projects. There are several Civil Society Empowerment Programme (CSEP) projects that have developed digital tools that can be relevant for C&N or RAN in general. There is an opportunity for C&N to start cooperating more with CSEP projects. This will help in giving the tools developed by CSEP projects more attention, and it can help in improving online prevent work.

Families, Communities & Social care Working Group (RAN FC&S)

Fragmented ideologies and the normalisation of the (violent) right-wing extremist discourse. How to identify hybrid or fragmented ideologies (with for example fragmented elements of VRWE, VLWE, anti-government sentiments and/or conspiracies, which can be also disguised as 'human rights')

advocacy) and how could practitioners best address these fragmented ideologies? How can we dive into challenges of violent right-wing extremism in places where this discourse is increasingly normalised?

Media literacy for parents and/or digital awareness raising for practitioners. We need to foster critical thinking and raise awareness about digital disinformation among family and community workers as well as improve the digital skillset of practitioners. What are the methods they can use in the digital sphere? Who can they reach? How can we increase their skills? And how to involve parents and build on their media literacy? How to combine online prevent activities with offline components?

Shifts in vulnerable groups. How can practitioners better support new groups of clients, such as children seeking advice and being concerned with family members believing in conspiracies? How to respond to social change, the shift in age groups and new vulnerabilities of adult populations?

Making practitioners resilient. How to make the practitioner community itself resilient to conspiracies and anti-democratic sentiments?

Mental Health Working Group (RAN HEALTH)

Personality and mental disorders. Further exploring their implications in supporting, treating or preventing violent extremism to assess and properly treat individuals.

Fragmentation of ideologies and the practical implications for mental health practitioners.

Due to the emergence of the online world, and the pandemic serving as a catalyst, recent observations show that vulnerable individuals have started creating more personal frameworks of actions. There is a need for an approach that takes into account the hyper individualised ideologies that are emerging

Hate crimes and their psychological and societal impact. Exploring the how and why of hate crimes and the implications this has for mental health practitioners (victimhood, trauma etc.).

Across WGs: Training on mental health knowledge in P/CVE for other WGs/professions (e.g., on trauma, unsecure attachment patterns). Relevant for many practitioners, not only for mental health practitioners.

Local authorities Working Group (RAN LOCAL)

Dealing with the rise of anti-establishment movements related to extremism on the local level. These violent movements that do not agree with the measures taken by governments are feeding on the conspiracy narratives and mobilising frustrated people to commit violence.

Online activities on the LOCAL level. How to deal with online activities on the local level? This includes the offline impact of online activities, hate speech and its polarising effect, and right-wing extremism.

Pulse taking meeting. Multi-meeting with C&N and FC&S on pulse taking: what are the effects of the Taliban take-over in Afghanistan on the local level? How to deal with the effects? For example, de-escalation of the polarised discourse and constructed narratives about evacuees.

Police and law enforcement Working Group (RAN POL)

Preventing and countering internal radicalisation within police, military and prison staff. What happens inside the military, police and security authorities with regards to radicalisation? Exploring the insider threat and how to strengthen resilience, trust and a healthy working environment for police staff.

Anti-government extremism and hostility against the police. Exploring new developments in anti-government extremism and the growing hostility and violence against the police in different Member States. Looking at the 'ideology' around anti-government extremism, the relation with the public, trust, escalation and de-escalation, and the online dimension of the anti-government extremism. Combining it with how the police intervene during times of political activism, societal unrest and how they address violent and non-violent extremists since this has an impact on the anti-government dynamics.

Police role and contribution in the case of diagnosis of at-risk individuals. Improving in-depth analysis to understand the individual, his/her history, biography, level of involvement and causes and possible triggers that bring the at-risk person into action. What are the experiences of police involved in the holistic assessment of all dimensions in case diagnosis, in a multi-agency setting with social and health professionals? What is the role of the police and their contribution in the broad case diagnosis of at-risk individuals?

Online investigation and media literacy. A cross-cutting theme on online preventing and countering through investigation and raising awareness of media literacy.

Prisons Working Group (RAN PRISONS)

False & no-compliance: is Dynamic Security a solution? What to do with Violent Extremist or Terrorist Offenders who refuse exit/rehabilitation programmes or pretend to comply? Is Dynamic Security a solution?

Design workshop Training 2.0. Design a P/CVE training for prison staff and their partners, specifically for young prison officers: introducing a new methodology of training, more interactive and underlining the importance of the gender question in prison.

Toolbox of available P/CVE tools. Creating a toolbox to use and apply in prison, taking into consideration global developments.

Rehabilitation Working Group (RAN REHABILITATION)

Exploring digital/hybrid exit and rehab work. Exit and rehabilitation work can no longer be separated from the digital realities of all individuals. The potential ways in which digital (communication) elements can and should be included in contemporary exit and rehab work needs to be explored further, also considering the experiences collected during the forced interruption of physical exit work due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Motivation in an open setting. How can effective rehabilitation work with individuals who have not been sentenced to prison or alternative measures be carried out? How/where can they be reached; how

can they be motivated to take part in programmes if no initial intrinsic nor external motivating factors are present?

Evaluation of tertiary prevention. Understanding evaluation in Exit and rehabilitation work: the potential and benefits of evaluation, different formats and types of evaluation in this context (going beyond mere impact measurement).

Overarching topic/potential joint or multi-meeting: Trust building in a multi-stakeholder setting. While multi-stakeholder collaboration has been a constant and cross-cutting topic in the Rehab context, the challenge of trust-building and information sharing continues to trouble practitioners. While trust between involved actors needs to be fostered and information needs to be shared to do so, this process potentially endangers the trust building process with rehabilitation work participants. The question of how this tension and conflict can be managed needs to stay high on the agenda.

Victims and Survivors of Terrorism Working Group (RAN VoT)

Memorials. How to better coordinate memorials, providing space for remembrance for victims/survivors in countries where this is non-existent yet and create permanent exhibitions where people can come together all year round? Possibly a joint meeting, WGs to cooperate with: C&N, Y&E and potentially PRISON.

Perception of victims/survivors by the media. Victims/survivors should have a voice in the media: do not just talk about them, but also listen to them. Starting point: how do media in different countries portray VoT? What are good and inspiring examples? How to create a bigger focus on victims/survivors compared to perpetrators, while also respecting the privacy of the VoT that wish to stay anonymous? Creating ethical guidelines.

Practical guidelines for working with victims/survivors in P/CVE. Creating a guideline which Member States or practitioners can use when wanting to incorporate victims/survivors into P/CVE efforts. The aim is to raise awareness on the value of victims/survivors in P/CVE, while at the same time ensuring their safety and wellbeing.

Youth and Education Working Group (RAN Y&E)

Gender. Exploring gender and awareness training for teachers. How do teachers and youth workers deal with the gender dimension in and outside schools? How does this dimension influence the P/CVE work of teachers and youth workers? Shared values are being threatened by Islamist and right-wing extremists, but also by non-violent ideologies. What is their influence on gender roles? How to deal with the Incels ideology in classrooms and in the streets?

Digital literacy. How to educate teachers and youth workers on digital literacy in order to connect to the reality of young people? Methods and tools to connect the online to the offline world. How to include critical thinking and resilience building in the national education programmes? Concrete recommendations from the local to the national governments.

Post-covid traumas and tensions. How to deal with post-covid traumas and tensions in and around schools? Focused on the practitioners and youth. Teacher/youth worker training on psychological dimensions related to radicalisation and post-covid effects. Trauma sensitivity and insights in psychological support, joint meeting with HEALTH.

RAN YOUNG

Expanding knowledge. RAN YOUNG participants can increase their knowledge through attending RAN webinars and Working Group activities. They are interested in topics such as: returning FTFs and children, violent right-wing extremists, conspiracy narratives, mental health, gender and age group dimensions.

Networking. This can be done by creating smaller informal groups within the platform, including the youth perspective in other working groups, increasing collaboration and exchange of knowledge and integrating YOUNG into products of other WGs (self-help tools, handbook social media).

Capacity building. Building skills like public speaking (to make sure the young actors are empowered to get their message across), organising a review panel again, creating an alternative narrative campaign or other product together and dialogue about conspiracy narratives.

Closing remarks by Yolanda Gallego-Casilda Grau, Head of Unit, Prevention of radicalisation, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission

- Head of Unit, Prevention of Radicalisation Yolanda Gallego-Casilda Grau thanked Plenary participants for their openness and hoped to meet in-person again next year. She also noted the following:
- The RAN High Level Conference and Plenary were two intense days during which participants discussed, among other things, the impact of the pandemic, dissemination of violent extremist ideologies, violent incidents in EU countries by anti-vaccine and anti-government movements and the situation in Afghanistan. This is proof that practitioners are constantly having to adapt their work to meet new challenges.
- The following topics continue to require our attention: violent right-wing extremism, Islamist extremism and terrorism, the Incel movement, returning FTFs and rehabilitation and reintegration, gender, the digitalisation of our work, mental health, the tools and resources practitioners consider to be essential and the dissemination of knowledge.
- P/CVE continues to be one of the main focuses of the European Commission in the upcoming years and RAN is a key player in that field