National hubs supporting local actors in P/CVE – practitioners' insights

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Introduction

Local actors play a key role in effective efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism. When it comes to addressing challenges of radicalisation and violent extremism, local municipalities and authorities together with and supported by national governments, often bear the primary responsibility. In past years, a variety of local approaches has emerged across Europe, each of them informed by different local settings, governance structures, resources and needs assessments and all of them guided by different national prevention strategies. Multi-agency collaboration and locally owned approaches are increasingly seen as essential in developing effective P/CVE measures across the spectrum of prevention, intervention, exit-work, and rehabilitation and reintegration.

When listening to practitioners in P/CVE, it is evident that working with P/CVE has indeed undergone quite a development over the past decade or so – mainly a positive one. From the practitioners' point of view, this appears to be quite true – both when it comes to the development of the support from national hubs to local P/CVE, as well as for how the work is organised and carried out on a local level. Both national hubs and local P/CVE actors have gained and stored crucial experience and knowledge in the field of P/CVE over a number of years.

However, practitioners do emphasise that an easily accessible, flexible, updated, and not least continuous support from national hubs is key in making local P/CVE operationally possible and effective. Both national hubs and local actors in P/CVE now move forward in the wake of a pandemic that only added to the ever-changing challenges in the field and has carried with it a long period of tough constraints in the practical P/CVE work, such as only online meetings being possible and the crucial citizen-related work much impeded. The online dimension and conspiracy narratives have caused growth in concern and P/CVE relevance just to mention a couple of themes that have been addressed across the EU. Local P/CVE actors underline the importance of national hubs being able to provide support. The support mechanisms from national hubs to local P/CVE actors vary between EU member states. Among other things country size, existing infrastructures, and the nature of local challenges all influence how national hubs operate.

From practitioners' feedback, some commonalities appear. Local actors express the need for support, not only in the event of an acute and imminent crisis but also for setting up more long term solutions in local P/CVE. National hubs often issue or communicate a number of P/CVE recommendations and guidelines. These provide both structure and inspiration, and are generally appreciated and regarded as needed. However, recommendations and guidelines also call for some measure of local strategic implementation for which there can be a need for support from a national hub. For instance, during periods of "peacetime" or low conflict intensity local P/CVE actors can find it challenging to ensure P/CVE prioritisation with local management and to maintain that balanced level of local P/CVE awareness. This may be particularly relevant when it comes to keeping a local multi-agency platform operational. Other commonalities in the local perspectives' feedback are that national hubs are expected to be able to smoothly provide knowledge to local P/CVE about extremist milieus, dynamics etc. –
and a suggestion that national hubs set up and facilitate networks between local P/CVEs, where they can learn from each other's initiatives and what has been done in actual case work.

Setting the course from a local perspective this paper will aim at identifying different models of how national-level actors can support local actors in their P/CVE efforts. Based on an exploration of practical work and existing cases, this paper will provide an overview of different good practices, models and/or approaches of national hubs supporting local P/CVE actors in Europe. In doing so, the paper will give a structured

compilation of the different needs, lessons learned and experiences from existing models of national support hubs[1].

> **What do we mean by "national hubs" and "local actors"?**
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> For the purpose of this paper, both expressions "national hubs" and "local actors" should be taken in a broad sense. In P/CVE, a national (or subnational) hub is a structure that provides various types of support to local actors, so they can fulfil their missions more effectively. Such structures can exist at different levels, but are mainly national or regional[2]. They can be either public institutions (in that case, usually as a part of a ministry e.g Interior, Justice, Integration, etc.), or they can be independent entities: associations, NGOs, civil society organisations, even companies. They can work on P/CVE specifically, or on a broader mandate, including for example prevention of crime, social cohesion, education, urban development, etc.
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> "Local actors" include public authorities, especially municipalities, but also other local entities like civil society organisations[3]. Excluded from this definition are local state agencies and departments of overarching state institutions: even though they do exist at local level, they are state actors first and foremost, with a direct link to central authorities. These local actors are the ones that actually implement P/CVE strategies and projects, and are in direct contact with at-risk groups, communities, individuals, etc.

A local perspective on P/CVE

P/CVE being a rather new, complex, and somewhat intimidating issue, it's not uncommon for local actors, however competent or well-intentioned they are, to struggle with the subject. Also, at this point, P/CVE professionals still tend to come from different backgrounds, with different initial training backgrounds and different experiences. Hence the need for regular support from regional or national bodies, both to provide local actors with the proper tools and resources, and to build a common and consistent approach.

In producing this paper, a number of local and regional P/CVE actors across EU countries kindly agreed to give their feedback on the overarching question of how local P/CVE actors can best be supported by national hubs[4]. This dialogue gave rise to the below-listed outline of needs for support in the field of working locally with P/CVE:

Practical and doable

- Training: Not all actors and institutions have the capacity and the means to design their own training programme. What makes a competent trainer? What particular subjects need to be touched upon?

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[1] This paper will focus specifically on how local P/CVE actors can best be supported by national authorities, to the exclusion of the more general subjects of how to develop a local P/CVE strategy, or how to strengthen national-local cooperation. On the former, see RAN, *RAN policy paper. Developing a local prevent framework and guiding principles.* On the latter, see GCTF, *Memorandum on Good Practices on Strengthening National-Local Cooperation in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism.*

[2] Support structures and resource centres also exist at international level. One such structure is of course RAN itself. But in terms of public policy and practical P/CVE strategy, and for obvious reasons, most local actors count on the support of their respective national authorities first and foremost. On the activities of RAN with local actors and authorities, see RAN. *Special overview paper. RAN activities on local coordination and the local approach to P/CVE.*

[3] Depending on the context, schools can also be considered local actors. On how national authorities can support P/CVE efforts in the education sector, see RAN. *Ex post paper. Education and radicalisation prevention: Different ways governments can support schools and teachers in preventing/countering violent extremism.*

[4] We mostly interviewed P/CVE actors from the public sector, and so the paper is necessarily a reflection of their concerns and priorities. But civil society organisations and communities certainly play a crucial role in P/CVE efforts as well. On how public actors can engage and cooperate with communities, see RAN. *Ex post paper. Engaging with communities in P/CVE.*

What are the most effective training techniques? In some cases, national hubs and resource centres will offer training to local actors themselves. In other cases, local actors need guidelines and criteria, so they can select a service provider themselves.

- Virtual: One particular need was revealed by the context of the pandemic. How could local P/CVE actors maintain their activities during a lockdown? What are the tools and approaches they can rely upon to ensure the continuity of their activities? When faced with such a common challenge, local authorities need the support of a national body, so they don't have to come up with their own, particular, solutions.

Sustainable

- Funding: Whether it is to recruit their own employees, or to support projects from civil society organisations, local authorities need financial support. Of course, allocating funds also to some extent allows national authorities to influence local strategies, and make sure they are consistent with national priorities.
- Maintenance: It is regarded as very important that national hubs continuously support local actors in how they can ensure that P/CVE tabs and fits into the existing preventive structures. It is also key maintenance work to ensure P/CVE can work in a multi-agency setting. This needs to take into account that local prevention actors often have to handle an array of prevention challenges as well as P/CVE. Overall it is very important that national hubs are clear in their expectations to local P/CVE actors.

Coherence between national P/CVE strategy and local P/CVE strategy

- Strategic support: When local authorities decide to formulate their own action plan, they don't always have the proper expertise. How to carry out a local diagnosis? How to formulate strategic and operational objectives? How to mobilise both internal and external partners? How to build a multi-agency and multi-actor network? How to approach P/CVE in the context of a broader prevention strategy?
- Project management: In many countries P/CVE work sets out from a project oriented base. P/CVE coordinators usually have some project management skills, but those skills always need to get refined and adapted to the particularities of P/CVE. Also, local actors can often benefit from an outside, independent perspective.
- Crisis management: Fortunately, most local authorities do not face crisis on a regular basis. Crisis management requires some very specific skills, that are rarely available locally, if only because local authorities cannot allow themselves to employ someone with such a specific set of skills[5]. In that case, when an unfortunate event occurs, support has to come from outside the organisation.

Networks and learning

- Networking: Not all local authorities employ clearly designated P/CVE coordinators, and not all local authorities have a clear P/CVE action plan. Yet, many local authorities do develop interesting projects and approaches, which can be leveraged for P/CVE. Professionals usually regard experience sharing

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[5] Tabletop exercises are sometimes used to put crisis procedures to the test. On that subject, see RAN. *Ex post paper. Tabletop exercises: Practicing multi-agency cooperation*

with great interest, but for various reasons (lack of time, access to information, etc.), they don't have the capacity to build their own network alone.

- Good practices: How can local actors identify and take inspiration from nationally recognised good practices? And what constitutes a good or even best practice? Local authorities can benefit from successful experiences, in order to adapt them to their own context[6]. Also, it sometimes happens that a certain project gets noticed, not because of its own merits, but because it is supported by an effective communication strategy. In other words, the best known or most spectacular projects are not necessarily the most effective, required or successful ones.

Information and mapping

- Information: Regardless of the national context, there is always a division between national and local authorities when it comes to information. National authorities can have a broader perspective on the movements, the ideologies, and the threats that can manifest themselves locally. Local actors need this sort of information to anticipate medium to long-term tendencies, and adapt their own strategy accordingly.
- Mapping: National hubs can help P/CVE locals in systematically mapping the local challenges and resources and help relating to the information and knowledge that a national hub is expected to possess.

Accessible and visible national hubs

- Moral support: Working in the field of P/CVE is a demanding task. Whether P/CVE locals have to deal with a sensitive, complex situation, or they have to react after an event, local authorities and their employees can find themselves under a lot of stress, and even sometimes doubt themselves. Local P/CVE actors need some degree of moral support and professional recognition (including public support in times of crisis), so they can carry on in a sometimes stressful, unfriendly, or even threatening environment. Hearing the phrase "You did a good job" from an outside and reliable source can have a positive impact. This is distinct from actual psychological support, which is generally easier to organise and provide locally.
- Accessibility: From the point of view of the local P/CVE actors, the accessibility of a national hub is key. Accessibility is important on two counts – acute and long-term challenges and solutions. Whenever a local P/CVE experiences challenges of a more acute nature it is important that a national hub can provide counsel, knowledge, practical support and inspiration as to possible actions quickly and smoothly.

Research and practice closer together on the local P/CVE level

- Evaluation: Recently, the question of evaluation in P/CVE has attracted more attention. After years of practice and development, local authorities have to prove the effectiveness of their projects and approaches. Quite often, practitioners are rather uncomfortable with evaluation, for various reasons. Especially meaningful impact-oriented evaluations may require conditions and prerequisites that have

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[6] Of course collections of good practices already exist. For a notable example, see RAN. *RAN collection of approaches and practices*. The question is how to make such collection easily accessible to local actors in a given national context.

not yet been established in many P/CVE contexts. Furthermore local P/CVE actors can find themselves in complex relationships locally that make evaluation a sensitive subject. In that sense, external support is usually welcome, whether to provide local actors with an adequate approach, or even to offer an external evaluation.

- Knowledge: There is an ongoing need for knowledge about prevention of extremism and radicalisation at the local level. Local P/CVE think it fruitful if national hubs look at how practice, research and national hubs could join hands and enter into a closer companionship. From the point of view of local P/CVE actors, research-based knowledge about P/CVE is sometimes more generic. This knowledge is welcomed, but an input flow from locally perceived P/CVE issues to research may make the knowledge provided by national hubs even more relevant.

Examples of national support hubs and initiatives

Over the last 15 years, good models of national hubs offering support to local P/CVE have developed. Below are listed some examples of recognised and quite well tested approaches from different countries as to how a national hub can support local P/CVE. The different types of national hubs reflect the diversity of political and institutional models across Europe, but also the diversity of P/CVE approaches and strategies in general[7]. With the examples of national hubs and inititatives illustrated below this paper aims to balance between countries of different sizes, as well as between countries of both centralised and federal organisation.

Sweden - The Swedish Centre for Preventing Violent Extremism

The Swedish Centre for Preventing Violent Extremism (CVE) work is primarily based on crime policy grounds, to strengthen and develop preventive work against violent extremism. The primary aim of the centre is to prevent ideologically motivated criminality and terrorism in Sweden. The centre lies under the auspices of the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, and was established in January 2018. The Centre is tasked with developing the knowledge-based and cross-sector work involved in preventing violent extremism on the national, regional, and local levels in Sweden. This includes, among other things, providing a needs-based support to local actors, serving as a knowledge hub, and contributing to creating greater effectiveness and coordination in respect of the preventive measures.

The Swedish Centre has four main tasks:

- Promote the development of preventive work on national, regional, and local levels.

- Work to attain a higher degree of coordination and effectiveness in respect to the preventive measures.

- Provide support tailored to the local needs of municipalities, agencies, and other actors whose work includes addressing issues involved in preventing violent extremism.

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[7] For a concise and clear presentation of different P/CVE approaches, see OSCE, *Understanding Referral Mechanisms in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism*, 100-106.

- Collect and disseminate knowledge, based on research and proven experience, regarding prevention of violent extremism, and work towards knowledge-based practices.

Support for professionals and the public

The Swedish Centre also operates a daily support phone – and mail-in counsel function for professionals at local, regional or national level. Professionals can contact the centre anonymously if needed. The content of the counsel provided generally depends on the needs that the caller has. Sometimes the immediate counsel and information will suffice. However, the centre also accommodates a longer process of counselling at a local level initiated by a first call to the support phone.

If the caller him- or herself needs help to leave a violent extremist milieu or if he, or she, is related to someone involved in a violent extremist environment, the caller is directed to a hotline serviced by Save the Children – Sweden.

The Swedish centre collaborates with relevant national, regional, and local actors that work with preventing violent extremism.

https://www.cve.se/om-cve/in-english.html

France - a diversity of national support actors, with the CIPDR as the central player

In France, the role of local authorities in P/CVE appears to be less central than in other EU countries, which is due to the centralised nature of the country. When the first national action plan was adopted in 2014, the Secretary General of the Interministerial Committee for the Prevention of Crime and Radicalisation (CIPDR) was selected to lead the effort. At local level, the national strategy is implemented mainly by the prefectures (which represent the state in a global sense) and the judiciary. Starting in 2016, local authorities, especially municipalities, were invited to contribute to P/CVE, with a focus on two fields: prevention of crime, and urban development. Whenever a local authority decides to develop its own P/CVE strategy, it can count on the support of different bodies, including but not limited to the CIPDR.

The CIPDR was first established in 2006, with the "R" for "radicalisation" being added a decade later. It brings together professionals from different ministerial departments (interior, justice, education, health, social affairs), under the authority of the Prime Minister. It can support local authorities either directly, or indirectly via the prefectures.

The CIPDR provides different types of support:

- Training: the CIPDR offers training to different bodies of professionals, with carefully selected experts. Training sessions can also be organised locally by the prefectures.

- Funding: national projects are selected by the CIPDR itself, while the selection of regional and local projects is delegated to the prefectures.

- Information: in the form of handbooks, manuals, guidelines, etc.

- Networking: the CIPDR coordinates a network of local prevention coordinators, but not necessarily on P/CVE in particular.

- Hotline: although not hosted by the CIPDR itself, the national hotline can also be used by professionals to get advice and guidance on specific situations[8].

Other organisations can be called upon in support of local P/CVE actors. For instance, the French Forum for Urban Security (FFSU), which is the national branch of the European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS).

Urban development resource centres also play an important role in the dissemination of good and innovative practices, as well as in the implementation of local projects. France has a network of such institutions, which are active at regional level. Only some of them work on P/CVE as such, even though they do address P/CVE related issues such as integration, discrimination and youth violence. Their main strength lies in their local presence and their capacity to support local authorities on an almost daily basis. One of them deserves special mention, as it was established to work on P/CVE specifically: the Resource Centre for the Prevention of Social Radicalisms (CRPRS, plural intended). Based in Lille, it services local authorities in the north of the country. By promoting a common culture between local actors, it can help them get accustomed to P/CVE, a subject that still remains quite intimidating, if not foreign to many of them[9].

https://www.cipdr.gouv.fr/

https://prev-radicalites.org/

Denmark - The Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism

The Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism was established in 2017 with the purpose of strengthening prevention of extremism, nationally, locally and online.
The centre supports the preventive work done by local interagency collaborations, municipalities, regions, educational institutions, housing organisations, associations and other actors. The centre is part of the Danish Agency for International Recruitment and Integration, which is answerable to the Ministry of Immigration and Integration.

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[8] The national hotline is operated by the UCLAT, the Counterterrorism Coordination Unit, a specialised intelligence agency within the Ministry of Interior. The calls, mainly from family and friends, are answered by voluntary intelligence officers, with the support of a psychologist.
[9] For a concrete example of how an urban development resource centre can support a P/CVE project from a municipality, see ESEIS and ORIV, *Constitution de réseaux territoriaux de prévention de la radicalisation*.

The core tasks of the centre are:

- **Counselling** municipalities and other local actors on 1) how to tackle concrete challenges with extremist background, for instance suppressive social control and other social harm, agitation and recruitment attempts in schools and residential areas, violence, threats, vandalism and other forms of hate crime, 2) developing strategic action plans for prevention and an interdisciplinary organisation to support it and 3) mapping local resources and challenges.

- **Supporting the Info-houses.** The Info-house is an extremism- and crime-preventive multi-agency collaboration where the key actors are the police and the municipalities, but also including other authorities like the regional psychiatry and the Prison and Probation Service. There are 12 Info-houses in Denmark, one for each police district. The Danish centre in particular supports local P/CVE actors from municipalities in their work in the Info-houses.

- **Training and upskilling** of professionals, e.g. on internet challenges, awareness of extremism, tool based assessing of concerns of extremism and case handling.

- **Developing and implementing tools and methods**, e.g. for mentors and parent coaches to support at-risk persons and families and for area based prevention in local communities.

- **Producing and communicating research-based knowledge**, initiating and compiling research, producing podcasts, publications and website. A network of researchers is affiliated to the centre, assisting it in its mission to promote research- and knowledge based prevention efforts.

Counselling and support

The Danish Centre provides free local-needs-based counselling for municipalities, regions, multi-agency crime prevention units, educational institutions, housing organisation, and civil society actors, etc. The centre's counsellors can be reached daily by phone or mail. The purpose of counselling is to prevent the negative consequences of extremism and the scope of counselling covers from dealing with local challenges with extremism, local action plans, multi-agency organising, knowledge to awareness training and prevention methods implementation.

The Centre also manages an Anti-Radicalisation Hotline, which can be used by both professionals and citizens if they experience concrete concerns about extremism. Experienced professionals in prevention of extremism service the hotline and they will assist with qualified guidance. The caller can remain anonymous. If needed, the hotline can refer to the relevant local authorities.

The centre functions as a secretariat for a **National Coordination Group on Prevention of Extremism** with relevant national actors, including the Danish National Police, the Agency for Education and Quality, Local Government Denmark and Danish Regions.

https://stopekstremisme.dk/en

Germany – A federal system with a wide variety of actors, programmes and projects

P/CVE in Germany is characterised above all by a great diversity of approaches. Traditionally, there is a coexistence of governmental and non-governmental actors as well as great financial support of NGOs. While

Germany has a federal government, it is simultaneously divided into 16 states (or *Länder*), each with their own governmental structures, legislations, and a large degree of autonomy[10]. At the national level, two federal ministries play a central role in P/CVE:

- The Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community (BMI)

- The Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ))

Each of them have established their own structures, platforms, and programmes, and they have their equivalents at state level. The states have no immediate obligation to implement national policies. Instead, the government provides the states with a common framework and guidelines, which states have the possibility to base their local strategies on. Among both governmental and non-governmental actors, strong cooperation is aimed for in order to form a closely interwoven network of practitioners and experts.

Beyond the BMI and BMFSFJ, the most prominent structures from the governmental side on a national level are the GTAZ (Joint Counter-Terrorism Centre), the Advice Centre on Radicalisation of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) and the Interministerial working group. Broader networks are developed in cooperation with civil society actors through working groups and networks of expertise on a national level (e.g. Kompetenznetzwerk islamistischer Extremismus, Kompetenznetzwerk Rechtsextremismus, InfoEx and BAG RelEx) that also include actors on the local level. These initiatives consolidate under the umbrella of joint programmes such as NPP (National Prevention Programme Against Islamist Extremism), the funding programme "Zusammenhalt durch Teilhabe" and, most importantly, the programme "Live Democracy" ("Demokratie leben!").

Counselling centres for dealing with radicalised individuals are active at federal and state levels, and prevention projects are implemented at state level. Civil society organisations and NGOs contribute significantly to local P/CVE in Germany. Therefore, support structures in varying forms do exist, both at national and state levels.

Federal initiatives that support local P/CVE:

"Zusammenhalt durch Teilhabe" (Cohesion through participation). Since 2010, this programme by the BMI supports and encourages associations such as sports clubs, the voluntary fire brigade, and other civil society initiatives on the local level to include PVE approaches in their existing structures. By offering funds for the implementation of projects as well as relevant expertise in the form of consultants available to local stakeholders, the programme encourages low threshold engagement with P/CVE on the local level.

"Live Democracy!" (*Demokratie Leben!*). This programme was launched in 2015 by the BMFSFJ as a continuation of numerous other federal programmes since the early 1990s. "Live Democracy" aims to support municipalities and districts throughout Germany in setting up local projects and initiatives to promote democracy, shape diversity and prevent extremism. Through 'Partnerships for Democracy' cities, municipalities and districts throughout Germany develop strategies for action in order to strengthen

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[10] For a detailed presentation of Germany's P/CVE model, see Said, B. T. and Fouad, H. *Countering Islamist radicalisation in Germany: a guide to Germany's growing prevention infrastructure*.

democracy and diversity and to counter group-focused enmity. The partnerships decide independently on the types of measures that are to be carried out in their respective local areas.

Similar structures exist at state (the Federal State Democracy Centres) and federal (the Competence Centres and Competence Networks) levels. The federal programme achieves its goals by strengthening expertise, enabling innovation, and funding projects. 'Partnerships for Democracy' are responsible for selecting and allocating funds to projects in their respective areas.

https://www.demokratie-leben.de/en/

United Kingdom - The Prevent strategy

P/CVE in the UK is characterised by a top-down approach, with local delivery. Local authorities intervene in a clear national framework, and receive adequate support as a result. The *Prevent* duty guidance explicitly states what is expected from local authorities: "With their wide-ranging responsibilities, and democratic accountability to their electorate, local authorities are vital to *Prevent* work. Effective local authorities will be working with their local partners to protect the public, prevent crime and to promote strong, integrated communities[11]."

Prevent was developed after the 2005 London terrorist attacks as part of the *Contest* national counter terrorism strategy. In its almost fifteen years of existence, this strategy has established a significant number of structures and procedures. The effort is spearheaded by the Home Office, which includes a local delivery team. The strategy is implemented on the ground by local authorities, which deliver on national priorities. The level of support varies according to whether the area is considered a priority or not (which in turn depends on the level of risk). Many of the urban areas are considered priorities.

Financial and practical support to local authorities
Priority areas receive financial support from the Home Office for staff and projects, and officially appointed local coordinators are in charge of running the strategy. In order to do that, the Home Office provides local authorities with different types of support, including:

- Analysis of risk

- Funding

- Communication support

- Training packages

- Good practice guides

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[11] Home Office, *Revised Prevent duty guidance: for England and Wales*, 6.

Local practitioners also have access to regular information and operational tools and services. The *Prevent* strategy also includes the *Channel* intervention programme, which clearly describes the composition and operation of local panels. By law, these panels must be chaired by local authorities.

Even in non-priority areas, local authorities receive support, in the sense that regional coordinators are established, as well as health coordinators, and higher education coordinators. They also have at their disposal the legislation, including the *Prevent* duty[12], training, good practices and self-assessment tools. Last but not least, local counter terrorism units, which are separate from the Home Office, can play a similar role by providing advice, guidance, resources, and regular risk assessments.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-strategy-2011

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-guidance/revised-prevent-duty-guidance-for-england-and-wales

The Western Balkans – involvement of civil society organisations in local level P/CVE efforts

Looking across the entirety of the European regions and countries and taking into account this paper's characterisation of "national hubs", national support to local P/CVE organisations do indeed come in many variations. In the Western Balkans, the P/CVE situation is a little different from that of the other examples mentioned in this paper. Historically the Western Balkans have favoured quite centralised government-dominated and security focused strategies and approaches in P/CVE efforts[13]. This is in part owing to the region's history of periods of violent conflicts.

Effectively this also means that local P/CVE activity in the region generally can be perceived as local manifestations of national actions primarily funded by the international community, rather than locally coordinated and initiated P/CVE actions. However, this situation is progressing in a more nuanced direction, where CSOs are increasingly becoming a key part of local P/CVE efforts. This means that governments in the region more often are cooperating with CSOs about P/CVE initiatives at the local level. This change has partly been brought about by the fact that several countries in the region face challenges of P/CVE effort relevance. One such example is the return of a large number of foreign terrorist fighters to the Western Balkans from the conflict theatres in Syria and Iraq. In dealing with returnees, the local P/CVE efforts need to be able to apply a 'whole of society' approach rather than only one of security in order to provide a long term stable situation locally for returnee individuals and as well as families. Nearly all countries in the Western Balkans now have national P/CVE coordinators and frameworks that describe the importance of a 'whole of society' approach on the local level in P/CVE efforts and how CSOs can be involved in this work.

The government outlined engagement with CSOs in local level P/CVE efforts in the Western Balkans is still in relatively early stages, but based on the experiences in recent years some important take-aways are already visible.

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[12] The Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 contains a duty on specified authorities to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.
[13] Rosand, E. and Manton, E., *Lessons learned from preventing and countering violent extremism in the Western Balkans.*

Some key experiences and observations from CSOs' engagement in local P/CVE in the Western Balkans:

- CSOs can provide a space for constructive engagement and trust building dialogue between governments and citizens.

- CSOs often have relevant local community knowledge and can facilitate, that local challenges of extremist violence can be addressed with a prevention perspective.

- CSOs can reach across groups of different ethnicity and bridge communication between government and groups in marginalised positions.

- CSOs can lead activities to raise awareness among adults, families and youth of the risks of recruitment into extremist milieus.

- CSOs can design and carry out innovative and locally informed P/CVE initiatives e.g. involving education and culture and areas linked to the implementation of a national P/CVE framework.

"Local PVE actors can be supported by establishing regional or national networks with other coordinators to share good practice, discuss challenges and manage cross-border issues".

Local P/CVE coordinator

Challenges

Experience indicates that attention to P/CVE may vary in time and from place to place. Local authorities may be more or less enthusiastic about developing a P/CVE strategy. In that perspective, P/CVE practitioners can benefit from the support of a national hub. It can help them get the legitimacy that they need to convince local decision makers[14]. Similarly, national hubs can ensure that local authorities intervene at the appropriate level. When intervening in P/CVE local authorities need to be clearly aware of the mandate of their professional area of expertise. National hubs can support the clarity of the authorities' different roles in P/CVE at local level.

National hubs have a special responsibility in difficult times such as the current pandemic, when new needs and — maybe — new opportunities emerge. The Covid-19 crisis has had a significant impact on P/CVE. National hubs have the capacity to centralise information, to identify, promote, and disseminate good practices, while local authorities may lack the perspective, time, or capacity to do so. When new initiatives emerge in such a short time, it is essential to have a central actor that can gather and then redistribute information.

When building a national hub or resource centre, a decision often has to be made between creating a new structure or leveraging an already existing one for P/CVE. Both solutions have their pros and cons. But some

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[14] On the complex subject of how to get political support for a local P/CVE strategy, see also RAN. *Ex post paper. How to get sustainable political support for your local P/CVE strategy.*

considerations have to be taken into account: for example, how to make P/CVE support more sustainable? Is the creation of a new ad hoc structure the best solution, given that attention to P/CVE will most likely fluctuate? Also, with a specific P/CVE structure, sometimes other actors think that they do not need to contribute to P/CVE. Already existing, effective, and trusted structures, with years or decades of experience in adjacent fields (crime prevention, social, health, etc.) can incorporate a new P/CVE component.

Recommendations

National hubs should encourage local actors to adopt strategies and build networks proactively and with a long-term perspective, and not only in times of crisis. P/CVE is not always a popular topic, especially for smaller municipalities. As a result, when not faced with an acute situation, both politicians and practitioners may have a tendency to focus their attention on more pressing and/or popular issues. National hubs can support local professionals in bearing in mind that P/CVE is a long term concern, and that they do have a role to play, especially in primary and secondary prevention. It is often an easier and more effective undertaking to build structures and procedures when local actors are not under heavy pressure. While doing that, national hubs should make sure that P/CVE structures and initiatives are distributed quite evenly in the whole country, and not concentrated only in certain areas.

National hubs should offer a single, clearly identified, easily accessible point of contact. Local authorities can sometimes feel isolated, or even lost in the global P/CVE landscape. When they look for support, a website, or a phone number, or an email, is simply not enough. Face to face, personalised support is by far the most effective solution. Local authorities should not have to lose time looking for the right contact person, and they should be guaranteed that their concerns will be heard. Ideally, national hubs should have the capacity to actually show up on site to address local issues along with local authorities.

National hubs should offer regular and accessible information on P/CVE issues, for example in the form of a newsletter. Local authorities need to be updated on current threats and priorities, on the state of radicalisation, but also on new legislations, new procedures, best practices, latest research, publications, etc. This information should be accessible to non-specialists, especially given the diversity of the field of P/CVE. Besides, the function of a newsletter is not merely to communicate information. It also serves as a reminder that national hubs remain at the disposal of local actors, and that local actors are part of a wider professional community.

National hubs should consult local authorities on a regular basis, consider the local dimension and thereby support local ownership in creating a local P/CVE strategy. This could take the form, for example, of an annual national conference, where P/CVE actors could express their needs and concerns. Both the national strategy and the support which national hubs provide should be adjusted according to the results of this consultation. Besides, local authorities will be all the more willing to contribute to P/CVE, if they have the impression that their voice is heard.

National hubs should support the creation of networks of practitioners, as not all support needs to come directly from national hubs. Networks can be supported at national or at a more local (regional) level, so they can share their experience and concerns, and help each other without the intervention of a third party. National hubs may not be available all the time, and also sometimes peer support is more

effective than external support. At the same time, local authorities may not have the time, the will, or the expertise to build such networks. National hubs can then lead the way.

National hubs should officially recognise and value participation in P/CVE, for example by explicitly mentioning P/CVE in job descriptions. Local actors may have the impression that their contribution to P/CVE is not properly recognised, or that it is taken for granted. As a result, some of them get discouraged. Professional practices have been impacted by the emergence of P/CVE as a new field of public policy. Professionals have had to embrace new responsibilities and develop new skills, and these evolutions should be officially acknowledged.

National hubs should find the proper balance between long term funding, accessibility of procedures, consistency of strategies and projects, and accountability of local actors. Unsurprisingly, the issue of funding is one of the most sensitive and most debated ones. National authorities may have a tendency to favour short term funding, thus potentially limiting the effectiveness of P/CVE projects. Local authorities sometimes have the impression that procedures are unnecessarily complex, or too directive. Experimentation, innovation, and evaluation are all crucial elements in the field of P/CVE, and should be supported, but at the same time local authorities need long term financial support to be able to implement their projects, build trust, and actually measure results. Ideally in this regard national hubs should have the capacity to provide local authorities with sufficient knowledge about good P/CVE practices and methods that can be suggested, applied and adjusted to local needs.

National hubs should be quite attentive of how the best level of intervention is achieved. National hubs come in different shapes and sizes, depending on their nature, objectives, on the political and administrative context. There is no 'one size fits all' solution. Depending on the size of the country and other factors, sometimes a national hub will still be very far away from local authorities. In that case, regional branches can be established at a lower level, or instead of one single national hub, there can be several independent resource centres for the whole country. Both centralisation and decentralisation have their merits and limits, but the most important aspect is the quality of support that is offered to local authorities.

Different structures can actually serve as P/CVE hub or resource centre. The creation of a national hub does not mean that other structures must cease to exist. Local authorities can find value in having a diversity of partners that they can rely on. On the other hand, local actors must have a guarantee that self-proclaimed resource or expertise centres are actually competent in their field. In that sense, the role of a national hub is not merely to concentrate all P/CVE activities, but also **to provide guidelines, or even give official recognition to other bodies**, so that local authorities can trustfully enter into partnership with the resource centre of their choice.

Further reading

As was already mentioned in this paper, the particular issue of how national structures can best support local P/CVE efforts is not often touched upon. As a result, it is not suprising that the literature appears to be rather limited. Nevertheless, the following references can be of interest for actors in local P/CVE work as well as for policy makers:

1. Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) (2020). Memorandum on Good Practices on Strengthening National-Local Cooperation in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism. GCTF.

2. International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IIJ) (2021). Developing Multi-Actor P/CVE Intervention Programmes: Implementing a 'Whole of Society', 'Do No Harm' Approach. IIJ.

3. RAN (2016). RAN policy paper. Developing a local prevent framework and guiding principles. RAN Centre of Excellence.

4. RAN (2021). Special overview paper. RAN activities on local coordination and the local approach to P/CVE. RAN Centre of Excellence.

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