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POLICY BRIEF
Preventing the risk of radicalisation of asylum seekers and refugees, and far-right mobilisation against asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants

Breaking the cycle

The rising number of refugees arriving in Europe since 2015 and the involvement of individual asylum seekers in some terrorist attacks have sparked concerns about a risk of radicalisation among asylum seekers and refugees. While the number of recent refugees involved in radical violent activities remains very limited, Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) activities have shown that asylum seekers and refugees — due to their specific experiences and needs in their countries of origin, during their flight to Europe and in their host countries — might be affected by certain risk factors at stake in radicalisation processes.

At the same time, far-right extremist parties and movements continue to draw heavily on the topic of immigration and refugees. Far-right extremist attitudes and narratives are becoming more and more visible, and are increasingly being expressed in the form of violence against asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants.

Based on the experiences collected in the RAN community and recent research, this issue paper assesses challenges related to questions of social cohesion and the prevention of polarisation related to the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe. It aims at supporting practitioners and policymakers in adjusting existing strategies for preventing violent extremism (PVE) to the challenges related to a

mounting polarisation of public opinion regarding refugees, asylum seekers and migration issues, and highlights the importance of broad and comprehensive perspectives and multi-agency cooperation in understanding and challenging the different forms of violent radicalisation.

This paper also outlines the main narratives regarding refugees, asylum seekers and immigration used by the far right. It presents communication strategies suitable for preventing polarisation on this topic and aims to support practitioners and policymakers trying to mitigate the effect of far-right discourses. The Bart Brandsma polarisation management model is central in this regard.

Introduction

Since 2015, the rising number of asylum seekers and refugees arriving in Europe has affected policies in EU Member States on different levels. In several states, questions related to the acceptance and integration of asylum seekers and refugees have resulted in the rise of violent right-wing extremism and increasing polarisation of public opinion. In the past, migration and Islam have on various occasions and in varying contexts sparked heated debates; these controversies have further intensified in recent years due to concerns about a possible rise of violent religious extremism related to the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees from Muslim-majority countries.

These debates and tensions have been felt in national and local policies as well as in the fields of social and youth work and education. Already in 2016, a report by Eurocities, a network of local governments of major European cities, summarised the concerns of 28 cities:

> *"The refugee situation in many European cities raises two main concerns relating to anti-radicalisation: fear of radicalisation of asylum seekers who may be vulnerable to recruiters targeting refugee shelters, and concerns about rising violence of extreme right-wing groups towards asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants. (Eurocities, 2016, p. 6)"*

The so-called refugee crisis further fuelled a phenomenon described as a reciprocal polarisation, or as a "vicious circle of Islamist and far-right extremism" (Ebner, 2017), that has raised alarm among practitioners within the RAN community since the inception of the network. Studies of far-right and Islamist narratives have shown that both influence each other in their communication strategies and narratives: far-right extremist ideologists draw on Islamist terror to feed their narrative of an Islamic threat and a supposed "Islamisation" of Europe; radical Islamists, on the other hand, exploit far-right racism and violence to feed their narrative of a Western "war against Islam" and the need for young Muslims to defend themselves (see Fielitz, Ebner, Guhl, & Quent, 2018).

Based on several meetings of practitioners, researchers and policymakers since early 2016, RAN pointed to the need to readjust PVE and countering violent extremism (CVE) policies in various fields. Stating that a "polarised society with different groups depicted as adversaries is a dream for extremists propagating 'us and them'" ([Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), 2016, p. 3, 2016, p. 3](#)), it highlighted the need to intensify efforts in the areas of inclusion, social cohesion, education and integration. Preventing polarisation, as the [RAN polarisation management manual](#) concluded, is a contribution to the prevention of radicalisation ([RAN, 2017, p. 5](#)). The need to tackle polarisation has further increased with the arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees in 2015 and related challenges to safeguarding strategies and social cohesion.

Based on the experiences collected in the RAN community and recent research, this issue paper considers the risks of radicalisation among asylum seekers and refugees and offers a comprehensive perspective for multi-agency cooperation in understanding the challenges and vulnerabilities of individuals and how PVE strategies may help safeguard individuals at risk.

Refugees, asylum seekers and the risk of radicalisation

The rising numbers of asylum seekers and refugees arriving in Europe since 2015 has sparked concerns about a possible exploitation of these movements by violent extremists. In most cases, these concerns were linked to the risk that terrorists could use migration flows to cross into Europe. Recent studies concluded that individuals have indeed been involved in violent extremist attacks (Mullins, 2019). Several EU Member States responded to these developments by implementing measures to improve the detection of potential terrorists posing as refugees (see Mullins, 2019a, pp. 121 ff; European Migration Network, 2016). Despite some cases of involvement of refugees and asylum seekers in extremist violence, observers stress that the vast majority of terrorist attacks in Europe since 2015 was executed by domestic cells (see Crone, Falkentoft, & Tammikko, 2017), and that in "the grand scheme of things, jihadist infiltration of [migration] flows is relatively small and should not be the primary point of reference in approaching the issue of migration" (Mullins, 2019, para. 18).

RADICALISATION OF REFUGEES AFTER THEIR ARRIVAL IN EUROPE?

In recent years, concerns increasingly shifted to a possible radicalisation of asylum seekers and refugees after their arrival and settlement in Europe. In January 2016, a report by Europol already referred to a "real and imminent danger … of elements of the (Sunni Muslim) Syrian refugee diaspora becoming vulnerable to radicalisation once in Europe and being specifically targeted by Islamic extremist recruiters" (Europol, 2016, p. 3). Yet, limited data is available about asylum seekers and refugees having developed tendencies for (violent) radicalisation after their settlement in Europe. A report of the Senate Department for the Interior and Sport in Berlin concluded that among 748 identified persons in the Salafi scene in Berlin by May 2017, 27 were refugees who had arrived in Germany since 2014 ([1]). All of them were male, with 80 % of them aged between 18 and 33. Given the large numbers of asylum seekers and refugees who have arrived in Germany in recent years, the report observed that the inclination of asylum seekers and refugees to join this scene appears to be "extremely low" (Senatsverwaltung für Inneres und Sport – Abteilung Verfassungsschutz, 2017, p. 25).

This assessment is supported by recent research. Analysing the nexus between migration and terrorism, a study for the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism conducted by Alex P. Schmid concluded that the "short-term likelihood that recent refugees arriving in Western Europe become radicalised is … very low" (Schmid, 2016, p. 45). It is only in longer terms, Schmid argues, that the vulnerability of refugees might increase:

> *"If they are not fully integrated in host societies, they might develop resentment and with some that anger might become so strong that they – or more likely, their children – turn against the host society. That has been one of the reasons why so many of the foreign fighters from Europe were the sons of immigrants. (Schmid, 2016, p. 45)"*

VULNERABILITIES AND SPECIFIC SAFEGUARDING NEEDS OF REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

These findings are also in line with experiences of practitioners from both within and outside the RAN community. They highlight the need to re-evaluate existing PVE and safeguarding strategies and to include refugees and asylum seekers as possible target groups with the aim of building resilience and reducing the risk of vulnerabilities (see Krasenberg & Lenos, 2018; Lenos, 2016; RAN EDU & RAN H&SC, 2019). In fact, asylum seekers and refugees might be affected by known risk factors at stake in radicalisation processes; their legal and social status as asylum seekers or refugees and their personal experiences of displacement and diaspora potentially add to vulnerabilities to violent extremist ideologies and scenes.

A note of caution, however: refugee communities in Europe are diverse, and their experiences in their countries of origin and host societies differ considerably. Recent research suggests that different living conditions both prior to and post migration experience significantly impact on individual vulnerabilities to radicalisation (see Ahmad &

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[1] It is important to note, however, that only 45 % of these persons are considered to support violent forms of Salafi ideology; the remaining proportion engages in extremist ideology and activities but does not support jihadi violence. No specific data is available for the support of violence among Salafi activists from refugee communities, cp. Senatsverwaltung für Inneres und Sport – Abteilung Verfassungsschutz, 2017, p. 21.

Masinda, 2018; Rafiq & Malik, 2017, pp. 37-75). These differences also relate to the self-perceptions and orientations of asylum seekers and refugees. In public debates, refugees and asylum seekers are often equated with "Muslims"; while most refugees to Europe in the period between 2015 and 2019 indeed came from Muslim countries such as Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, their personal situation in their countries of origin (i.e. social status, education), the causes of migration and flight (i.e. persecution by the regime or jihadist fractions, economic shortages, war and destruction), and their understanding of religion differ considerably: A person from Bagram, Afghanistan, does not necessarily have much in common with a refugee from Aleppo (Syria).

Experiences from the RAN community and prevention work in different European countries point to a set of specific needs of asylum seekers and refugees that should be addressed in any safeguarding and prevention schemes directed at refugee communities. While none of these needs alone predict or explain extremist violence, they provide a framework to identify critical policy areas in which PVE strategies and interventions are required. In this paper we insist on this focus on "needs" rather than just on "risks" to highlight the importance of education, youth, and social and health work as key areas of PVE interventions.

Insecure residence status and uncertain perspectives: an insupportable position

Many asylum seekers and refugees are confronted with insecure residence statuses in their host countries, significantly impairing any effort to develop long-term perspectives for themselves and their families. For many asylum seekers and refugees, this period is marked by existential anxieties about one's prospects and a possible forced return to the country of origin. A lack of perspectives and desperation due to a pending threat of deportation might encourage a retreat to violent extremist ideologies; these ideologies potentially serve as exit strategies from a dead-end, offering relief for emotions such as desperation, anger and a quest for revenge.

Social marginalisation: arrived, but not settled

Living conditions of asylum seekers and refugees are often marked by limited access to housing, labour, culture, education and communal life. Restricted access to public services impedes the creation of social networks and bonds as a crucial footstep for engaging with society; it frustrates expectations of proper livelihood and personal success (see Koser & Cunningham, 2017). Studies on immigrant communities have shown that restrictions of individual liberties and rights, deprivation of access to social life and experiences of social exclusion can foster grievances towards the state/system and encourage retreat from society. These experiences can trigger the search for alternative opportunity structures and in-groups, with radical violent organisations possibly providing such alternatives (see for instance Lyons-Padilla, Gelfand, Mirahmadi, Farooq, & van Egmond, 2015). In this regard, experiences shared in RAN working groups point to harmful consequences related to large-scale, centralised and geographically isolated accommodation of refugees and asylum seekers.

Facing discrimination and hostility in public life

Asylum seekers and refugees often face discriminatory practices in public life. This includes personal experiences of discrimination and hostility in public spaces, the labour market or schools. Experiences of discrimination and racism obstruct identification with society and are exploited in religious extremist narratives of victimisation to foster the idea of an impossibility of Muslims integrating into European societies.

Disorientation and quest for identity in transition: establishing oneself against all odds

Living in diaspora, asylum seekers and refugees are confronted with an immediate and large-scale upheaval of social conventions, values and legal norms. Migration in general, and forced migration in particular, implies the need to quickly adapt to new social environments. This also involves questions of identity and belonging. Religious extremism stands for a highly accessible and comprehensive individual and collective identity that might be perceived as an alleviation of identity conflicts and quests for orientation and meaning (see Sterkenburg, Smit, & Meines, 2019, p. 3).

Mental health issues as additional challenges: leaving behind past burdens

Many asylum seekers and refugees have experienced traumatic events due to persecution and violence in their countries of origin. In addition, many were confronted with life-threatening situations, violence, sexual abuse and human rights violations during their flight to Europe. Ongoing persecutions and violence experienced by family members, relatives and friends in the countries of origin could further foster anxieties and place additional burden on refugees' well-being, with potentially harmful consequences for mental health (see RAN 2019d). If not

addressed and treated, traumatic experiences due to violence and mistreatment risk adding to social exclusion, economic insecurities and disorientation, and can thus turn into risk factors for violent behaviour and violent radicalisation (RAN, 2019e).

Questioning established truths of authoritarian environments

Many asylum seekers and refugees have grown up and lived in authoritarian environments, often marked by government-supported chauvinistic or exclusive narratives based on ethnicity, nationality or religion. In some cases, this also involves explicit religious intolerance, anti-Semitism and anti-Western and/or radical nationalist convictions. Socialisation in authoritarian contexts has long-term influence on personal orientation and attitudes and potentially contradicts recognition and acceptance of basic human rights such as freedom of religion and gender equality.

Groups with heightened risk due to experiences of flight and diaspora

Experts and practitioners from the RAN community have identified four groups affected by risk factors related to experiences of flight and diaspora (cp. Krasenberg & Lenos, 2018):

1. Rejected asylum seekers

Given their insecure legal, social and economic status and their lack of personal perspectives, rejected asylum seekers are particularly vulnerable to extremist ideologies. Being placed "outside the system might result in them directing their frustration against that system" (RAN, 2018b, p. 6).

2. Refugees and asylum seekers with mental health issues

Mental health issues potentially increase vulnerability to violent radicalisation. In the light of often limited resources and infrastructures in host countries to provide sufficient support for those with mental health issues, they often lack appropriate support and accompaniment.

3. Unaccompanied minors

Adolescence is related to experiences of insecurity and disorientation. The status of asylum seekers and refugees, growing up in new social environments, and the lack of social bonds and networks are additional burdens faced by unaccompanied minors that might heighten individual vulnerability to turn to extremist ideologies and communities.

4. Unaccompanied minors turning 18+

Minors often enjoy particular legal protection and access to education, accommodation and personal support. In many Member States, access to and protection by public services significantly weakens with the age of legal majority. This results in abrupt legal insecurities and diminishing access to social life. Experienced as an existential crisis, this might add to vulnerabilities of radicalisation.

While awareness for possible risk factors due to flight experiences and diaspora is helpful to adopt and conceptualise safeguarding strategies for asylum seekers and refugees, it is important to note the implied risk of stigmatisation. It is crucial to reflect on possible harmful effects of interventions targeted at specific groups; they might add to injustices and stigmatisation and further distance affected persons from society.

ENTRY POINTS INTO VIOLENT EXTREMIST SCENES AND RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Radicalisation processes involve social interactions with peers and/or direct contacts with extremist milieus. Experiences from several Member States point to activities by extremist organisations to fill in voids left by public services and community structures. This relates to material support (i.e. the provision of food, accommodation and clothes), but also involves accompanying asylum seekers and refugees to medical doctors, offering translation in administrative procedures and organising leisure activities. In addition, extremist organisations also cater to religious and cultural needs and interests (i.e. by invitations to religious feasts) that are not sufficiently met by existing public or community infrastructures. Some of these activities take place in the immediate surrounding of refugee shelters and can thus be prevented by administrative measures; other strategies include activities in the public sphere (i.e. distribution of publications in pedestrian zones, invitations to barbecues in public parks) and are more difficult to avert by administrative interventions. Prevention strategies targeted at

refugee communities should hence not be limited to the supply side of potential radicalisation processes (i.e. banning of extremist missionary work in the public sphere), but should equally address the demand side of violent extremist ideologies and communities (i.e. "Why does someone turn to extremist organisations?"). Interventions need to fill possible voids identified in public services and community structures that might otherwise be satisfied by (violent) extremist actors.

Preventing violent extremism among asylum seekers and refugees: experiences, lessons learned and good practices

PVE approaches and practices often refer to refugees and asylum seekers as some of many possible target groups. In recent years, several approaches have been developed and implemented that specifically aim at addressing potential vulnerabilities and needs related to displacement. Members of the RAN community have identified four main areas in which such interventions are most relevant:

SAFEGUARDING AND SOCIAL COHESION

Approaches focusing on fostering social cohesion aim at improving access of refugees and asylum seekers to basic services in the areas of housing, employment, education, health and social life.

National policies are crucial to provide a legal framework and necessary resources

National policies are crucial to provide the legal framework and necessary resources to lift restrictions and to enhance opportunities for refugees and asylum seekers — irrespective of their legal status — to engage in society. In many EU Member States national migration policies have become significantly more restrictive. This relates to legal status, housing conditions, welfare payments, access to health services and education, or freedom of movement. From a safeguarding and PVE perspective, these restrictions add to the vulnerabilities and risk factors of violent radicalisation.

Local communities have been successful by integrating PVE strategies into broader policies of social inclusion

Noticeable efforts have been made by local governments to address basic needs and to improve refugees' inclusion in communal life (cp. for instance Eurocities, 2017 and Eurocities, 2016, p. 8). These efforts are twofold: they aim at improving refugees' integration into communal structures, and at strengthening communities and building their resilience against polarisation. This also highlights the need to link PVE strategies to broader policies of social inclusion and community building, and to include activities directed at refugees into existing multi-agency networks. In addition, PVE strategies directed at individuals or groups at risk need to be supported by more general policies of social inclusion. Counselling centres or info house structures are a key element of these efforts. This includes centres providing specialised multidisciplinary support (i.e. psychologists, social workers, family consultants, educators and others) and multisector support (i.e. youth, social and health services, schooling, NGOs, police) to prevent radicalisation, but also support structures directed at refugees for basic services and needs.

Good practice: A community that cares

In the city of Malmö, PVE strategies play an important role in local policies, but are linked to overarching strategies and goals of social inclusion and fostering social cohesion. Housing of refugees, for instance, is mostly provided in regular housing areas and apartments to facilitate inclusion and access to public services and to prevent seclusion. In addition, the city has adopted the prevention system "Communities-that-care" ([2]) that is based on engaging different community stakeholders in defining a shared community vision and addressing related challenges and needs. PVE is thus integrated into wider efforts of fostering social cohesion and building resilience of the community. Civil society organisations are considered important partners to assess needs and challenges and, most importantly, to implement related programs and activities (see RAN, 2018b, pp. 2-5).

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[2] For information on this programme, see University of Washington, Center for Communities That Care,
https://www.communitiesthatcare.net

EDUCATION, YOUTH WORK AND EMPOWERMENT

Education and youth work are key to foster resilience and to empower youngsters and young adults against violent extremist offerings (see Nordbruch & Sieckelinck 2018; Prinzjakowitsch, 2018); this is also true for refugees. Enhancing their participation and access to civic, social and political rights and strengthening active participation are a central part of PVE policies (see RAN, 2019d).

Adopting existing approaches and practices to specific needs of refugees

For obvious reasons, educational programmes directed at refugees primarily focus on language acquisition and basic information about host societies (for instance, related to public services, rights and duties, local culture and habits). Yet, experiences from the RAN community and beyond highlight the need to broaden the scope of educational and youth work strategies and rethink overall approaches and methods to include refugees as target groups with specific needs and experiences. This includes, among others, the fields of youth work, civic education and gender education, media education and religious education. They offer important opportunities to support identity development and self-affirmation, to foster social bonds and belonging, and to experience solidarity and self-efficacy (see ufuq.de, 2018).

Ensuring continuous access to education and youth work beyond immediate PVE needs

Education and youth work play a key role in detecting early signs of radicalisation and in supporting PVE interventions and disengagement schemes. The role of educators and youth workers is not confined to firefighters, however. An expert group set up under the European Union Work Plan for Youth, for instance, highlighted the importance of refugees' access to youth work as a precondition of integration: "integration is a process that begins immediately after arriving (…). It is of the utmost importance to connect young immigrants with youth organisations and youth workers immediately after their arrival, in this early stage of integration." (European Commission – Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2019, p. 9; see also Eurocities, 2017). Education and youth work are crucial to foster identity, develop emotional skills, acquire social and communicative competencies, encourage critical thinking, enable autonomy and ensure participation; they are essential to build resilience prior to any radicalisation occurring.

MENTAL HEALTH

A significant number of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe suffer from mental health issues due to their experiences in their countries of origin and/or during their flight to Europe. Existing mental health approaches should thus be adapted to refugees to guarantee access and to respond to their specific needs and experiences.

Mental health issues rarely come alone; to address mental health issues of refugees, trauma-sensitive services and comprehensive and accessible support structures are needed

Experiences from within the RAN community draw attention to the fact that individuals "with mental illness are not more vulnerable per se, but if the mental illness is not addressed or treated adequately, the risk of engaging in violence increases" (RAN, 2019e, p. 2; see also RAN, 2019a). Raising awareness for trauma and related challenges among educators and social workers is crucial to ensure support and to build resilience. Mental health issues are often linked to other problems, such as weak social bonds and social exclusion, family conflicts or financial problems; mental health issues thus rarely come alone, but imply needs on various levels. Due to limited access to public services and support structures, refugees and asylum seekers in particular are at risk of being affected by these dynamics. Mental health approaches in PVE are thus not limited to psychological or medical support, but include furthering welfare, development, active citizenship and integration in society. It is crucial to facilitate access to mental health support, and to integrate mental health approaches into local multi-agency PVE strategies to ensure psychological expertise in the development and implementation of PVE interventions.

TRAINING AND SUPPORTING PRACTITIONERS

PVE interventions are sensitive and require specific knowledge, skills and attitudes to be successful. This holds true for PVE interventions with refugees in particular.

Enhance competencies and skills, and encourage cooperation

Practitioners from the RAN community have pointed out the need to provide trainings for first-line professionals raising awareness for possible signs of radicalisation among asylum seekers. However, first experiences made with such trainings point to the difficulties in providing practical knowledge that could effectively improve work routines. In many cases, these trainings on possible indicators of radicalisation led to additional insecurities and, maybe most importantly, to unjustified suspicions of individuals (van Wijk & Bolhuis, 2017). Trainings should be tailored to concrete audiences and provide guidelines rather than checklists. This also includes raising awareness for stigmatising and alienating effects of possible interventions. In addition, trainings should inform about existing procedures and available support structures and clarify responsibilities and roles of different actors; they should firmly transmit the message that PVE is not a one-man show but builds on exchange of knowledge and interdisciplinary cooperation.

Good practice: Systemic approach to enhance social inclusion of refugees

The counselling network Anschluss ("Connection") is specialised in prevention work with refugees and supports and trains educators and social workers confronted with violent extremist ideologies and behaviour ([3]). The network is part of a PVE counselling structure established by the civil society organisation IFAK in Bochum and supports practitioners as well as relatives and friends of individuals at risk of radicalisation in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. The network combines expertise in social work, education, psychology and Islamic studies, and follows a systemic approach to strengthen the immediate social environment of individuals at risk and to enhance these individuals' social inclusion and resilience.

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[3] Beratungsnetzwerk Grenzgänger/Anschluss: https://ifak-bochum.de/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Broschuere-Beratungsnetzwerk-Grenzgaenger-2018.pdf

Anti-refugee and anti-immigration discourses and mobilisation

Discrimination and hostility experienced by refugees and asylum seekers in public life constitute a risk factor for radicalisation and are exploited in religious extremist narratives. Unfortunately, anti-refugee and anti-immigrant discourses continue to poison European public debates. Xenophobic populism and racist hate speech have left their marks on the political climate in Europe, as documented in a report by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) (ECRI, 2019). According to the report, anti-immigration discourses have also entered mainstream political parties and government policies. But have far-right attitudes really gained a hold on larger segments of the European population? And what role do issues related to immigration and refugees play?

STABLE SUPPORT FOR FAR-RIGHT ATTITUDES, BUT GROWING VISIBILITY, ORGANISATION AND VIOLENT FORMS OF EXPRESSION

Perhaps surprisingly, public opinion on immigration and refugees in recent years remained relatively stable and positive across Europe. A study published by the Research Social Platform on Migration and Asylum (ReSOMA) in July 2019 found that, overall, Europeans have become less opposed to immigration, particularly in western Europe (Huddleston & Sharif, 2019, p. 5). Opinion polls show that attitudes towards refugees are rather similar across Europe, but tend to be more positive in countries with higher levels of immigration and more developed integration policies (European Commission, 2018; Huddleston & Sharif, 2019, p. 12). Studies conducted in Germany confirm these findings: The majority of Germans are in favour of an open society, against discrimination of minorities and open to welcoming refugees (Quent, 2019, pp. 54-68). A long-term study by the University of Leipzig finds that the percentage of Germans supporting far-right radical attitudes has decreased from 9.7 to 6 % since 2002 (Decker & Brähler, 2018, p. 87). Even overall populist attitudes seem to be relatively constant since 2014 (Küpper, Berghan, & Rees, 2019, pp. 185 ff). One conclusion from this data is that far-right attitudes are neither due to the number of refugees and asylum seekers that arrived in 2015 and after, nor directly resulting from discourses in media and politics. Rather, far-right extremist attitudes have long been a part of Europe's societies, but are becoming more visible and vocal in recent years and are increasingly expressed in political parties and social movements.

This does not change the fact that violence statistics are a source of worry; even more so as far-right attitudes are increasingly expressed through violent means. Civil society actors have pointed out a correlation of anti-refugee discourses and violence in 2015: for example, the number of attacks on refugees, asylum seekers or their homes in Germany was three times higher in 2015 than in 2014 (Quent, 2019, p. 134). The number of hate crimes registered by the German Ministry of Interior has been increasing every year (from 5 376 in 2001 to 8 113 in 2018) (Federal Ministry of the Interior, 2019), while experts assume that many, if not most, cases remain unreported.

TAKING MOBILISATION TO A DIFFERENT LEVEL: NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL STRATEGIES, ACTORS, NETWORKS

Far-right movements use different strategies to spread their ideas. Firstly, far-right actors and parties are nationally and transnationally connected in networks of parties, movements and ideologists. The far-right, anti-Islam blog Politically Incorrect (PI-News) may serve as an illustration of these networks. Founded in 2004 by a German teacher, it was quickly joined by other authors and is today one of the most popular German-language websites with local groups active in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. It is run anonymously from United States servers and well connected with far-right movements across Europe. Secondly, the far right has been successful in bringing racist and illiberal positions into the mainstream. One example of mainstreaming is the connection being made between crime and migration. Without being founded on any justifiable data, the notion of this link has permeated mainstream discussions, regardless. Increasingly obligatory and coercive integration policies such as immigration or citizenship tests in the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and Germany, and increasingly restrictive national legislation on refugees and asylum seekers can be seen as a reaction to anti-immigration discourses since 2016 and thus constitute further examples of mainstreaming far-right attitudes.

Finally, social media and modern communication techniques play a central role in far-right mobilisation strategies. Fake news items, according to researchers, are key elements of far-right mobilisation. The strategic propagation of rumours and lies over the internet has been documented by civil society organisations (Baldauf et al., 2017,

pp. 6-7). In addition, the connection between online mobilisation and factual violence is well documented. A recent study has shown how communication via Facebook fuelled anti-refugee attacks on a local level (RAN, 2019b).

FAR-RIGHT NARRATIVES REGARDING REFUGEES AND IMMIGRATION

The RAN paper 'Current and future narratives and strategies of far-right and Islamist extremism' (RAN, 2019b) identifies five far-right narratives that are shared by most far-right organisations: the struggle for identity narrative, the masculinity narrative, the victimhood narrative, the loss of self-government narrative, and the eco-fascist narrative. Immigration and refugees are key issues in far-right mobilisation. Two sub-narratives linked to these issues can be identified.

The fear of losing one's identity

The fear of losing one's identity expresses itself in a variety of ways and sub-narratives: it ranges from angry comments in social media by people feeling offended by renaming Christmas markets "winter markets" or by a school's decision to stop serving pork in the cafeteria to more elaborated theories of "ethnopluralism" and "great replacement".

The narrative of a demise of the national supposedly authentic peoples is based on a perceived demographic threat that immigration constitutes for national culture and tradition. Multiculturalism, in this view, is a concept of the elites, of "decadent" liberals, "cosmopolitan" hipsters and leftist "traitors of the nation" (Quent, 2019, p. 52).

On the more extreme end of the spectrum, the far right has developed complex theories to identify hidden powers behind recent migration. The far-right extremist concept of ethnopluralism, which has come to replace openly racist calls for an elimination of minorities, works from the concept of the "pure" nation that is ethnically homogenous. It prefers a world in which ethnic groups are supposed to stay or go back "where they belong". Finally, the theory of a plan of "great replacement" has been popular in far-right circles for a few years now. It stands for an all-encompassing worldview that seeks to explain changes in European societies in the last decades. The "great replacement" narrative claims a detailed plan of the political elites to replace the European autochthonous population with "other cultures" (Institute for Democracy and Civil Society, 2017). It is a conspiracy theory in that it claims the "invisibility of power": behind political processes as we see them, there are "true" holders of power without popular legitimacy. Proponents of the idea of a "great replacement" refer to the book 'Le grand remplacement' by French author Renaud Camus. Defenders of this narrative call for "resistance" and incite violence. The attacker of two mosques in Christchurch (New Zealand), who killed 51 people and injured 50 others in 2019, gave his "manifest" the title 'The great replacement'.

Example: The Identitarian movement in Europe

The Identitarian movement is a pan-European far-right youth movement that started in France in 2003 as the Bloc Identitaire. The group espouses the idea of "ethnopluralism" and the "great replacement" theory and believes in the existence of a homogenous "European culture" that needs to be defended from Islamisation by migration. It demands the "remigration" of immigrants and refugees to their countries of origin and has gained some publicity with actions like the chartering of a ship by Austria's Identitarians to keep immigrants from entering the EU in 2017 (Action Defend Europe). Identitarian groups have met with different degrees of acceptance by the state: while they are under surveillance by the German and French intelligence services, they are connected to Austria's Freedom Party (FPÖ), in government until May 2019. Although the movement is judged to be clearly in conflict with the constitution in several European countries, it has not been banned in a single one. In March 2019, connections between Austria's identitarians and the man charged with killing 51 people in Christchurch, New Zealand, have brought the movement under pressure.

The fear of losing one's identity is not always but quite often linked to a supposed "Islamic threat" to Europe. In Europe, far-right movements have come to promote anti-Muslim sentiments during the last decade. According to these views, Muslims will eventually become the majority of the population and impose Islamic law on Europeans. Islamic culture is seen as inherently bad, Muslims as backward, violent and hostile to women (Fielitz et al., 2018, pp. 13-17). Calling for a "counter-jihad", far-right networks have tried since the late 2000s to propagate resistance against Islam in Europe. Counter-Jihad started mainly as an online movement, but quickly translated into political movements such as the English Defence League or Germany's Patriotic Europeans Against the

Islamisation of the Occident (Pegida). Supporters of some of these movements have openly called for violent action.

Example: Terror attacks in Oslo, Norway

In 2011, Anders Behring Breivik detonated a bomb in Oslo, killing 8 people, and then shot dead 69 others, many of them teenagers, at a camp run by Norway's Labour Party. In his manifesto, titled 'A European declaration of independence', he claims to have been directly inspired by American counter-jihad websites like jihadwatch.org and Gates of Vienna and what he called "The Vienna school". Gates of Vienna refers to the siege of Vienna in 1683, which it sees as only one battle in a long war between Europe and Islam. The blog espouses the belief that the European elites have conspired against their people to hand the continent over to Muslims. Breivik himself saw his terrorist act as resistance against the "Islamisation of Europe".

The fear of physical insecurity

Fear of crime and violence is one of the main narratives expressed by far-right extremist actors. According to Alice Weidel, co-Chairman of the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland, the security situation in Germany "has become much worse" due to "the irresponsible open border policy" (Alternative für Deutschland, 2018) — this statement comes in spite of the fact that there has been a steady decrease in crime rates in Germany over the last decades (Quent, 2019, p. 27). In Germany, while 73 % of the population say they feel safe, 86.9 % of far-right voters say that they are afraid of terror attacks (Quent, 2019, p. 175). This may suggest that voters of far-right parties are more afraid of violence and a rise in crime rates than voters of other parties.

Example: The events in Cologne on New Year's Eve 2015/16, Germany

An important event that spurred far-right anti-refugee discourses in Germany were the events of Cologne on New Year's Eve of 2015/16. Sexual harassment and attacks committed by male immigrants against women led to the stigmatisation of immigrants and refugees as dangerous rapists ("rapefugees"). It was interesting to see how, in this debate, women's bodies became a symbol for the integrity of the nation, while sexual harassment and violence against women were hardly ever discussed in German society otherwise. In January 2016's polls leading up to national elections, support for the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland was its highest since the founding of the party

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Prevention of far-right extremist mobilisation against asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants: Strategic communication and polarisation management

Incidents and fake news around refugees and immigrants are a driving force in far-right mobilisation. Changes in local contexts like the construction of a refugee home or the involvement of immigrants and refugees in violent incidents can lead to conflicts and increasing polarisation in communities. The experiences of the RAN community offer valuable insights on how to use local and national strategic communication regarding refugees and immigrants in order to mitigate the effects of far-right narratives and propaganda. The RAN Centre of Excellence (CoE) thematic events in 2016 pointed to the importance of strategic communication as part of a coordinated approach and offered potential actions to take in this regard: RAN practitioners recommended, for example, running campaigns to influence public opinion, investing in awareness raising, expertise and dialogue with media organisations as well as sharing personal stories to humanise the debate about refugees (RAN, 2016, p. 5). The Bart Brandsma polarisation management model, which has been presented and discussed at several RAN meetings and is central to the RAN polarisation management manual (Lenos et al., 2017), is particularly helpful. In the following section, it will be combined with recommendations from the RAN community of practitioners in order to develop a set of best practices regarding strategic communication and polarisation management on a national and local level.

The RAN polarisation management manual

RAN practitioners from across Europe gathered in Amsterdam in July 2017 in order to discuss regional problems with polarisation and to exchange practices for managing polarisation. The group developed the RAN polarisation management manual (Lenos et al., 2017), a text that takes stock of several RAN meetings and papers on the subject, introduces the Bart Brandsma polarisation management model, explains the mechanisms of polarisation and offers practical guidance for different sectors.

UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING POLARISATION — THE BART BRANDSMA POLARISATION MANAGEMENT MODEL

The polarisation model developed by Bart Brandsma has been presented and discussed at several RAN meetings, such as the joint EDU and POL meeting in Stockholm. The model offers a set of recommendations for communication strategies regarding refugees and immigrants, preventing far-right mobilisation and polarisation on the topic.

We will summarise the approach here; for more details, watch a 4-minute video here or read a substantial part of his book in English here.

Brandsma argues that polarisation is built upon three rules and five roles:

Three rules:

1. Polarisation is a thought construct, 'us-and-them' thinking, based on identities and groups. Polarisation is the spin, the story exploiting an incident or conflict.

2. Polarisation needs fuel; it thrives on talking about identities in combination with judgment. If there is no communication, no energy put into the polarisation, it will die out.

3. Polarisation is about feelings and emotions. Facts and figures won't get the job done in managing polarisation.

The five roles:

1. The Pushers, positioning themselves at two opposing poles, are trying to create polarisation, they are the instigators acting from the poles. They claim 100% truth and are more in the 'send mode' than the 'listen mode'. They don't want a real dialogue.

2. The Joiners have chosen sides and moved towards the pushers; this is polarisation unfolding.

3. The Middle ground, the nuanced, have not chosen sides, and [are] not taking part in polarisation. They could be neutral, scared or indifferent. They are targeted by the pushers; the game of polarisation is won or lost in the middle ground.

4. The Bridge-builder is trying to bring peace and moderation by reaching out to both opposing poles. But, by doing so, he or she underlines the existence of the two poles, and as a result might even be adding fuel to the polarisation.

5. The Scapegoats are being blamed or attacked, these could be the non-polarised 'in the middle ground' or the bridge-builders. (Lenos et al., 2017, pp. 6-7)

Brandsma recommends four game changers:

1. Change the target audience. Pushers portray an enemy in the other pusher but target the middle ground, that is where the actual polarisation is taking place. So, target the middle ground for depolarisation.
2. Change the topic. Move away from the identity construct chosen by the pushers and start a conversation on the common concerns and interests of those in the middle ground.
3. Change position. Don't act above the parties, but move towards the middle ground.
4. Change the tone; this is not a question of facts being right or wrong. Use mediating speech, try to engage and connect with the diverse middle ground. (Lenos et al., 2017, p. 7)

Bringing together the recommendations made by the RAN community and the Brandsma model allows formulating key recommendations for strategic communication regarding refugees and immigrants, preventing far-right mobilisation and polarisation on the topic. Starting from Brandsma's four game changers, we will add two game changers that seem to be particularly important for strategic planning: Analysis and Evaluation.

Analyse and prepare

- Make sure you and your partners understand the dynamics of polarisation. Organise training courses for local practitioners and politicians on the rules, roles and game changers.
- Define the polarising issue as clearly as possible and spend some time understanding the dynamics at play. Analyse the actors: Who are the pushers and joiners? Who is in the middle ground? Who are the bridge-builders? How is the polarising issue being framed by the different sides?
- Be prepared! Try to build up procedures for dealing with problematic incidents or first signs of far-right mobilisation. Try to identify polarisation when it is still at an early stage.

Example: National Community Tension Team (NCTT, United Kingdom)

In the UK, the NCTT is a national police function that uses data provided by individual police forces on a weekly basis to monitor, assess and inform an appropriate response to changes in community tensions. Community tensions are assessed locally by looking at information from four sources: 1) force intelligence 2) community engagement 3) open source (news media, blogs, academic papers etc.) 4) social media (instant response).

The assessment leads to a national document which is sent to all police forces and relevant government departments. The reports offer a threefold EEP assessment:

-Experienced: how do communities feel?

-Evidenced: what has happened or is happening?

-Potential: what might happen or has the potential to happen?

In each area, a Single Point of Contact is appointed to develop the local community tension summaries, to ensure this activity is prioritised, and to encourage police and partners to feed relevant information into the process. (RAN, 2017, p. 23)

Change the target audience

- The middle ground should be your target group. Who is the middle ground? What matters to them? Decide who you would like to speak to, in a way that makes sense to them.
- Are there credible community voices that could help you reach your target audience?
- Do not ignore the pushers and haters, though, whether they act online or offline. Designate police officers or social workers to engage with them directly — e.g. during an unannounced home visit.
- Know that those attending community meetings, etc. are usually the ones already engaged in the issue. Try to broaden your target audience and get people who have been silent so far to join the conversation.

Example: Community voices, Germany

On the occasion of the Islamic holiday of Eid al-Adha in 2019, a Berlin mosque organised a festival followed by a public prayer in a nearby park. The organisers as well as local authorities met with heavy criticism for allegedly handing over the park to Islamic extremists. The tone in the media was harsh and pressure on local authorities rising as priest Martin Germer, head of a church that had been collaborating with the mosque, published an open letter, defending the event as the believers' basic right to undisturbed practice of religion in accordance with Art. 4 of the German Constitution. The discussion calmed down considerably after the priest's intervention.

Example: Police management of polarisation, the Netherlands

In the summer of 2015, with the refugee crisis at its peak, intolerance, prejudices and hate speech were widespread in social media. A lot of the language used could be perceived as insulting, or at least feeding intolerance and polarisation. In several instances, the identity of these loud voices could be determined, and community police officers paid these individuals a home visit - not to launch an investigation or other legal actions, but just to make sure individuals understood that it was not okay to hide behind a keyboard and intimidate and insult others. Online matters. The same approach has been used by mayors in certain cities. The mayor of Gouda, for instance, knocked at the door of around 10 angry and concerned citizens and had a good conversation with them. This cooled things down. (RAN, 2017, p. 23)

Change the topic

- Provide as much factual information as possible. Be transparent about decision-making processes, strains and limitations.
- Don't adopt far-right language, narratives and positions in an attempt to appease pushers. You will only strengthen the radical right. Distance yourself clearly from radicals and don't offer them public stages.
- Deal with legitimate grievances and fears in the population. If you ignore it, it will get worse. This is not about talking to far-right extremists but about making people understand changes in their environment without being arrogant or angry at them.
- Communicate in a positive and inclusive way. Put forward common, optimistic visions of citizenship and shared identity.
- Don't ignore problems but try to draw attention to positive developments, common achievements and constructive solutions. Positive news about migration and integration are rare; a too-pessimistic way of reporting distorts reality and destroys trust.

Example: Terror attack in Christchurch, New Zealand

In March of 2019, a white supremacist shot and killed 51 and injured 49 people in two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern received international attention for her leadership and communication in the aftermath of the attack. Instead of repressing civil liberties or calling for a "war on terror", she showed great compassion with victims and mourners. She comforted believers, covered her head in a gesture of respect and showed unconditional solidarity with New Zealand's Muslim community. The government was able to put in place stricter gun control measures that had been opposed by parliament for a long time. Addressing parliament after the attacks, she said she would never speak the attacker's name and urged others: "I implore you: speak the names of those who were lost rather than the name of the man who took them. He may have sought notoriety but we, in New Zealand, will give nothing – not even his name."

Change position

- Who should initiate and run communication campaigns? Will the message be more credible and acceptable if it comes from government, local authorities or NGOs?
- Work in partnership with others. Partnerships between different sectors — e.g. government, community and local NGOs — are particularly fruitful.
- Will local community events be helpful for better communication? If you opt for community events, choose small formats, where you can communicate with people directly, over big public events with a central stage for "important" people. Pushers might use this stage to address the middle ground.

Example: Community Seminars, Finland

In Finland, Community Seminars are organised at the local level. The seminars bring together different local actors from different public sectors (law enforcement, social services etc.), NGOs that specialise in working with vulnerable groups and have expertise in local prevention efforts, religious communities and community-based organisations. This opens a door to grassroots access to citizens and their trust. The seminars function as a trust-building and co-creation platform for local preventive practices and initiatives. After a seminar, the local authorities receive support from a local multi-agency team and action plan. The objective of this co-creation is to facilitate a transparent, inclusive and participatory process for all parties that also prevents stigmatisation and 'targeting', for example of Muslim communities. This is also important from the point of view of strategic communications, as polarisation around the topic of radicalisation, violent extremism and foreign terrorist fighter returnees reflect a narrow and misleading image of the nature of violent extremism as a phenomenon. (RAN, 2017, p. 18)

Change the tone

- Use mediative speech whenever possible. Language should not feed polarisation. By using mediative speech, you reduce the risk of pushers using your messages for polarisation.
- Personal stories shared by trusted community figures can help change the tone. If your campaign addresses emotions, it will be more effective. Show empathy for all sides, try to include different types of people and build trust.
- Choose communication channels that are conducive to reaching your target audience. Social media might be better suited than classic media channels. Still, it can be useful to include traditional media in your communication strategy: raise awareness and increase knowledge among journalists on the dynamics of polarisation. Provide the media with factual information to prevent the spreading of rumours and propaganda.
- Take a clear stance against hate speech and violence. Show strong support for NGOs and individuals being attacked by far-right extremists and make sure that hate crime is recorded and punished according to national standards. The consistent prosecution of hate crimes is an important cornerstone of living together in a diverse society.

Example: Reporting on refugees, Ireland

The Irish National Union of Journalists (NUJ) guide, 'Reporting on refugees. Guidance by and for Journalists.', was written in collaboration with the UNHCR and the Irish Refugee Council.

In seeking to improve standards we are not trying to stifle debate. Rather we are seeking to ensure that all of us meet our obligations through fair and honest journalism. While there is a widespread awareness of the importance of accurate reporting, some of our colleagues continue to print or broadcast myths and misinformation about refugees and asylum-seekers. Inaccurate terminology and commentary has increased confusion and that breeds prejudice.

That means always: checking and cross-checking information, being aware of the veracity of sources, being mindful of the language we use and the context in which information is presented. (RAN, 2017, pp. 12-13)

Evaluate and learn

- Monitor responses to your communication strategies carefully. Evaluate and improve your communication strategy together with your partners and other stakeholders.
- Ensure results and lessons learned are available to others; this will help future communication strategies.

Example: Monitoring & evaluating counter- and alternative narrative campaigns

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are essential to building successful communication campaigns. A clear M&E framework makes it possible to quickly adapt a campaign to changing circumstances and to measure success. RAN practitioners worked together in early 2019 (Wouterse & Verdegaal, 2019) to put together recommendations for an M&E framework that is practical and realistic. The group focused on counter- and alternative narrative campaigns, but its recommendations offer valuable guidance for broader communication strategies and campaigns, too. The paper differentiates between four phases: before, testing, during and after a campaign, and introduces key elements to take into consideration in each phase.

Key recommendations for policy and practice

The rising number of refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Europe since 2015 and the related challenges to local communities have added to concern about a growing polarisation of public opinion and the rise of far-right extremism in several EU Member States. These concerns are paralleled by concerns about a possible radicalisation of refugees and asylum seekers due to their particular needs related to diaspora and experiences of displacement.

POLICY

National policies are required to foster long-term social inclusion of refugees to prevent the development of vulnerabilities for violent radicalisation. PVE policies should aim at identifying and filling in possible voids in public services and community structures that might otherwise be exploited by violent extremist actors. In addition, policies should significantly increase efforts to tackle polarisation of public opinion and to challenge extremist "us-and-them" narratives.

Policy actions should focus on:

- revising and adopting PVE strategies to address special needs and possible risk factors of refugee communities;
- providing secure residence status for refugees to allow long-term perspectives in the host countries;
- ensuring access to public services, education, youth work and mental health for refugees — irrespective of their legal status — to enhance social bonds and economic autonomy and to foster social inclusion;
- supporting the adaptation of existing approaches and practices in the areas of education, youth work and mental health to specific needs of refugees;
- supporting and encouraging local communities to integrate PVE strategies into broader policies of social inclusion;
- implementing anti-discrimination policies and building support structures to ensure safety of refugees and asylum seekers in the public sphere;
- supporting target group-oriented trainings and qualifications for practitioners that focus on guidelines (rather than checklists), networking and multi-agency cooperation;
- supporting NGOs as key players in PVE interventions and encouraging cooperation between public institutions and NGOs;
- monitoring polarisation of public opinion and identity issues at stake;
- responding timely in case of incidents caused by violent far-right extremist mobilisation;
- supporting credible community voices as bridge-builders by bringing them to the fore;
- engaging pushers and haters directly by designating police or social workers to seek contact with them;
- dealing with legitimate grievances and fears in the population;
- using mediating and inclusive language in strategic communication;
- providing as much factual information as possible and being transparent about decision-making processes;
- using strategic communication to foster inclusion and to highlight positive examples of living together and community cohesion;
- taking a clear stance against hate speech and violence and prosecuting hate crime.

PRACTICE

Practitioners are facing significant challenges in fulfilling their respective roles. Working with refugees and asylum seekers implies being confronted with persons living in often dire conditions; polarising public opinion and the growing visibility of far-right extremism poses additional burden on their work. Practitioners should therefore:

- build on interdisciplinary and multi-agency networks and cooperation to exchange knowledge and experiences to develop strategies to improve social cohesion and to prevent polarisation;
- use trainings to be informed about current expressions of polarisation, to increase knowledge about radicalisation processes and to exchange good practices to tackle both phenomena;
- be aware of particular challenges and burdens related to experiences of displacement, and be trauma-sensitive; focus on needs, not just on risk factors, to safeguard individual refugees and to foster inclusion;
- use existing multi-agency networks and support structures to provide comprehensive support for individual refugees;

- challenge "pushers" of polarisation on the local level; provide support for "bridge-builders" in local communities;
- use mediating and inclusive languages and put forward inclusive visions of citizenship;
- organise small community events in order to broaden the number of people involved and to connect the community;
- express support for victims of discrimination and hate speech: take a stand!

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