International Organization for Migration (IOM)

The UN Migration Agency

PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

<u>INTERNAL</u> BRIEFING NOTE

RATIONALE FOR IOM ENGAGEMENT

Annually, armed conflicts drive millions of people to leave their homes and seek refuge within and across international borders. As an element of IOM's global efforts to prevent and mitigate conflict as a cause of displacement and human suffering, and in concert with the Secretary-General's 'Sustaining Peace Agenda', IOM continues to develop and implement innovative programming to address the challenges presented by contemporary armed conflicts, including those instigated by *violent extremist groups*.

As a migration agency, IOM works to address the *drivers* of conflict-induced displacement and to create conditions for return and reintegration. With respect to violent extremism, IOM takes a context specific approach to identifying the structural, individual and enabling factors contributing to individual and group *risk of recruitment into VE groups*, by holistically engaging at the individual, community and institutional levels. Through Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) programming that addresses the contextually specific drivers of radicalization, and individual incentives to join violent extremist or terrorist groups, IOM aims to reduce recruitment into these groups and strengthen peaceful processes that help prevent and resolve conflict-induced migration. To be effective, PVE programming must be conceived and implemented with a context specific, *conflict sensitive approach* articulated and elaborated in a risk mitigation strategy that mitigates potential reputational risks, the possible misapplication of the PVE agenda for political ends or the stigmatization of beneficiaries, and any potential security risks in some contexts.

IOM draws a qualitative distinction between Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), and as such orients its work toward PVE related efforts. Within the United Nations and the European Union, PVE is defined as preventative actions aimed at addressing the factors underpinning vulnerability to VE. Prevention efforts are focused on those vulnerable to, *but not yet implicated in*, violent extremism as well as individuals who may positively influence those vulnerable and at-risk. CVE by contrast, describes efforts that include countering the activities of VE actors such as non-securitized approaches to disrupt, undermine or discredit the ideology, methods or messages of violent extremist groups themselves. As such, CVE programming may place actors in more direct confrontation with VE groups, increasing risks for programme staff and participants.

PVE CONTEXT AND CHARACTER

Violent extremism (VE) involves advocating, committing or supporting acts of violence to achieve ideological objectives that are typically based on racial, religious or ethnic supremacy and/or opposition to democratic values. It is distinct from ideological extremism specifically in its advocacy for, or direct use of, violence. VE emerges in dramatically diverse contexts across the globe and is not associated with any one ideology, religion or group. In some contexts, growing xenophobia and fearmongering have contributed to false associations of migrants with violent extremism. While an unsubstantiated correlation given the large number of migrants globally and the relatively small number of violent extremist, it is important to recognize that migrants may be more vulnerable to the influence of VE recruiters at various points in the migration cycle, including when facing the challenges of forced displacement, protracted displacement, irregular status, or social integration in contexts of hostility or xenophobia.

As a thematic area, PVE programming is relatively new and continues to evolve as research findings inform practice. However, the socio-cultural, economic, and political factors contributing to contemporary manifestations of VE are complex, multi-faced and context specific. Where conditions exist, risk factors may include the systematic

marginalization of minority, ethnic, sectarian, religious or cultural groups, socio-political or socio-economic exclusion, structural violence, shared trauma or rights violations, or other long-standing grievances that can be instrumentalized by VE groups for the purposes of recruitment. The presence of these factors, however, is still insufficient to explain the vulnerability of a given individual or group to recruitment or joining VE groups. Even in contexts where these drivers are present, the actual number of individuals recruited remains small, raising the question of why some individuals with shared circumstances join, whereas others do not. It is therefore imperative that PVE practitioners invest in and develop highly contextualized and in-depth analyses of specific individual and structural drivers, as well as enabling factors such as the activities of recruiters, that collectively contribute to recruitment vulnerabilities.

ACTIVITIES

PVE programming encompasses a wide range of activities tailored to the specific array of challenges in any given context and undertaken with the specific purpose of preventing radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism. The rapidly evolving global discourse and research makes clear that reducing individual vulnerability to violent extremism is not as simple as creating 'counter messaging' or employment programmes, though both have their role. In general, PVE projects integrate a range of features that may include mobilizing and organizing positive influencers, engaging those at risk in meaningful community initiatives, promoting socio-economic inclusion and livelihoods, building social cohesion and resilience, developing critical thinking skills and preparing government entities to take an integrated, non-securitized approach to constructive community engagement. Gender sensitivity plays a central role in PVE work, as women/girls and men/boys are affected differently by VE groups and play different social, political and cultural roles that may be important to prevention efforts.

PVE programming can therefore be both 'PVE-specific' and 'PVE-relevant'. PVE-specific programming is designed pursuant to a theory of change supported by evidence intended to address specific drivers of VE and create resilience among discrete at-risk populations. PVE-relevant programming refers to activities that do not meet a PE-specific definition, but that nonetheless are expected to impact positively on PVE outcomes. Much of IOM's programming is grounded in good practice learned from familiar thematic areas such as community stabilization, psycho-social recovery, conflict mitigation, peacebuilding and integration/reintegration support, but appropriately adjusted for each context and to address PVE-specific challenges. PVE programming may also be incorporated as an element of other interventions, such as demobilization, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) programming where the 'reintegration' of former violent extremists may explicitly include PVE activities to prevent new or re-recruitment, and address social integration and resilience building for those potentially at-risk of radicalization and recruitment, or community-policing programmes which increase community collaboration with police to protect youth from recruitment.

MANAGING CHALLENGES AND RISKS

Despite growing international attention to, and donor interest in PVE, the processes driving violent extremism and recruitment are just beginning to be understood and supported by research. Simplifications and misguided assumptions around 'root causes' or vulnerabilities to radicalization remain prevalent as are oversimplified solutions. It is therefore central to risk mitigation and programme effectiveness that PVE activities be properly contextualized and that programme design and implementation be well coordinated institutionally. As such, in compliance with the DG's Memo of August 2015 establishing oversight for counter-terrorism and preventing and countering violent extremism activities, all P/CVE related projects are reviewed by DOE RTS' and endorsed by DOE/TRD, and all Counter-Terrorism related border security projects by IBM RTS' and endorsed by DMM/IBM.

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