# High-Level Experts Meeting on Framing Development Solutions for the Prevention of Violent Extremism

# 13-15 June, 2016

# Dushanbe, Tajikistan

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**Disclaimer**

This document has been prepared on the basis of information gathered at the meeting in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on 13-15 June. The subsequent analyses and findings do not necessarily represent the views of the UNDP or any other entity of the United Nations System.

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*This report serves as a summary of the presentations, discussions, and conclusions reached by the participants. The recommendations should serve as the basis for UNDP and partner organizations work in the Central Asian region when addressing the conditions conducive to radicalization which leads to violent extremism.*

# Regional Context

1. In Central Asia, the threat of violent extremism is endangering the development gains that have been accrued over the past two decades. At a time of increasing economic volatility, the phenomenon of violent extremism poses a serious challenge to making further progress on sustainable development as reflected in the 2030 development agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. With the underlying drivers of radicalization that lead to violent extremism being exacerbated by the rise of transnational violent extremism, such as the movement of Foreign Fighters to join ISIL in Syria or spillovers from Afghanistan, the threat level is increasing substantially in Central Asia. This threat level increase is exemplified by the incident in Aktobe, Kazakhstan on 6 June 2016 when 6 people were killed and 40 injured as a group of militants attacked a National Guard base.[[1]](#footnote-1) According to the government the attack was in part motivated by “a radical imam in Syria who reportedly spoke by videoconference with the attackers and encouraged them to commit crimes”.[[2]](#footnote-2)
2. Extremist organizations, both those such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) that are insiders to Central Asia, and outsiders such as ISIL, are vigorously recruiting new members. While recruitment methodologies utilizing social media dominate the headlines, traditional social networks are also heavily exploited, especially among vulnerable groups such as young and economic migrants. Such recruitment weighs heavily on the manipulation of those feeling most affected by the development problems (e.g, lack of employment, inequality, failures in governance and social and political exclusion) facing the countries throughout the region, which are intensified by the economic crisis.
3. The most publicized consequence of this radicalization which leads to violent extremism is the phenomenon of foreign fighters traveling to Syria and Iraq in order to join ISIL. The latest available data concerning foreign fighters (FF) who left the region for Syria and Iraq comes from the end of 2015. The data indicates that there are upwards of 4,600 individuals from Central Asia and Russia who have left to become foreign fighters, with more than 2,400 of them originating from the Russian Federation alone.[[3]](#footnote-3) At the time of the last count, there was thought to be about 20,000 total foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, with current estimates being around 30,000.[[4]](#footnote-4)
4. Based on these numbers, there is the concern that this virulent form of radicalization is spreading throughout the region. The young are particularly vulnerable to these organizations’ alternative ideologies that promise to rectify their grievances, both real and perceived, against a state which they feel has failed them, and excluded them from political and economic spaces and opportunities. Such individuals are drawn not only to the economic incentives being offered by the extremist organizations, but have also been lead to believe that it is only through violence that they will be able to rebalance society and be recompensed for their grievances.
5. The other group particularly vulnerable to radicalization in the Central Asian context are economic migrants from Central Asia who have travelled to the Russian Federation, many of whom are also young men. This vulnerability to radicalization is the result of a number of complex factors. One of these concerns the consequence of the migrants being cut adrift from their normal social networks upon which they would rely in their home communities, and subsequently experiencing a crisis of identity in a new and sometimes antagonistic setting. For many “religion may become a key element [of their life], even if in their own countries it was not an essential part of their life”, leaving them vulnerable to recruitment by religious extremists who provide them a social structure and identity. The result is that an increasing number are being “radicalised by people from the North Caucasus, [and] recruited by them to go to Syria.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

# Purpose and Objectives

1. Bearing this situation in mind, UNDP convened a “High-Level Experts Meeting on Framing Development Solutions for the Prevention of Violent Extremism” that took place in Dushanbe, Tajikistan on 13-15 June, 2016. The meeting was opened by Assistant Secretary-General Cihan Sultanoglu, UN’s Resident Coordinator in Tajikistan, Alexander Zuev, as well as Tajikistan’s Foreign Minister Aslov Muhridinovich, the EU’s Special Representative for Central Asia, Peter Burian, and Petko Draganov, SRSG and head of the UNRCCA office. It was attended by a diverse group of 120 senior government officials, civil society representatives, academics, religious leaders, diplomats and UN colleagues from across the region and the Arab States.
2. The specific objectives of the meeting were to:
* Develop a common understanding of radicalization in Central Asia; the groups that are vulnerable to it, and its impact on development objectives;
* Examine current approaches to the prevention of violent extremism their successes, failures and gaps;
* Identified entry points and opportunities for new/adjusted and rights-based development programming at all levels, which can effectively contribute to preventing the conditions conducive to radicalization;
* Understand the gender differentiated roles played by men and women in extremist organizations, and the necessity for a gender-sensitive approach to preventing violent extremism; and
* Focus on the vulnerability of young adults, both men and women, and the need for engagement and opening of economic and social opportunities and voice.
1. Rather than concentrating on the theoretical underpinnings of radicalization that leads to violent extremism, the Dushanbe meeting focused on finding solutions that were practical, context-specific initiatives that balance human rights, development and security considerations. Further, the meeting sought to realize ways to operationalize the necessity of development responses and security responses existing side-by-side and in a complimentary manner – something that is very often not achieved.

# Framing the Debate

1. Prevention work that focuses unduly on religion and youth can be considered inadequate to addressing the full phenomenon of violent extremism. If the focus is only on religion, extremism arising from xenophobia or nationalism will be missed. If the focus is only on youth extremism, intergenerational extremism that is passed between generations will be missed. This inadequate response is further exacerbated by a lack of recognition that radicalism is not in and of itself a problem, thereby missing the important role that can be played by religion and youth in prevention. Instead of focusing on generalized target groups, effective prevention policies need to address the underlying problems that create an environment conducive to violent extremism.
2. It is important to understand the process of radicalization that leads to violent extremism, as these are the conditions (the push and pull factors) that need to be addressed. When looking at these conditions, it is critical to recognize that the reasons individuals become violent extremists are complex and varied. That being said, there are a few major issues that appear to be common factors that either push or pull individuals into becoming violent extremists.
3. UNDP has identified eight (8) major factors that can push individuals into embracing violent extremism. Those factors are: (1) The role and impact of global politics, (2) economic exclusion and limited opportunities for upward mobility, (3) political exclusion and shrinking civic space, (4) inequality, injustices, corruption and the violation of human rights, (5) disenchantment with the socio-economic and political system, (6) rejection of growing diversity in society, (7) weak state capacity and failing security, and (8) a changing global culture and the banalization of violence in media and entertainment.
4. People are also pulled into violent extremism through manipulation and socialization processes that take place through the media (both traditional and social), schools, families and friends, and cultural and religious institutions. Both the pull and push factors can also be enabled through emotional and psychological factors such as feelings of alienation, a sense of injustice, the search for identity, among others.
5. UNDP’s approach to preventing violent extremism (PVE) is based on two interlinked trends. First, there is a global rise in violent extremism and second, more inclusive and tolerant societies are better able to achieve lasting peace and sustainable development. Therefore, in order to prevent violent extremism, more attention needs to be paid to the governance structures that promote the peaceful and inclusive governance of increasingly heterogeneous societies and communities. Further, governance structures are key in the push and pull factors of violent extremism which are the result of shortcomings in development, failures in governance and the rule of law, the failure of conflict resolutions systems and the absence or weakness of early warning systems that provide fertile ground for violent extremist organizations to recruit.

**UNDP’s eleven (11) building blocks for preventing violent extremism:**

1. Promoting a rule of law and human rights-based approach to PVE;
2. Enhancing the fight against corruption;
3. Providing effective socio-economic alternatives to violence for groups at risk;
4. Enhancing participatory decision-making and increasing civic space at national and local levels;
5. Strengthening the capacity of local governments for service delivery and security;
6. Supporting credible internal intermediaries to promote dialogue with alienated groups and re-integration of former extremists;
7. Promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment;
8. Engaging youth in building social cohesion;
9. Working with faith-based organizations and religious leaders to counter the abuse of religion by violent extremists;
10. Working with the media to promote human rights and tolerance; and
11. Promoting respect for human rights and diversity and a culture of global citizenship in schools and universities.
12. To address this, a security approach is needed, but it should be complemented by economic development, peacebuilding and governance solutions. Sustainable solutions require an inclusive development approach anchored in tolerance, political and economic empowerment and a reduction of inequalities and injustice. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 provides a suitable framework for this as it commits member states to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. Using SDG 16 as a guide for solutions to balance security responses allows for both local level engagements that focus on communities that is critical for the prevention of violent extremism and the addressing of structural failures at a national, regional and global level that enable the growth of violent extremism.

## The Central Asia Context

1. Within the Central Asian context, there are in general four categories of radicalized groups. The first is social extremists who have a problem with the status quo and social norms. These groups reject the values of the wider society using a particular type of religious narrative to put pressure on everyday practices of religion, clothing, social values and behaviors. This group includes a lot of Salafists from this region utilizing the “takfiri” type of Islam and is quite widespread. The second group are ideological Islamic radical groups that want to create a caliphate. Their influence is marginal in this region as the agenda for them is more international than local or regional. The third group are political Islamic radicals who are typically seen as the most dangerous by the regional authorities as they stand against the existing political systems. These groups have organized networks of followers in the wider society but also influential networks for furthering their political ambitions. This is the key for these groups as they are more focused on their political ambitions, and use Islam as a tool to mobilize populations. The fourth group are militants tied to international jihad who are typically professional fighters. Their operations are not in Central Asia and are not an imminent threat for the region.
2. The threats in the region from violent extremism fall into two categories: domestic and foreign fighters. For the domestic threat, the numbers are not known and as there are no clear definitions it becomes very difficult to measure. Further contributing to the difficulty in measurement and hence the full nature of the threat is a confluence of factors such as migration, security in the region being against them, fear of repression, and competition from outside sources.
3. The threat from foreign fighters (FF) is a major issue in the region. There is a division in FF from those who are coming into the region from Afghanistan to those FF who are leaving for Syria and Iraq. In each case, the direct threat to Central Asia is an exaggerated problem. In the first case the Taliban will not cross the border into Central Asia, and in the second ISIL is more interested in Pakistan that Central Asia. Similarly, IMU is no longer interested in Central Asia as they know there is a strong security apparatus.
4. What is more relevant as a threat are those leaving to become FF in Syria and Iraq, about which there have been many different studies done. While the numbers vary greatly, from between 2,000 and 7,000 individuals going from Central Asia (and Russia), Central Asians are the third largest group behind Europeans and North Africans in ISIL, causing Russian to become the 3rd largest language used by ISIL.
5. Central Asians that are being recruited into ISIL are doing so for a variety of reasons. Migrant workers are alienated and facing social exclusion. They are being enticed due to the economic crisis in Russia and the returning Central Asian migrants are going to Syria for work. They are also far from their elders at home (as the migrants are in Russia). Recruitment takes place in prisons, through social networks, and being led astray by charismatic leaders.
6. Specific motivations of Central Asians tend to be around social justice and socio-economic pressure. Social justice is a very strong motivator, this can be couched in terminology invoking religion, standing against the West and Russia, family ties, political marginalization, repression of national religious leaders, or the greed and corruption of the government. In terms of socio-economics, it is not just about money but also about alienation. There are many different ethnic groups that feel ostracized, the young and women also feel marginalized in society.
7. Jihadi propaganda for the purpose of recruitment moves between the various categories of groups previously mentioned (social extremists, ideological Islamic radicals, political Islamic radicals and militants tied to international jihad) as the messages are underpinned by a shared world view. Even though the propaganda is shared between groups there remains a distinction in the type of propaganda used and the category of the group. This distinction is a result of the manipulation of different grievances at different levels and that each media item is targeted and aimed at certain groups.
8. The shared world view does not create a monolithic ideology. This salafi-jihad ideology can be broken down into 4 main systems of ideas (group identity, values, objectives and conduct) which can be broken down still further into various categories. The result is that even though all the propaganda is rooted in their shared world view, the narratives of each group and their propaganda is the result of a combination of their system of ideas and categories.
9. A key grievance that is exploited is a feeling of a lack of justice, especially among young people who are searching for alternatives to their current situation. The development of radical views among young people is often the result of a backlash against a political order that they may feel is corrupt or politically exclusive. Oftentimes, young people are initially involved in movements that emerge as a protest against the status quo that they find to be unsatisfying. Unfortunately, these movements can be a gateway to violent extremism.
10. This conversion happens as youth groups become influenced when searching for new identities. During this search, the formation of radical groups is often a bi-product. When it occurs in a space characterized by an environment of conflict, a weak state, or a lack of governance young people can be especially vulnerable to violent extremist organizations as they search for a new identity. For many young people the search ends in ideologies (be they religious, nationalistic, or liberal) that are able to provide meaning to their lives.
11. Those in Central Asia for whom religion provides solace are typically drawn to thinkers who are proponents of the restoration of Islam doctrine. For these people, the community should strictly follow the principles of the prophet Muhammad, with the values not being subject to reconsideration. This is a different viewpoint that the western idea of social context redefining ideologies and values.
12. In terms of the modes of recruitment, there are different stages of engagement on the part of the extremists. The initial stage is that they identify individuals that are not part of particular groups, that are having social or political difficulties or are facing identify problems. Next, they approach these individuals and promise them solutions to the challenges. They work to transform the people’s worldview by teaching them their ideology and Arabic. They also seek to elevate the individual’s status or sense of worth by impress upon them they can meet central people or that they can do something important such as rescue all of mankind.
13. Other ways that they recruit people depends on their job and social standing. For example, with police the radicals spread the names and personal data of law enforcement, as both an attack and a recruitment method. While for businessmen, they seek to attract them in a different way through lectures, workshops and the use of religious signs. When recruiting, the radical’s messages are often disguised and seek to create a feeling of confusion with life. Once they have established this confusion another professional recruiter comes to offer a solution.
14. To counter the propaganda used for recruitment, the utopian claims that are being made need to be undermined. It also needs to be made clear that this is not a war against Islam. There also needs to be a focus on both young people and women whose voices are often not heard. This is important as both these groups are targets of recruiters (women in particular are being targeted as groups such as ISIL who are providing a narrative of giving them a liberating role beyond just being a jihadi wife), and by encouraging and empowering them they become less susceptible to a recruiter’s message.
15. In terms of responses, there are a few things to be aware of. First, there is an evolution in the discussion from being about countering to preventing violent extremism. Currently though there is little being done for those who are post-radicalization in order to prevent the move to violent extremism. Second, there needs to be a greater linkage from the more practical approaches to the more strategic approaches concerning national plans and dialogues in this space. Third, existing laws are not formulated for effective prevention of violent extremism. Fourth, there is a lot of discussion about the development approach but no clear methodology has yet emerged. Fifth and lastly, the grievances and needs of the target communities need to be addressed geographically and this has not been methodically done.
16. Having a balanced security and development response is important. It is therefore important for UNDP to work with UNRCCA (they have a security based response to violent extremism) in Central Asia. One of the problems though in terms of a unified response is that there is not a common definition or terminology among governments and international actors. This makes it difficult to determine what actions are legal and what are illegal. Definitions matter and currently they are blurry in Central Asia.

# Principles and Approaches for Preventing Violent Extremism

1. Protection of human rights and the rule of law is cited by many as a crucial component to PVE. To address this, the UN Secretary General’s Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism (UN SG’s PoA for PVE) shifts the focus from a solely security response to one based on human rights and the rule of law. It is important in any fight against violent extremism to have both elements (security and human rights) working together. In this regard, it is essential to recognize that the term “violent extremism” is used by governments and other actors in a multitude of ways. Where human rights are not recognized, policies targeted at “violent extremists” can be used to discriminate against minorities or other vulnerable groups.
2. Governments are often overtaken by the immediate security threat of violent extremists. This immediacy necessitates a security based response. Oftentimes, though this leads to allocating less resources and effort to the preventative side. When this imbalance between security and preventative responses occurs and governments are unable to devote the time and resources for the prevention of violent extremism among youth, then the focus (and ownership) should be among the youth themselves on a local and societal level.
3. It was posited that countering violent extremism has been used at times by governments as an excuse to restrict the space for civil society. When this happens, it is counter-productive as civil society is a core pillar in the prevention of violent extremism. Despite this, there has been an increase in work being done on the grassroots level by women. Women’s organizations are also working more on de-radicalization, and engaging mothers and religious leaders to promote peace and alternative discourses. Further, they are fighting for space in society, are working for access to education for women, and are working for women’s empowerment by seeking to change discriminatory laws.
4. Central Asian migrants to the Russian Federation are often part of the shadow economy, but are currently facing a deteriorating situation in Russia. According to the SHARQ Research Center 20% are working in conditions of forced labor. They have no access to health services. They are socially restricted and are increasingly becoming victims of hate crimes. All of which is creating a situation of vulnerability to radicalization for migrants from Central Asia who are faced with injustice and discrimination.
5. In terms of the statistical number of migrants being radicalized to violent extremism, it is difficult to determine. It is very hard to calculate the number of migrants becoming Foreign Fighters in Russia. Radicalization is a gradual process that moves from preliminary radicalization based on the conditions faced to providing an ideological alternative and finally to “jihadization.”
6. A recent survey conducted by the SHARQ Research Center was detailed during the meeting. The survey found that 94.5% of migrants consider themselves Muslim believers, this is compared to 2014 in which 60.4% identified themselves as Muslim. Along with this, the survey found a decline of traditional forms of Islam local to Central Asia. It was postulated that this was a result of migrants going to local mosques in Russia and being required to adapt to the local (Russian) Tatar Islam. An important note was that according to the survey migrants are not being radicalized at the mosques, nor online as it was found that the use of social media among migrants was very low. Rather the results indicated that this takes place through person to person contact outside of mosques and prayer houses.

# The Role of the Community and Dialogue in Preventing Violent Extremism

1. Community resilience is most simply the ability of a community to effectively respond to adverse events. In terms of countering or preventing violent extremism, community resilience is seen as providing people protection against becoming vulnerable to radicalization. The creation of this protection is reliant on community resilience and is shaped through two approaches. The first is security focused, targeting the community for information. The second is development focused, oriented on the community in order to respond to the community’s needs. Effective community resilience is accomplished through a community oriented approach rather than a community targeted approach.
2. There are three stages in building sustainable community resilience for the prevention of violent extremism: prevention, combatting and dealing with the aftermath of violent extremism and terrorism. In the prevention stage,the social ties of the community are strengthened. The stronger these ties and communication is between people the more likely they are to be able to detect and prevent radicalization from occurring within the community. In the combatting stage, the trust between people and between the public and the authorities is increased. When there is trust between the community and the police the community will be able to assist the police with information and intelligence about what is happening within a community. It is important that this is done in a manner that allows the community to take responsibility for their security environment, rather than the community being mined for information**.** In the stage dealing with the aftermath of violent extremism and terrorism, the community is supported by state and development actors not just in the psycho-social aspects of recovering from a traumatic event, but also in reintegrating or rehabilitating former radicals who have returned.

1. When building community resilience to violent extremism, there is a risk that if the state can over-target or co-opt communities for security purposes. This can result in the people in the communities losing trust with each other, the communities becoming ostracized from neighboring communities and can ultimately end in the community being destroyed.
2. Dialogue has a definite role in the prevention of violent extremism. It helps diffuse tension both personal and interpersonal by providing a space for people to share their grievances. As violent extremism is the fragmentation of communities in a manner that we have never seen before, dialogue provides a way to bring communities together. With the bringing together of communities being a critical aspect of dialogue, it important to recognize that dialogue is not about winning arguments. When it is just about “winning arguments” it is not conducive to bringing communities together.
3. Outside mediators and facilitators should have cultural sensitivity and be focused on the needs of the community. Too often the international community comes with a specific agenda. Instead, outside mediators and facilitators should be bringing the technical expertise to enable the community to discuss their grievances in a shared and structured manner.
4. Religious communities need to work together in a manner that creates buy in or reach-out from their own religious community and others. This out-reach should be performed in a manner that is not just a top-down approach. This type of out-reach should also include law enforcement, community leaders, researchers, NGOs and others together in a multi-sectorial cooperation network. Further the work with them should not just be focused on PVE, but also on day to day issues that are important for the wider community.
5. Religious communities should also be involved in PVE planning from the beginning for proper implementation. Yet, their involvement should not be viewed as a silver bullet that will fix everything, they are just one of many actors that are linked together in the wider community and it is important for them to all work together.
6. In terms of Central Asia specifically, it was commonly agreed that inter-faith dialogue is not the problem, rather it is intra-faith dialogue within Islam that is a challenge. The different sects within Islam need to be brought together for a dialogue to address violent extremism.
7. Youth dialogue is also critical. Space should be created for youth to be able to express their views and thoughts on religion in a safe place. Too often the approach to involving young people in dialogue is to dictate their needs to them. An intergenerational space that allows the young and old to listen to each needs to be developed.
8. Women are also integral to any dialogue efforts to prevent violent extremism. When women and religious leaders have been able to work together in the region, they have been successful in countering -radicalization, especially concerning the HuT. That being said, it is important to be able to protect women from any potential pushback or danger resulting from including them in dialogues.

# International, Regional and Local Approaches to PVE

1. The key to successful PVE efforts is national ownership of the solutions. National ownership will allow for country-specific responses that take into account local culture. International actors should not dictate programmatic approaches, but work with national actors to develop strategies on PVE utilizing best practices drawn from abroad.
2. National strategies or action plans need to cover four (4) distinct areas: prevention, protection, law enforcement and rehabilitation (specifically on FF returning from Syria). Further, they need to include a steering mechanism that will facilitate coordination and guidance between the areas. Both the media and local communities should be included in the formulation of such a plan of action. There is also a need to map the areas of responsibility and to determine who is in charge of implementation so as to develop a clear understanding among international actors and national partners. Further, this mapping will allow everyone to identify potential gaps.
3. In Tajikistan, OSCEfor example has cooperated with the government in facilitating dialogues including on human rights. Further OSCE (with ODIHR and UNODC) has completed quantitative research (semi-structured interviews) with the National Research Institute to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of violent extremisms.
4. Moving into the future the key to successful PVE response will be cooperation between all actors. In Central Asia, there is massive potential for regional cooperation that will result in effective prevention of violent extremism. All the Central Asian countries are working on or have a strategy for addressing violent extremism, and they share a similar situation. This shared situation will be conducive to the sharing of research and best practices between countries.
5. The international community should support a Central Asian network that will engender the exchange of data and formulation of a network of practitioners for PVE. As regional projects are difficult to realize in Central Asia, international organization such as the OSCE or UN should take the lead in this.
6. Violent extremism manifests in different ways, it does not form a homogenous block. Each individual case has a different set of drivers which do not always transfer from location to location; rather it is highly contextualized. For example, some of the nations in the Arab States region are seeing highly educated, employed people, leaving to fight for Syria. This contextualization of violent extremism necessitates that any response mechanism not only understands the phenomenon but also is able to transform quickly to respond to new pressures.
7. As the threat of and solutions to violent extremism come from within society, it is challenging for a third party, such as the UN, to insert itself into the discussion. This necessitates that the UN avoid formulaic repetition of past approaches to peacebuilding and development. Instead, examination of the behaviors and attitudes of people is required. Further, national ownership and the accompaniment approach need to be taken seriously.
8. Development responses need to be tailored to both the short and long-term. This means showing actual results in the short term with the understanding that the real solutions will be in the long term. Sustainable solutions will be the result of the long term approach which demand multidisciplinary responses that can address different drivers in a holistic manner.
9. An example of multi-disciplinary responses comes from the Arab States region where twelve UNDP Country Offices gathered in Amman recently to discuss future PVE responses in the region. Eight response blocks were presented to the country offices: political inclusion, socio-economic support, rule of law and security, community resilience, rehabilitation and reintegration, media, gender, research and analysis. While there is strong collaboration with colleagues in the Africa region, cooperation with the ECIS region needs to be strengthened.
10. The European Union (EU) is not just a development, security, or political actor, rather it is all three. Currently the EU is working to mainstream aspects of PVE into its early warning system in conflict prevention. The purpose is to determine structural risks in order to allow the EU to move early (ideally years before a crisis) to prevent a conflict rather than responding to a conflict using a security approach.
11. The EU sees international actors as having a translating role in providing analysis to those who can act. It should be noted that it is not a lack of analysis that is preventing people from acting, rather it is a lack of a shared internal assessment with a PVE lens. It is therefore up to international actors to gather and dispense this information.
12. For the analysis to be effective it needs to move beyond the identification of individuals and groups’ grievances. It needs to show how and where the EU and other partners can best contribute. To properly do this, the analysis needs to include monitoring and orienting. Monitoring should involve identifying and addressing discrimination, but also be able to protect independent individuals in the process (e.g. journalists or aid workers). Orienting is about being able to provide proper PVE support that does not target individuals. Programmatic targeting provides differentiated support that can be seen as imbalanced and work at cross-purposes to the goal of PVE.
13. Search for Common Ground (SFCG) has been in Kyrgyzstan since 2011 with projects focusing on dialogue and community. Since 2013, it has been holding consultative working groups to discuss pressing issues around PVE. Gathering key stakeholders for meetings every 3 months has revealed that PVE solutions need to be relevant to the audiences that are being addressed. A conclusion drawn from these meetings is that local level and person to person engagement is more important than online or social media engagement.
14. The meetings have also discussed the religions and politics of the region and how they interact with radicalization. Outcomes of the meetings are mealtime talks that help men become aware of radicalization and women focused discussions that seek to raise awareness to the fact that recruiters are targeting women specifically. Further, the meetings exposed a lack of formal religious education at the local level leading to trainings being developed for local imams and PVE handbooks being developed and distributed for the imams.
15. Other activities that SFCG has pursued concern development of cross-regional teams of youth to prevent violent extremism through awareness raising utilizing traditional and social media. This has included the formulation of a database of youth that are actively working on peacebuilding and a website with webinars, video lectures, short films and information about NGOs.
16. It was generally agreed among the participants that international standards in preventing violent extremism, counter-terrorism and human rights need to be adhered to when developing policy and programmes for PVE at the local, national and regional levels. Specifically, the UN SG’s Plan of Action for PVE should guide all international organizations working on the prevention of violent extremism.
17. It was also established that regional cooperation needs to be built on the interest of the countries being asked to cooperate and not dictated from above. To complement such regional action there should also be cooperation between different regions around the world. Finally, there was widespread approval that a network of PVE actors between regions needs to be developed, as do alliances with civil society actors.

# Desistance

1. The use of crime as a framework for the understanding of terrorism has certain limitations, as terrorism is a political phenomenon that is vastly different than the social phenomenon of crime. Yet, understanding a terrorist or a criminal is much more interrelated. By differentiating between the phenomenon (terrorism) and the perpetrator (terrorist), one can make a more direct comparison to criminality, and apply existing theories and bodies of work to the perpetrator. This takes away the uniqueness of the terrorist and places them in a context wherein desistance can be applied.
2. Desistance can be broken down into two main parts. The first is that an individual stops offending (in this case committing violence) and in the second they no longer see themselves as offenders. Desistance stands in contrast to de-radicalization, based on the understanding that someone can be a terrorist without being radicalized. An example of this comes from North Ireland where interviews of perpetrators showed that they became terrorists for reasons such as their friends or family already committing violent acts as opposed to becoming terrorists for political or ideological reasons.
3. For desistance to be successful, there are three aspects that need to be taken into account. The first is that the perpetrator cannot lose their status. The second is that their identity has to be continuous. If the individual loses their status or has to change their identity there will be a relapse to violence as they will seek to gain them back. The third and final element for effective desistance is that the former offender has to become engaged in non-violence; the longer they are non-violent the more non-violence becomes a part of their status and identity. This means that non-violence can be approached as a series of steps, focused on not being violent just for today.

# Development Solutions and Gaps to Date (Working Groups)

## Economic Inequalities Working Group

1. Experiences from across the region concerning economic inequality as a driver of violent extremism indicate the need for better baselines and data. This is because there are major differences between urban areas, rural areas and boundary areas of a single country not to mention the differences between countries.
2. Support to state structures for service provision can help to reduce the need to search for alternatives to the state that are proffered by extremists. It was noted that the absolute level of service delivery doesn’t appear to influence the conductions conducive to violent extremism, rather it is the relative level of expected service delivery that influences susceptibility to violent extremism. It is therefore important for the state to understand the expectations of vulnerable groups in terms of public services.
3. In the case of economic migrants, they face a double vulnerability. At the country of destination, they are often socially and economically marginalized due to a variety of factors such as a lack of their normal support structure and an uncertain economic future. While upon returning to their country of origin, they are economically marginalized due to a lack of a professional network.

## Youth Marginalization Working Group

1. A single profile for youth susceptible to radicalization does not exist, as the vulnerable can include marginalized groups, such as immigrants, but they can also include university graduates. The key to susceptibility to radicalization among youth is due to dissatisfaction and disconnection with their lives. To address the fact that there is not a single profile, programmes should target communities and networks of young people. When dealing with youth networks, it is important to note that there is a distinction between online and offline networks. There is also a critical distinction between ideology that may reach radical individuals through networks and the act of recruitment for violent extremisms.
2. It is not just young men that are being recruited to radicalization. Young women are also being targeted by extremist organizations. Both young women and young men are facing social issues that can be a source of frustration which drives them to embrace alternative ideologies to relieve the frustration. However, giving young people a voice in the community can also relieve such frustration. PVE actors should support young people in their community and encourage them to take a larger role in community decisions. Along with this, religious youth should not be stigmatized in the media, nor the sole targets for PVE programmes as this can lead to their marginalization and drive them into the arms of extremist recruiters. Polarization and an “Us vs Them” mentality can only strengthen extremists. International organizations need to be careful to not politicize the issue when dealing with religion.
3. Economic considerations also drive youth susceptibility to extremism. An anecdotal example came from Kyrgyzstan where many of the Kyrgyz who went to fight for ISIL did so for economic reasons and were radicalized after going to Syria. Youth employment schemes while able to address the economic vulnerabilities of youth should not be looked at as an instantaneous solution. Rather programmes and policies that create employment which gives meaning to the lives of youth should be the focus.
4. Education is another critical component for PVE. Increasing education among the young was not felt to be the essential aspect of education for PVE, as there are many examples of educated individuals becoming violent extremists. Instead, critical thinking and open-mindedness were reasoned to be the vital elements to successfully prevent violent extremism among young people. It was agreed that UNDP can help national governments develop curriculum that builds open-mindedness and critical thinking skills.

## Dialogue and Mediation Working Group

The purpose of dialogue is to listen and to understand so as to know the positions of each side on the issues that are important to them. Ultimately, the goal of dialogue is to transform the relationship of participants. When using dialogue for the purpose of PVE, it should not be just dialogue for the sake of dialogue. The dialogue should be focused and include marginalized groups as they are the ones most vulnerable to radicalization.

1. The working group on dialogue and mediation identified three components considered to be the most important parts of the process of dialogue: 1.) the rules of engagement; 2.) the ability of each side to move from positions to compromise; and 3.) to know who is leading the dialogue and for them to be able to facilitate the movement from positions to compromise.
2. There are two types of leaders: formal and informal leaders. Formal leaders are typically the official leaders of the community, while informal leaders are those who have gained the trust of the community or are influential but do not necessarily have an official position. The young and women are more commonly informal leaders and should be encouraged to participate in dialogue. Religious leaders should also be highly engaged in PVE dialogues.
3. Another important consideration in dialogue for PVE is to create conditions that allow for intergenerational participation. Too often there is a barrier between the old and the young, especially in a post-Soviet context. This leads to misunderstandings and feelings of disrespect or frustration on both sides. A dialogue that enables both the young and old to have a voice is critical for effective PVE in a community.

## Governance and Rights Working Group

1. Strategies concerning governance and rights need to address the root causes of radicalization, therefore they should be developed in collaboration with the institutions that are dealing with specific issues (e.g. if social than Ministry for Social Welfare, if education than Ministry of Education, etc.). When working with institutions, the approach should be as integrated and comprehensive as possible. It is also important that the work should be done in manner that promotes trust and openness in the society; it thus becomes important to select partner institutions carefully.
2. The working group recommended four (4) criteria for selecting institutions. The first criterion concerns the values of the institution. They should respect tolerance, human rights and the rule of law. The second criterion is participation. The institution should be able to ensure participation of all members of society, and specifically the vulnerable and marginalized with participation of youth and women emphasized. The third criterion is focused on the services that the institution provides. The institution should be able to provide the correct service and in a manner that ensures access to all. The fourth and last criterion deals with discrimination. The institution should not be discriminatory, but should be available to all.
3. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) can play an important role holding institutions working on PVE accountable and to show respect for human rights and the rule of law. CSOs can also act as a mediator between the government and public. It should also be noted that there is often lack of trust between security institutions and CSOs. With PVE being a balanced approach, between security responses and development solutions, it is important to create an environment where these issues of trust are presented and discussed in order for implementation to be effective.
4. The international community has to deal with the challenge of remaining a neutral partner, while still ensuring that government institutions respect international standards. To accomplish this, the international community should work with the government system as a whole, but have a particular focus on the following: legislation (the consultative process and ensuring participation), legal implementation (anti-corruption and respect for human rights), judicial integrity (the independence of the judiciary), and resolving of grievances about the government (i.e. the introduction of transparency and accountability).

# Recommendations

1. The following recommendations evolved out of the consensus reached by the participants of the Dushanbe meeting; serving both as a record of the meeting and as broad-based commitment for UNDP and partner-led work thereafter.

## National

1. Develop national Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) policies (including national action plans, donor coordination fora and programming) informed by human rights considerations and contextualized by international best practice;
2. Align national strategies, plans and efforts with the UNSG’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, as well as subordinate regional documents;
3. Support national measures and partners that promote political inclusivity; encourage extension of social services to marginalized or at-risk groups and returning migrant populations;
4. Encourage the convening of diverse actors and the appointing of focal points by governments to ensure coherence and complementarity of all PVE work; governments should be also encouraged to intensify their cooperation on PVE issues on a regional level;
5. Ensure, among all partners, that young people are part of the conversations determining their futures – be they political, social or economic;
6. Support, by all partners, research on context-specific drivers of radicalization and recruitment pathways to violent extremism on national and sub-national levels;
7. Address the frustration associated with a lack of economic opportunity or the prospect of a decent future amongst the youth with targeted measures to reach at-risk youth through employment programmes that confer dignity and respect;
8. Prioritize programming which has a direct impact on grievances and frustrations that have been demonstrated to lead to radicalization and violent extremism in specific national and sub-national contexts;
9. Establish and strengthen programmes that measurably increase the levels of social cohesion and nurture trust between individuals, communities and the state;
10. Support civil society organizations, including those reflecting the interests of religious, women and youth communities, to create coalitions for multi-sectorial PVE responses together with governments; recognize the importance of intra-faith and inter-faith dialogue as religion is part of the everyday life of most people and can send a positive or negative powerful message;
11. Ensure the “do no harm” approach informs all aspects of PVE work; further, ensure communities affected by VE are not stigmatized;

## UNDP and International Organizations

1. Map the contribution of international organizations to operationalizing the UNSG’s Plan of Action at the regional level, including information and evidence on what type of development work is effective and which programmatic interventions work (and which don’t);
2. Review current development and crisis response programmes that are not PVE-focused but might have elements related to PVE work, especially in such areas as governance and rule of law, economic development, job creation and livelihood support;
3. Ensure experience-sharing on programme design and implementation across UNDP offices in the ECIS region and facilitate programme-related learning across different UNDP regional hubs and across different institutions and organizations working on PVE issues;
4. Support coordination of UNDP’s PVE programming with UN sister agencies whose mandate might be relevant for PVE work (UNICEF, UNODC, IOM, UNW, FAO, OHCHR); coordinate prevention efforts with all partners by sharing, widely and systematically, ongoing interventions and lessons-learnt;
5. Complement security sector/penal reform responses with inclusive development initiatives that are aligned with international human rights standards;
6. Support research necessary to understand, for all partners, how vulnerable people are targeted by propaganda messaging so that effective outreach and support (rather than counter-narratives) can be developed;
7. Generate research-based measures and indicators by UNDP that help evaluate the impact of PVE-related programming (social cohesion measures, vulnerability indicators, etc.);
8. Create at the regional level, a research/analytical platform for sharing knowledge and research on PVE across the ECIS;
9. Provide a peer-to-peer exchange for civil society and research institutes working on PVE;
10. Establish the creation of rosters of experts on religious issues, psycho-social support and PVE programme development at the regional level;
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