



International Organization for Migration (IOM)
The UN Migration Agency



InfoSheet No 9

MIGRATION, VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Over many decades, research has shown that international migration can generate considerable benefits for all sides involved. Yet, around the world, a number of political leaders, reflecting varying degrees of popular sentiment, are linking migrants and migration with the rising threat of violent extremism and terrorism. Recognizing that this is a sensitive topic that has attracted significant public and media attention, this chapter is intended to put into perspective the relationship between migration and violent extremism. This chapter provides an analysis of the existing

evidence on the relationships between migration, violent extremism and social exclusion. It provides a brief overview of definitions and data, emphasizing the need for analytical clarity, pointing to a shortage of reliable data, and highlighting the challenge of distinguishing causation from correlation. A simple typology of the intersections between migration and violent extremism is developed, following the logic of the “migration cycle” from departure to settlement and at times return.

KEY POINTS:

- Part of the challenge in responding to concerns about the linkages between migration and violent extremism is the inaccurate use of terminology (such as on migration status) as well as different views on concepts (related to violent acts).
- Data on the intersections between migration and violent extremism are scarce. At the individual level, data, for example, on prescreening of migrants or candidates for refugee resettlement who raise security flags are rarely available; nor is there a clear and simple profile of perpetrators of violent extremism, whether migrants or not.
- There is the challenge of discerning causation from correlation when examining the intersections between migration and violent extremism. For example, some people may be fleeing direct experiences of violent extremism; others may be leaving their homes because of the consequences of the emergence of violent extremism, such as a reduction in opportunities to make a living for themselves and their families.

- Perhaps the most politicized question is whether or not there is evidence to support claims that terrorists are systematically infiltrating irregular migration flows to perpetrate attacks on foreign soil. There is scant evidence to support assertions that Daesh and other groups are systematically and on a large scale exploiting asylum flows to send fighters to Europe. While it is important to try to guard against the risk, any policy response needs to be proportional and should not serve as a pretext for denying access to asylum for all those in genuine need of protection and assistance.
- There is wide acknowledgment that radicalization to violent extremism among settled migrants and refugees and their descendants is a symptom of social exclusion. This remains a contested concept, but most definitions note that it is a dynamic and multidimensional process driven by unequal power relationships interacting across four main dimensions – economic, political, social and cultural – and at different levels including individual, household, group, community, country and global levels.
- It is possible also to conceive migration as part of a potential solution to violent extremism. A focus on solutions, in contrast, can show how a rights-based approach to migration and displaced persons can be an integral component of the global effort to prevent violent extremism.

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT:

- Closer dialogue is required between policymakers responsible for migration and those charged with preventing violent extremism; this is a particular challenge as the latter are variously located in security and development agencies, with internal as well as external mandates.
- A better analytical framework, based on better definitions, more comprehensive data and empirical evidence is required, in order to support more rigorous analysis and inform policy.
- While the evidence on the risk of infiltration by terrorist groups is currently slim, it is necessary to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of migration management and inter-State collaboration.
- A more integrated approach to tackling the causes of displacement and migration should include interventions specifically focused on countering and preventing violent extremism.
- Greater efforts may be required to guard against the risk of radicalization across all displacement conditions, including in refugee and transit camps, with an emphasis on providing education, access to work, and, where possible, greater freedom of movement.
- More effective integration and social inclusion policies are required to reduce social exclusion and the risk of radicalization to violent extremist agendas amongst migrants and their descendants.
- It is important not to undermine migration or refugee policy by focusing too much on preventing violent extremism agendas, for example by ensuring that Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) interventions respect the rights of migrants and refugees.

To read the report, please go to <https://www.iom.int/world-migration-report-2018>

