

# WORLD MIGRATION REPORT 2018: CHAPTER 9



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Cover photo: Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site in Bentiu, South Sudan was established in December 2013 and currently houses an estimated 120,000 IDPs. Many people displaced by conflict in South Sudan have increasingly fled to UN PoC sites for safety. The UN and various humanitarian agencies are working together with the community to improve the living conditions in the PoC area.  
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# 9

## MIGRATION, VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

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. It is always important to remember, as emphasized in this chapter, that migrants, asylum seekers and refugees are more likely to be the victims of violent extremism than the perpetrators; nevertheless, there is a belief in certain political groups in North America, Europe and beyond, that large flows of asylum seekers and migrants may be infiltrated by members of terrorist groups.

On occasion, asylum seekers and migrants have indeed perpetrated attacks against host societies. Furthermore, this is not an entirely new phenomenon – migrants and diaspora groups have been involved in terrorist attacks in the past, for example in France or Spain before the World War I. Looking into the near future, there are concerns that returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) may pose a threat to their countries of origin if they are not apprehended, but these are mainly nationals of the countries in question.

Without therefore denying the potential of migrants (or refugees) to turn to extreme violence, the risk is that isolated contemporary incidents, or distant historical examples, are taken out of context and then projected into the future and used as the basis for sweeping generalizations about the threat that large-scale migration and asylum flows may pose to national and regional security. This may in turn inform policy choices.

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. It is necessary to analyse the linkages between migration and violent extremism for a number of reasons: First, there have been isolated incidents of violent extremism perpetrated by migrants and we need to try to understand why these occurred. Second, it is important to bring data and evidence to bear on an often misinformed public debate, acknowledging from the outset important research and data gaps. Third, there are linkages between migration and violent extremism, but not those that normally attract attention. Finally, looking to the future, the risk of radicalization among migrants may grow unless evidence-based policies and interventions to prevent violent extremism are developed now.

The remainder of this chapter is structured in three main parts. It starts with 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. Next, 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. The chapter ends with a series of preliminary implications for further policy debate.

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## Definitions and data

Part of the challenge in responding to concerns about the linkages between migration and violent extremism is the inaccurate use of terminology. In the European debate, for example, there is little distinction in public discourse between migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. Yet these are separate (but sometimes overlapping) legal and policy categories, which entail different rights and responsibilities; where intersections occur between them and violent extremism, the causes and consequences may differ. Equally, it is likely that individual experiences are actually more significant than legal status in explaining why some people may become radicalized. This chapter makes clear throughout which category is the focus as different intersections are discussed, and to what extent migration experience really is a pertinent factor, based on the limited existing research. Almost all the examples discussed here concern cross-border or international migration, although there is also limited evidence of radicalization to violent extremist agendas among internal migrants and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

A further distinction needs to be made between migrants, citizens and settled ethnic minorities. Some recent violent extremist attacks in Europe have been perpetrated by newly arrived asylum seekers or migrants. A sizeable proportion of those who have left European countries to become FTFs, on the other hand, are citizens of these countries and descendants of migrants (sometimes referred to as second- or third-generation migrants). In most cases, returning FTFs will be citizens of the countries to which they return. This matters, as different types of interventions may be appropriate. Attacks perpetrated by recently arrived migrants or asylum seekers, for example, may point to the need for better migration management; whereas the departure of European citizens with a migration background may be symptomatic of a long-term failure of integration, resulting in social exclusion. Different responses are also called for; migrants may be deported, citizens may not. (To further complicate this, in some countries there are proposals to strip returning FTFs of citizenship of their country of settlement where they have dual citizenship, thereby potentially making them eligible for deportation).

Analysis is further hampered because there is no clear definition of what constitutes violent extremism, nor is there agreement about what radicalizes people, nor what conditions permit violent extremism to flourish (and therefore, what the best intervention strategies are). The United Nations (UN) has no formal definition for “violent extremism”, nor has the European Union.<sup>2</sup> Some States have developed definitions in their own national policies and strategies, and these often differ, for example, on the question of whether violent extremism is always political or covers a wider spectrum. The Government of the United States, for instance, has adopted a fairly broad definition, holding that violent extremism means “...advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social, economic or political objectives”.<sup>3</sup> For some commentators, it is critical to achieve consensus on a definition; in the view of others, this risks still further delaying long overdue action on the issue.<sup>4</sup>

One specific intersection between migration and terrorism where there is a clear definition is for FTFs, defined by the United Nations as “...individuals who travel to a State other than their State of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict”.<sup>5</sup>

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2 Glazzard and Zeuthen, 2016.

3 USAID, 2011.

4 Koser and Rosand, 2016.

5 UNSC, 2014.

The drivers of violent extremism are often categorized into “push” and “pull” factors. Push factors are those that are “...important in creating the conditions that favor the rise or spread in appeal of violent extremism or insurgency”, while pull factors may be financial or psychological and are “...associated with the personal rewards which membership in a group or movement, and participation in its activities, may confer”.<sup>6</sup> It is also widely accepted that “radicalization to violent extremism” is at the same time an individual process as well as context-specific. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is neither consensus on how to address the drivers of violent extremism, nor how to reduce their impact. Even the terminology – countering violent extremism (CVE) and preventing violent extremism (PVE) – is contested. The Global Center on Cooperative Security proposes the following definition: “...although emerging from efforts to address terrorism, CVE activities represent a range of initiatives designed to identify and prevent threats arising from violent extremism, which can include community tensions, regional instability, and conflict”.<sup>7</sup>

While statistical systems on migrants and migration remain underdeveloped – especially for irregular migration, which may be particularly relevant for analysing violent extremism – they are certainly more robust than data on violent extremism. Where such data do exist, they tend to focus more on incidents and victims, rather than on perpetrators. According to the 2016 Global Terrorism Index (GTI),<sup>8</sup> which analyses worldwide data on terrorist attacks from the previous year, 72 per cent of all deaths from terrorism in 2015 occurred in just five countries: Iraq, Afghanistan, Nigeria, Pakistan and the Syrian Arab Republic.

Data on the intersections between migration and violent extremism are even scarcer. An immediate observation – expanded below – is that three of the countries identified in the GTI top-10 countries impacted by terrorism are also reported by UNHCR as the three countries worldwide that generated over half of the world’s refugees in 2015, namely the Syrian Arab Republic, Afghanistan and Somalia.<sup>9</sup> At the individual level, data, for example, on pre-screening 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. What is more, information-sharing among domestic and international law enforcement and intelligence agencies is far from perfect, and there is a lack of uniformity in the way countries identify and catalogue migrants, especially irregular migrants. This chapter does not attempt to offer direct technical recommendations, but it does highlight the need for more coordinated and centralized information-sharing.

There is a particular lack of data from non-OECD countries, where the majority of violent extremist attacks occur, and where the majority of the world’s refugees and IDPs and at least half the world’s migrants can be found. The holes in the various datasets significantly inhibit any systematic analysis of, or reaching overarching conclusions on, the linkages between migration and violent extremism.

A final caveat worth mentioning here, in part arising from the definitional and data challenges already identified, is the challenge of discerning causation from correlation when examining the intersections between migration and violent extremism. Some refugees may be fleeing direct experiences of violent extremism; other migrants may be leaving their homes because of factors related to the emergence of violent extremism, for example, lack of opportunities to make a living for themselves and their families. Some migrants and refugees may themselves perpetrate acts of violence because of their traumatic migration experience; others partly due to conditions in the countries where they arrive, or for reasons not related to either situation. Sometimes the

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6 USAID, 2011.

7 Global Center on Cooperative Security, n.d.

8 Institute for Economics and Peace, 2016.

9 UNHCR, 2016.

perpetrators may in fact be terrorists posing as migrants. Some migrants may actively seek violent extremist opportunities, while others may be vulnerable to recruitment to violent extremism.<sup>10</sup>

## Migration and violent extremism: a typology

It is possible to sketch an approximate fourfold typology of the intersections between violent extremism and migration, broadly following the logic of the migration cycle, from departure, through transit, to settlement, and sometimes return; specifically: (i) violent extremism as a driver for displacement and migration; (ii) the risk of radicalization in refugee, IDP and possibly migrant transit camps and centres; (iii) the risk of terrorist infiltration of migration and asylum flows; and (iv) the challenges of integration resulting in social exclusion. A final intersection – which concludes the migration cycle, but is not included here for want of data and analysis – is the possibility that return and failing or unsustainable reintegration may exacerbate drivers of violent extremism for some returnees.<sup>11</sup>

### *Violent extremism as a driver for displacement and migration*

The very superficial comparison of GTI and UNHCR data above at least hints at some sort of link – whether causal or correlative – between the occurrence of violent extremist attacks and refugee flight.

Focusing first on forced migration – and also thus widening the lens from refugees exclusively to include, for example, IDPs and others who leave their homes involuntarily – it is important to distinguish between those fleeing direct experience or threat of violent extremism and those fleeing its indirect effects. There are populations in the world today that can quite clearly be demonstrated to be fleeing because they have been targeted by violent extremism and violent extremist groups. One example would be Christian minorities in the Levant: *The Economist* reported that by 2014, over half a million of 1.8 million Syrian Christians had been displaced.<sup>12</sup> Another example is those displaced in northern Nigeria: there is evidence that displacing people from their villages may be a deliberate strategy for Boko Haram, as it was earlier for the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda. Further examples of populations fleeing violent extremism directly affecting religious minorities occur in South-East Asia, including from Rakhine State in Myanmar.

Equally, many people are probably displaced by the secondary effects of violent extremism, rather than directly being threatened, for example, where violent extremism disrupts labour markets, agricultural production, or results from cessation of social welfare provision.<sup>13</sup> In Afghanistan there is evidence that some people have been displaced internally by the effects of counter-terrorism measures.<sup>14</sup> Moving further along the spectrum from forced to voluntary migrant, it is also possible to consider people leaving their country not because of any direct or indirect effect of violent extremism, but because they no longer see a future in a country where there is an environment that allows violent extremism to develop and flourish.<sup>15</sup>

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10 For a more in-depth look at these causal chains, we refer the reader to Schmid, 2016.

11 Koser and Kuschminder, 2015.

12 *The Economist*, 2014.

13 Connor, 2016.

14 Koser, 2013.

15 Cunningham and Koser, 2015.

## Violent extremism and displacement in Latin America

Historically, violent extremism in Latin America has been characterized by sharp socioeconomic and political divisions, a number of which have included armed insurgent movements fighting to depose seated governments.

The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), for example, fought the longest-running insurgency in the Western Hemisphere until 1 December 2016, when a peace deal between the rebels and the Government of Colombia was approved by the country's Congress. Founded in 1964 as a response to perpetual land disputes and growing inequality, the group's main target was government security forces. However, incidents of civilian kidnappings, the bombing of social gatherings, and the destruction of infrastructure were also commonplace.<sup>a</sup> At the beginning of 2017, Colombia had over 7 million IDPs and 340,000 of its citizens living as refugees in neighbouring countries, including Ecuador, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Panama and Costa Rica.<sup>b</sup> The FARC is not the only group whose violence has caused mass displacement in Colombia. The National Liberation Army (ELN), considered a terrorist group by both the United States and the European Union, has been known to kidnap civilians for ransom as well as to commit acts of violence against both security forces and civilians.

In other Latin American countries such as Peru, violent extremism has been driven by communist groups such as the Shining Path. Established in the late 1960s, the Shining Path unleashed violence in the 1980s and 1990s that claimed tens of thousands of lives across the country and forced hundreds of thousands of people out of their homes.<sup>c</sup> While the group has largely been dismantled and most of those who were displaced have returned to their homes, a few remaining cells continue to operate within the country, and an estimated 62,000 people remain in protracted displacement.<sup>d</sup>

a Sullivan and Beittel, 2016.

b UNHCR, 2017.

c *The Economist*, 2017.

d IDMC, 2017.

## *Radicalization in camps*

There have been examples of refugee (and IDP) camps becoming spaces for violent extremism in at least three ways. One is where camps may become bases for violent extremist fighters to rest and recuperate.<sup>16</sup> Examples include the use of Namibian refugee settlements in Angola by the South-West Africa National Liberation Army (SWANLA); Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan by the Taliban; and border camps by Nicaraguan Contras and Cambodian Red Khmer. A more recent example was the use of refugees in the Yarmouk camp outside Damascus as "human shields" by Daesh fighters.<sup>17</sup>

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16 Zolberg, Suhrke and Aguayo, 1989.

17 Ban, 2015.

A second and related example is where refugee camps may become recruitment grounds for violent extremist groups. In 2015 Najat Rochdi, the United Nations Resident Coordinator in Cameroon, publicly expressed his worries that the Minawao camp in northern Cameroon risked becoming a "...fertile ground for recruitment by Boko Haram".<sup>18</sup> The Kenyan authorities have also expressed similar concerns that Al-Shabaab may be recruiting in the Dadaab camp complex in the north of the country. There have also been largely uncorroborated reports that Daesh may be recruiting within refugee settlements in Turkey and Lebanon.

Third – and perhaps the most pervasive example of the intersections between refugee camps and violent extremism in the still limited literature – is the risk of refugees becoming radicalized to violent extremism.<sup>19</sup> There is certainly evidence of radicalization leading to violence within refugee camps, including in Pakistan (at the Jalozi camp for Afghan refugees), Yemen (at the Somali refugee camps in Kharaz), Cameroon (at the Minawao camp for Nigerians) and Jordan (at the Zaatari camp for Syrian refugees). Europe has also experienced this phenomenon in refugee centres. In September 2016, authorities in Cologne, Germany arrested a 16-year-old Syrian refugee for planning to carry out a terrorist attack. Arrested at a refugee centre near Cologne, where he was living with his parents since having fled the civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2015, authorities discovered bomb-making materials (including a battery carrier with wires, sewing needles and a small butane gas canister) and evidence of Internet chats with Daesh members. "The court attributed the boy's radicalization to loneliness at the refugee centre and spending most of his time on a cell phone. In addition, he spent a lot of time online and with chat contacts ... through these contacts he developed an Islamist-jihadist worldview".<sup>20</sup>

Existing literature highlights three particular conditions that allow for radicalization to violent extremism to take root in refugee camps: poor education, especially where the gap is filled by extremist religious indoctrination; a lack of work; and the absence of freedom of movement.<sup>21</sup> These three conditions are prevalent in many of today's under-resourced and overcrowded IDP and refugee camps, and the risk increases the longer such situations are protracted. Equally, they point towards intervention opportunities that may help reduce the risk of radicalization to violent extremist agendas in such settings.

### Lessening the risk of refugee radicalization: lessons for the Middle East from past crises

A recently published RAND Corporation report suggested that reducing the risk of radicalization among refugees goes beyond providing humanitarian assistance and requires a multipronged approach that gives refugees viable choices for their future.<sup>e</sup> There is, however, no system as yet to evaluate each situation in sufficient depth to create such an approach. The study demonstrates that any effective programme will require the collaboration, sharing of information and alignment of objectives among donors, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the local population and the host government, as much as with the refugees.

18 Larson, 2015.

19 Lischer, 2006.

20 Deutsche Welle, 2017.

21 Martin-Rayo, 2011.



Addressing economic and financial needs is also important, even if these are not the main drivers of radicalization. Refugees seek means to support their families and skills that might be useful for the longer term. Those needs must be fulfilled within the country of refuge, where refugees may compete with local people for both jobs and consumer goods. This means that attempted solutions should engage local players not usually directly involved in refugee issues, such as the business community. Interviewees recommended that funding streams by donors need to be flexible and less “siloed” to accomplish this successfully. Another common problem with international relief funds is that they are available at the start of a crisis, but dwindle over the long term.<sup>f</sup> Policymakers and stakeholders can increase their dialogue about long-term financial planning for refugee crises.

At the same time, jobs and education are only a partial answer. Psychological and security needs are key components. Refugees have experienced trauma<sup>g</sup> in escaping their country of origin and often face abuse, humiliation and powerlessness in their place of refuge. This arena is where militant groups may step in and try to radicalize vulnerable populations with narratives of empowerment through violence. Providing refugees opportunities to participate in their own governance, such as in camp administration, can also help mitigate this risk.

e Sude, Stebbins and Weiland, 2015.

f Makdisi and Prashad, 2016.

g Hawilo, 2017.

There has been no significant research yet on the risks or occurrence of violent extremism within transit camps for migrants. However, given that conditions there may often resemble those found to heighten risks in refugee camps, it seems reasonable to suppose that the risk exists.

### *The risk of infiltration of asylum and migrant flows*

Progressing along the migration cycle: In Europe as well as North America, perhaps the most politicized question – as large numbers of asylum seekers and migrants continue to arrive from Africa and the Middle East, and policymakers consider resettling significant numbers of refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, among other origin countries – is whether or not there is evidence to support claims that terrorists are systematically infiltrating irregular migration flows to perpetrate attacks on foreign soil.

In April 2016, reports surfaced and have since been corroborated that a man arrested in 2015 at a refugee camp in Salzburg was part of the original group of terrorists that carried out the November 2015 attacks in Paris, France. According to his own testimony, he was part of a group that included two of the Paris suicide bombers (Iraqi brothers who blew themselves up outside the Stade de France) who had travelled from the Syrian Arab Republic to Greece in October. Initially this Algerian man, along with a Pakistani man, was arrested in Leros for failing a passport check, but both were later released, whereupon they continued their journey to Austria, where

they were arrested again.<sup>22</sup> According to an investigation by the BBC, "...the two men bought ferry tickets to leave Leros to continue their journey through Europe with Syrian refugees".<sup>23</sup>

At the very least, this illustrates a failure to share information adequately across European jurisdictions. As more information about those responsible for the Paris attacks has come to light, there appears more evidence to suggest that a number of the gunmen and suicide bombers had travelled to the Syrian Arab Republic to train and fight alongside Daesh. What remains unclear is whether these attackers returned to Europe as part of " sleeper cells", intentionally positioned by Daesh leadership to coordinate attacks against France, or whether they returned to their countries of nationality as FTFs. As the refugee "crisis" was gaining attention throughout 2014 and 2015, and terrorist groups grew in notoriety, several smugglers interviewed reported having transported Daesh recruits.<sup>24</sup> In early 2015, Daesh "threatened at one moment to flood Europe with half a million refugees through Libya. It also claimed that 4,000 jihadist fighters would be sent to Europe via Turkey".<sup>25</sup> One smuggler attested to having sent at least ten Daesh fighters posing as refugees to Europe, and claimed that the fighters, once settled, were awaiting their orders to launch attacks on European soil. Two smugglers interviewed in Turkey also reported transporting fighters across the Mediterranean Sea. Such reports have increased in frequency.

Without underestimating how vital it is to manage and neutralize any such risk, it is still important to urge caution: smugglers are hardly the most reliable source of information and in almost all other contexts are routinely described as criminals and liars by politicians and policymakers. It is worth emphasizing that the majority of recent terrorist attacks in Europe, as in the United States, were "homegrown", that is, committed by citizens of that country, although many of them had an immigration background (see discussion in the next section). It is, of course also important to keep in mind that the overwhelming majority of terrorist attacks worldwide still occur outside Europe and the United States.<sup>26</sup>

Ultimately, 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. Even if smugglers are to be believed, the number of terrorist recruits reported to have been imported to Europe is very small compared to the hundreds of thousands of people seeking refuge there. While it is important to try to guard against the risk, for example through pre-screening candidates for visas or resettlement, and post-arrival registration and screening, 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.

### *Migrants, violent extremism and social exclusion*

A fourth intersection between migration and violent extremism takes place after migrants and refugees have settled; 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. The overall process results in

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22 Rose, 2016.

23 BBC, 2016.

24 Giglio, 2014.

25 Schmid, 2016.

26 Institute for Economics and Peace, 2016.

a continuum of inclusion/exclusion conditions characterized by unequal access to resources, capabilities and rights, which then leads to inequalities.<sup>27</sup>

According to research collected by New America, “every jihadist who conducted a lethal attack inside the United States since 9/11 was a citizen or legal resident”.<sup>28</sup> An overwhelming majority of Americans charged with engaging in terrorist acts (domestically or internationally) during this time period are/were permanent, legal residents, and many are the children of first-generation immigrants. Some of the most fatal recent terrorist attacks have been perpetrated by second-generation immigrants, including the Orlando nightclub attacker, who was a US citizen and the son of Afghan immigrants. In the case of the San Bernardino shooters, one was a US citizen and the son of Pakistani immigrants; the other, Tashfeen Malik, was a Pakistani national and conditional United States permanent resident who came to the United States on a fiancée visa.<sup>29</sup>

A September 2016 report from the Cato Institute undertook a comprehensive review of visas used by terrorists in the United States to offer a risk analysis. According to the Cato study, Americans have a 0.00003 per cent chance of dying in an attack perpetrated by a foreign-born terrorist.<sup>30</sup> Specifically, the Cato analysis identifies 154 foreign-born terrorists in the United States who killed 3,024 people in attacks from 1975 through the end of 2015, which – it should be noted – includes the almost 3,000 victims of the 11 September 2001 attacks. Of these 154 foreign-born terrorists,

...ten of them were illegal immigrants, 54 were lawful permanent residents, 19 were students, 1 entered on a K-1 fiancé(e) visa, 20 were refugees, 4 were asylum seekers, 34 were tourists on various visas, and 3 were from Visa Waiver Program countries. The visas for 9 terrorists could not be determined. During that period, the chance of an American being murdered by a foreign-born terrorist was 1 in 3,609,709 a year. The chance of an American being killed in a terrorist attack committed by a refugee was 1 in 3.64 billion a year.<sup>31</sup>

According to the Migration Policy Institute’s analysis of the 745,000 refugees resettled in the United States of America since 9/11 to the end of 2015, only three have been arrested on terrorism charges.<sup>32</sup> What is unclear however, is whether these individuals were already radicalized to violent extremism when they arrived, became radicalized subsequently, or whether they were deliberately sent to the United States by terrorist groups.

Perhaps another indicator of social exclusion is the incidence of FTFs, of whom it has been estimated about 30,000 are fighting in the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq, mainly with Daesh.<sup>33</sup> According to a report by the Soufan Group, at that time the top ten source countries for FTFs in absolute numbers were, in declining order: Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Russian Federation, Turkey, Jordan, France, Morocco, Lebanon, the United Kingdom and

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27 Rudiger and Spencer, 2003; UN DESA, 2016.

28 New American Economy, 2017.

29 Friedman, 2017.

30 Willingham, Martucci and Leung, 2017.

31 Nowraseth, 2016.

32 Newland, 2015.

33 The Soufan Group, 2015.

Germany.<sup>34</sup> While detailed profiles on these individuals are unavailable, it is clear that from some countries, like Tunisia, the vast majority are nationals and not migrants or their descendants. In contrast, it appears that the majority of foreign fighters from France and Germany do have a migrant background. However, they make up a proportion of total FTFs in two countries that combined are the source of a small proportion of the total number of FTFs. This suggests that globally, FTFs are not necessarily a major migration problem. It is worth noting, according to the Global Coalition, that “the number of Da’esh fighters in Iraq and Syria has been reduced to the lowest levels in more than two and half years– around 12,000-15,000, nearly half of the high-end estimate of fighters in 2014”.<sup>35</sup>

Such data – albeit scattered and unsystematic – do nevertheless indicate that, at times, settled migrants and refugees, and their descendants, may become radicalized to violent extremism; and not just in OECD countries. Something is clearly going wrong for some people, and it is worth considering the explanations.

Some analysts have focused on structural level drivers to radicalization among migrants and their descendants, although these alone are not usually sufficient to explain individual radicalization. In the cases of Belgium and France, for example, it has been suggested that the political culture, an overly secular manner of governance, has ostracized some minority communities, in particular Muslims of North African lineage. According to some analysts:

As with the Francophone finding overall, we’re left with guesswork as to why exactly the relationships between French politics, urbanization, youth unemployment, and Sunni militancy exist. We suspect that when there are large numbers of unemployed youth, some of them are bound to get up to mischief. When they live in large cities, they have more opportunities to connect with people espousing radical causes. And when those cities are in Francophone countries that adopt the strident French approach to secularism, Sunni radicalism is more appealing.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast, the Soufan Group report referred to above focuses more on personal rather than (socio)political drivers. It is certainly true that some migrants and their descendants experience marginalization and disenfranchisement, identified as “push” factors to violent extremism, making some young Muslim people and recent converts to Islam more vulnerable to recruitment.

Current policy responses include promoting “integrated identities” (meaning that, for example, an individual can have two or more identities, e.g. religious and national) and providing them with a sense of opportunity – in essence, enhancing a person’s belief or perception that they have access to opportunities and can see a future for themselves where they can actualize an option open to them. According to Daniel Köhler, Director of the German Institute on Radicalization and De-Radicalization Studies, “...over the last few years, counter-terrorism strategy in Germany has focused massively on working with families to prevent radicalisation taking place. Preventing radicalisation amongst refugees, however, will require lots and lots of catching up”.<sup>37</sup>

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34 Ibid.

35 The Global Coalition, 2017.

36 McCants and Meserole, 2016.

37 Oltermann, 2016.

## Radicalization among Central Asia's migrants

In an effort to discover why a sizeable number of terrorist incidents are perpetrated by Central Asians, Edward Lemon and John Heathershaw undertook a rigorous, but limited analysis and found that violent extremist groups were targeting and specifically recruiting migrants.<sup>h</sup> In their analysis of radicalization of a relatively small number of people from Central Asian countries, Lemon and Heathershaw draw on the limited information and data available, noting that:

...we still know very little about this phenomenon and that it remains very rare. Policy research on this topic is currently weak and driven by misconceptions, while academic research is rare and often out-of-date.

Lemon and Heathershaw offer observations on the possible relationships to migration, noting that most of those radicalized have been targeted by jihadist groups after they have left their home countries. They note that despite recent high-profile terrorism incidents carried out by Central Asian militants – the April 2017 St. Petersburg metro bombing, the January 2017 Istanbul nightclub attack and the June 2016 Ataturk airport bombing – there is no clear evidence that religious, economic or political root causes in Central Asia are responsible for it “exporting” terrorism.

Lemon and Heathershaw argue that while no single factor explains why an individual would decide to join an extremist group, many appear to have experienced isolation of some type, and this may explain why recruiters have targeted those at the margins of societies, including people working abroad. What is more, according to their research “most Central Asian migrants are literate and semi-skilled, but often work in jobs far below their capability and find themselves exploited by their employers”.<sup>i</sup> Many young men from Central Asia who have migrated for work spend their late adolescence away from their homes; they are subject to daily economic hardship, are undervalued in their jobs, suffer racial abuse and sometimes State harassment. This can make them more vulnerable to jihadism, underscoring the need to combat xenophobia and mistreatment of migrant workers, which in and of itself is important for all societies. The possibility of radicalization does not alter this, but highlights the rare and possibly extreme consequences of falling short.

h Lemon and Heathershaw, 2017.

i Ibid.

While it is too soon to assess whether such interventions will be successful, there have been concerns expressed that other policy options may be harmful. Many migrants, asylum seekers and refugees have experienced difficult situations in their lives and face discrimination. Furthermore, they are also often tainted by false or dubious assertions concerning their impact on the economy, social cohesion, ideological beliefs and motivations, and national identity. To portray them additionally as a threat to national security and seeing them as potential terrorists only adds to their hardship. It may result in the unintended consequence of further alienating them, thus increasing

their susceptibility to violent extremist narratives and agendas.<sup>38</sup> Such concerns have recently been expressed about the US 2017 Executive Order Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.<sup>39</sup>

**A final angle on the links between migrants, violent extremism and social exclusion, concerns the prospective challenge of reintegrating returning FTFs. According to the United Nations, FTFs:**

...increase the intensity, duration, and complexity of conflicts and may constitute a serious danger to their States of origin, transit, destination, as well as neighboring zones of armed conflict in which they are active. The FTF threat is evolving rapidly changing and is unlikely to be fully contained in the short term. A significant longer-term risk is posed by FTFs returning to their countries of origin or upon their arrival in third countries.<sup>40</sup>

**Scholars, civil society and a handful of policymakers have remarked that the rehabilitation and reintegration of FTFs must become a priority; we risk further radicalizing individuals and communities if we rely on detention as the sole means to treat returning FTFs. Indeed some may be able to help with preventing further violent extremism:**

Promoting the rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders is a critical component of addressing the full lifecycle of violent extremist radicalization and recruitment. Amid growing numbers of returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and the active prosecution of suspected terrorists in general, the need to support their rehabilitation and reintegration after imprisonment is paramount in order to minimize recidivism and to build trust among local communities and law enforcement.<sup>41</sup>

## Defectors and reintegration

In the eastern Danish city of Aarhus – the second-largest city in the country – the police, city council and local NGOs engage with one another in coordinated activities aimed at preventing at-risk youth from joining violent extremist groups.<sup>l</sup> For the residents and law enforcement of Aarhus, the primary concern for at-risk youth has been their interest in leaving the city to fight alongside militant jihadi groups abroad, primarily Daesh in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic. To prevent this, local stakeholders prioritize social integration for marginalized and vulnerable youth. For Aarhus residents who have travelled abroad to support Daesh and have returned home, there is also support offered.<sup>k</sup> In Denmark, the national policy states that returning jihadists whose involvement in terrorism has been established will be prosecuted; and that those with no proven record of participation in terrorist activities are eligible for assistance.<sup>l</sup>

38 Cunningham and Koser, 2015

39 Amnesty International, 2017.

40 UNSC, 2014.

41 Global Center on Cooperative Security and International Centre for Counter Terrorism – The Hague, 2016.

Reportedly, the programme has reduced the number of young people joining Daesh and other groups linked to terrorism, especially when compared with the foreign fighter flows of other European nations. According to a piece by National Public Radio, which highlighted the unique approach of the Aarhus model, in 2012, 34 citizens of Aarhus left Denmark to fight for Daesh, of whom 18 returned home and were enrolled in the rehabilitation programme, six were killed and an estimated 10 remained as of July 2016. However, by 2015 when foreign fighter flows from Europe to the Syrian Arab Republic and Iraq were at one of their highest levels, only one citizen from the city left the country to fight.<sup>m</sup> Specifically, the programme involves assisting with school enrolment, counselling, housing and employment, as well as conducting meetings with parents. Reintegrated and deradicalized defectors have played a key role in encouraging their peers to return home, while demonstrating that reintegration within Danish society is possible.<sup>n</sup>

There is growing recognition in both the policy and academic fields that defectors can be a powerful force in preventing violent extremism, as their experiences have the potential to serve as a deterrent to those with aspirations of joining groups such as Daesh. Stressing the significance of defectors, Anne Speckhard and Ahmet Yayla argue that

...disillusioned cadres of those who can speak from experience and tell their authentic stories about life inside IS may be the most influential tool for preventing and dissuading others from joining...<sup>o</sup>

Governments need to create the right conditions that make it easier for defectors not only to reintegrate, but also to speak out against extremist groups. These include the resettlement of former jihadists, providing them with services, and ensuring their safety and security.<sup>p</sup> If we do not allow for the reintegration of low-level violent extremists and their sympathizers, we risk making disillusioned individuals into hardened supporters as a result of prolonged incarceration and marginalization.

j Crouch and Henley, 2015.

k Ibid.

l Lister, 2015.

m Rosin, 2016.

n Ibid.

o Speckhard and Yayla, 2015.

p Neumann, 2015.

## Implications for policy debates

Starting off by justifying engagement with such a politically sensitive topic, and recognizing the risks of inflaming prejudice against migrants, this chapter has tried to provide an analytical framework for understanding better the intersections between migration and displacement on the one hand, and violent extremism and terrorism on the other. It has acknowledged existing definitional and data deficits, and stressed the challenges of establishing any causal link; implying significant reservations on the conclusions not just of this chapter,

but of current discourse and policy in this area. The chapter has followed the logic of the migration cycle to develop a preliminary typology of the intersections between migration, displacement and violent extremism. This chapter has also raised concerns about some unintended consequences of certain current policy responses in this field.

On the basis of this preliminary analysis, the following seven implications for policy debate may be offered:

- 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, including via appropriate pre-screening of candidates for refugee resettlement and migration, enhanced intelligence-sharing among governments and the appropriate usage of biometrics;
- A more integrated approach to tackling the causes of displacement and migration should include interventions specifically focused on countering and preventing violent extremism – there is growing evidence that preventing violent extremism may be one way to address the drivers of migration;
- 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 PVE interventions respect the rights of migrants and refugees.

To conclude on a positive note, it may be possible also to conceive migration as part of a potential solution to violent extremism. There is a real risk that focusing on migration and displacement only as a cause or consequence of violent extremism will simply exacerbate the threat. This focus may become an excuse to restrict the entry of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees; to limit their rights; or to force people to return to unsafe situations in their home countries. 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.<sup>42</sup>

Well-managed migration can promote mutual understanding; migration also has significant impacts on poverty reduction in countries of origin through remittances, reducing the appeal of violent extremism. Migration is a symbol of the hard-won principles of openness and globalization that violent extremism seeks to overturn and that therefore should be protected. The challenge for policymakers is to promote the positive aspects of migration, rather than merely focusing on the low potential risk of importing violent extremists when offering opportunities to migrants and protection to refugees.

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42 Koser, 2015.



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