

EX POST PAPER

RAN Policy & Practice Event

Common P/CVE challenges in the Western Balkans and European Union

Introduction

The Western Balkan countries and the European Union share common challenges in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE); many of these challenges are similar across regions. However, practice has shown that there is no one-size-fits-all P/CVE strategy. Nor can the multiple actors involved succeed individually in preventing radicalisation and countering violent extremism.

At the first RAN Policy & Practice Event on Common P/CVE challenges, held in Sofia on 4 April 2018, policymakers joined practitioners from the Western Balkans and the EU to discuss a number of key topics. These included the role of religion in P/CVE, local approaches to engaging with communities, multi-agency cooperation, and challenges posed by child returnees and children being raised in extremist environments.

This ex post paper summarises the recommendations and best practices drawn from the meeting. This document is intended for policymakers and practitioners who want to better understand the needs and goals of others and who wish to improve mutual cooperation at all levels. The exchange of best practices from the Western Balkan and EU countries could better prepare both regions to tackle any threats and challenges they may face.

Part 1: Multiple partnerships: needs and challenges

Those working in multiple partnerships have diverse needs and face numerous challenges. Policymakers and practitioners from Western Balkan and EU countries drew on their experiences and presented three dimensions of multiple partnerships that are key to successfully confronting related problems.

1. Religion plays an important role in radicalisation, and therefore also in deradicalisation or disengagement efforts.
2. Localised approaches are needed to engage with communities.
3. Multi-agency cooperation is vital to preventing radicalisation and countering violent extremism.

Related challenges and proposed solutions are set out for each objective.

1. *The role of religion*

On the dimension of religion, participants highlighted the following lessons learned, summarising the experience of both Western Balkan and EU countries.

Lesson 1.1. Find partners to channel religion constructively

- The religious dimension offers a framework for rebuilding identity, with guidance and a clear set of norms.
- Religion can serve to fill the gaps not covered by the state when providing for the basic needs of citizens.
- Trying to reverse religious ideologies is not the most effective method. Instead, interventions should cultivate critical thinking and help individuals to critically re-evaluate their own ideas.
- Use dialogue rather than confrontational arguments.

- Promote shared values and reduce sentiments opposing a specific religion, such as anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic sentiments.

Lesson 1.2. Effective policy measures should improve understanding of the role of religion in a security context

- The security debate on perceived 'religious extremism' often reveals a lack of religious literacy and a vocabulary featuring ambiguous phrases, that are often interpreted differently by different groups.
- Building mutual trust and understanding in relation to religion provides the best foundation for security.
- Increased interaction, reflection and dialogue between stakeholders such as policymakers, media and communities is needed, to achieve more accurate and nuanced representations of religiously motivated conflicts and violence.

Lesson 1.3. Consider the influence of radical jihadi ideologies in Islam

- The penetration of ultraconservative ideologies (e.g. Salafi and Wahhabi) into traditionally moderate and tolerant Muslim communities creates new challenges that call for a response from multiple actors.
- Some domestic factors have contributed to the spread of foreign radical jihadi ideologies in communities, for example, insufficient state support or provision of basic services (i.e. education, health care and other social services).
- In some areas, alternative solutions are provided by religious organisations with a more extremist viewpoint and less partnerships with local and national authorities.

Solutions call for:

- recognition of the gaps in community services, addressing community needs, cooperation with the religious community to reduce the influence of militant jihadi ideologies.
- creation of effective counter-narratives.

Lesson 1.4. Religion may play a role in the process of radicalisation and deradicalisation

- Although religion can be a factor in both P & CVE, we cannot focus solely on the religious aspect.
- Focusing exclusively on the religious element of these processes, to the exclusion of other factors, results in an inaccurate representation of the issues; such oversights can have consequences when disregarded factors are not accounted for.
- On some pathways to radicalisation, religion is exploited or misused.
- When religion does matter in a radicalisation process, it can play a role in preventing/countering it, through deradicalisation and disengagement efforts.

Lesson 1.5. Religious communities are important partners in P/CVE

- Religious counselling may be a positive way of supporting individuals who are vulnerable to religiously inspired extremist ideologies.
- Community partners are vital in defusing tensions in polarised societies.
- Dealing with religious issues requires respect for the different priorities/needs/views that religious communities might hold.

Lesson 1.6. Societal and individual levels should be handled separately

- Stigmatisation of religious groups should be avoided.

- Addressing the individual needs of community members is the first step in building community resilience.
- Starting work at the individual level may help people to overcome their fears and empower those willing to speak out against violence.

Lesson 1.7. Religious education, and education in general, is key to preventing vulnerability to propaganda and extremist interpretations of religious sources

- Link anti-violence work with civic education/theological discourse.
- Improve the network of EU imams.
- Enhance cooperation with experts in Islam.

A promising example of practice is the Violence Prevention Network (VPN) in Germany.

Box 1 The Verantwortungspädagogik® (Education of Responsibility) method (Germany)

Since 2001, the VPN team has successfully reduced ideologically and religiously motivated serious crime and extreme acts of violence committed by youths. Thanks to the Verantwortungspädagogik® (Education of Responsibility) method, the VPN has identified a way to address those who identify with anti-democratic structures without humiliating them, thus facilitating these individuals' reintegration into the democratic community. Through its extensive work with right-wing extremist youths and those endangered by Islamist fundamentalism, the nationally renowned VPN team has acquired expertise in work with ideologically motivated criminal offenders.

2. Local approaches for greater community impact

Localised approaches, driven by local context and reflective of the local circumstances, are considered vital in preventing radicalisation to violent extremism, both in the Western Balkans and the EU. Approaches need to be tailored accordingly, particularly when engaging with communities.

Collaboration with local authorities is in the interest of communities: by sharing knowledge and resources with local authorities, communities can better serve their members and protect them from extremist influences.

Early prevention of polarisation, radicalisation and extremism requires multi-agency cooperation at local level, to achieve mutual goals in:

- increasing resilience amongst people, by empowering professionals, parents and communities;
- stimulating cross-sector cooperation and an integral approach with the social domain;
- raising awareness and agenda-setting in the social domain.

Building strong cooperation, trust and dialogue between agencies has a positive impact on the whole process.

However, such collaboration may run into a number of challenges at different stages, e.g. preparations, establishing contacts, selecting partners, dialogue and collaboration, and responding to crises.

Countries differ widely in their local-level competences and policies. What works best when implementing local action plans and strategies?

Lesson 2.1. Create a national context, fostering a localised approach

- National support is essential for the success of local efforts to prevent polarisation and radicalisation and counter violent extremism.
- National authorities play an important role in creating the preconditions for a fruitful collaboration.
- National policy, budgets and communication have a direct impact on the conditions in which local authorities and communities operate.

Lesson 2.2. Recognise the importance of the localised approach

- Local level is where P/CVE measures are implemented, with work closer to the individuals at risk.
- Create a clear strategy of front-line workers: train them, raise awareness and get local practitioners to understand their role.
- In countries with a centralised governance structure, create mobile national teams that can work at local level.

Lesson 2.3. Recognise the complexity of communities

- Communities are diverse — recognise and understand this complexity and adopt different approaches with different communities and key persons when establishing contact. There is no one-size-fits-all approach;
- Make sure that community representatives feel the partnership is an equal one.
- Consulting with involved communities will make it easier to identify problems such as failed strategies.

Lesson 2.4. Avoid a top-down approach

- The process should always be initiated by local-level needs.
- Experience shows that bottom-up measures starting from the community

level can be more effective than top-down, government-led policies. Post-crisis, local authorities should involve communities and work together on recovery. Regardless of the type of crisis, the local authority should contact the community P/CVE network so as to be aware of the concerns, needs and fears of different communities. Having a network of communities in place will allow for a more effective response when an incident occurs.

Lesson 2.5. Develop an information-sharing and trust-building system

- Build relationships and create trust — this requires time and effort.
- Learn how to communicate effectively with different communities, each with their own norms, values and customs.
- Treat all actors with respect and show appreciation of their efforts.

Lesson 2.6. Establish conditions for multi-agency cooperation at local level

- Create local multi-agency networks of relevant actors.
- Apply a comprehensive approach. This is a multidimensional undertaking and involves non-traditional actors from the social environment (e.g. care professions), services (e.g. banks and financial institutions) and societal spheres (e.g. communities and religious institutions).

Lesson 2.7 Design local strategies or action plans

- Most local strategies or action plans use the prevention triangle in one form or

another. The triangle categorises prevention into different intervention levels: (1) general (to target the general society), (2) specific (at-risk groups and individuals), and (3) individual (radicalised individuals).

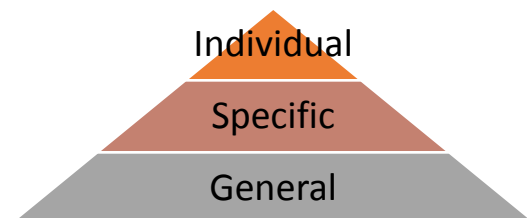


Figure 1 The prevention triangle

General prevention may include:

- civic education
- counter-narrative programmes
- stimulation of social cohesion
- parental support for all parents.

Specific or targeted prevention:

- stimulate close cooperation between schools, youth work, welfare institutions, police, etc.
- train professionals to run empowerment programmes for parents
- adopt key figure approach/strategic networks.

Individual prevention:

- put together a multidisciplinary case management team
- run reintegration programmes.

Examples of different models of local approaches for community engagement are shown below.



Figure 2 Local, multidisciplinary case-management teams (Netherlands)

- To **PREVENT** violent extremism via coordinated prevention measures, adopted both at national and municipality level.
- To **REFER** individual cases showing signs of increasing radicalisation towards violent extremism or those confirmed to be in need of deradicalisation or reintegration into society.
- To **ADDRESS** the referred cases, their roots, triggers and instrumental factors, in order to disengage, deradicalise or to reintegrate such individuals.

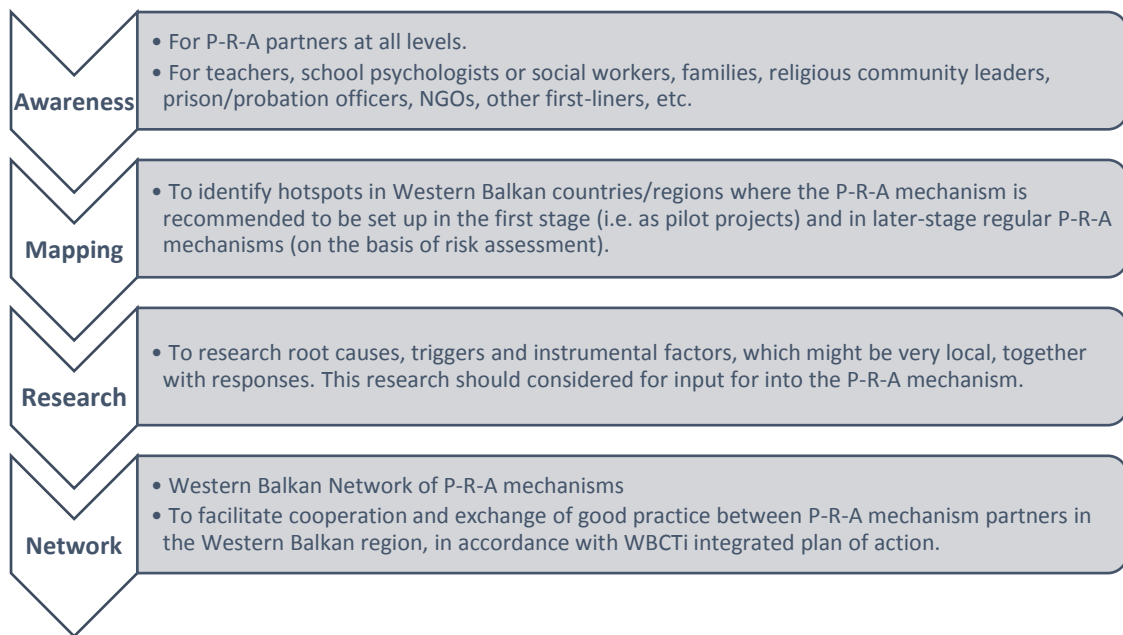


Figure 3 Steps to develop the P-R-A mechanism in Western Balkan countries

3. Multi-agency cooperation

Policymakers and practitioners from Western Balkan and EU countries highlighted many benefits of multi-agency cooperation in preventing radicalisation and countering violent extremism. There is no one-size-fits-all model for multi-agency cooperation, and often the chosen model needs to fit the local context.

Myriads of multi-agency solutions and types of collaboration were presented, each of which served their own purpose: to make decisions, to coordinate efforts, to deliver comprehensive services, etc. Some are less integrated, as in the case of teams liaising remotely and operating as liaison points. Others work as co-located teams coming together to address a specific

unfolding threat or to work on long-term strategic objectives.

Barriers to multi-agency cooperation still exist: legal and procedural barriers to information-sharing, the lack of clearly established policies and practice guidelines for multi-agency cooperation in P/CVE, lack of trust, cultural barriers and a history of inter-agency competition ⁽¹⁾.

The actors most commonly involved in multi-agency working are police, social workers, health experts, youth workers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and businesses.

Below are the recommendations and lessons learned for establishing and maintaining

⁽¹⁾ See the RAN H&SC Issue Paper *Multi-agency working and preventing violent extremism I* (April 2018) at https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/multi-agency-working-preventing-violent-extremism-042018_en.pdf online.

effective and sustainable cooperation between all necessary actors at national and local level in Western Balkan and EU countries.

Lesson 3.1. Countries develop their own models of multi-agency cooperation

- The creation of a multi-agency structure is a long process.
- Exchange of experience and best practices is highly recommended among countries and regions, both in Western Balkan and EU countries.
- Knowledge transfer between Member States as well as training and awareness-building experience is recommended at both national and EU/Western Balkan country level.
- Lessons learned from these exchanges need to be adapted to the national and local contexts at hand, in order to develop a suitable multi-agency structure.

Lesson 3.3. Coordination between different stakeholders remains a challenge

- Should there be one leading agency of multi-agency cooperation or an equal partnership? Who should be responsible?
- Clearly defined responsibility at national level and various leadership levels is recommended.

Lesson 3.3. Need for information-sharing frameworks/agreements

- The main challenge is the exchange of information within and across agencies.
- Does everybody have access to the same level of information? Not all actors have access to all databases. These circumstances call for an effective information-sharing model to be set up.
- The overreaching issue is the existing culture of classified information, particularly in the case of sensitive information crossing the borders of a public system to be shared with external private partners.

- It is thus clear that it is important to distinguish genuinely classified information from sensitive information that might be shared, with some prudence.

Lesson 3.4. Develop a shared language and tools

- It is recommended that a shared language and toolset be developed for work with radicalised offenders. This will allow all parties involved to work on the same definitions and share a common understanding of risk assessment and categorisation of radicalised offenders.

Lesson 3.5. Use/adopt existing multi-agency structures

- Multi-agency structures that are already in place for other types of offenders (e.g. organised crime, gang members or sex offenders) can be adapted to work for radicalised offenders.
- In these cases, the new structure can be built fast, thanks to the existing policy, information-sharing framework and training, which can be adapted to the different context.

Advisable principles for multi-agency cooperation:

- engage in broad coordination with the authorities, civil society and the local community;
- **respect human rights and the rule of law;**
- **ensure transparency** and clear coordination,
- **employ soft and hard measures, interventions, targeted services and awareness-raising.**

The following case studies were presented as examples of multi-agency cooperation in Western Balkan and EU countries.

Box 2 Multi-agency cooperation (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

| |
|---|
| <p>Coordination body</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inter-sectoral supervisory body: an expert body of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina <p>Task</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To monitor implementation of the Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Preventing and Combating Terrorism 2015-2020 <p>Structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comprising 14 permanent members from different institutions, primarily from the security sector • Representatives of international organisations, academia and the non-governmental sector can also participate as observers • Establishment of coordination bodies at lower levels to include local stakeholders <p>Referral mechanism</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping stakeholders, primarily at local level • Collecting and sharing information with all levels • Establishment of multidisciplinary teams at local level, primarily to include the sectors of education, health care, religious communities and police • Establishment of communication mechanisms/procedures, and method of sharing confidential information between local stakeholders • RAN Bosnia and Herzegovina — Group of Friends — Supervisor Body, IOM, academic community and non-governmental sector |
|---|

Box 3 Local cooperation and multi-professional work (Finland)

| Local cooperation groups | Anchor work/teams (first anchors in 1990s) |
|---|--|
| Members | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different authorities • Representatives of NGOs (permanent or case by case) • Lead by the representative of the municipality or the police | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police, social workers, psychiatric nurses, youth workers • In all police districts |
| Tasks | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and update a local 'situation picture' • Involve different partners in preventive efforts, including leadership of their organisations • Training, projects, etc. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early intervention in criminal behaviour — wide-ranging approach • Prevention of violent radicalisation |
| Added value | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Common approach and 'situation picture' • Support for preventive work and intervention | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interventions • Different experts, contacts with different authorities |

Part 2: Young children in extremist environments

The second part of this paper discusses policy and practice responses relevant to young children in extremist environments. In particular, we discuss responses to child returnees, the roles of parents, grandparents and foster care in dealing with children raised in extremist environments, and the challenges of dealing with children indoctrinated to hate the societies in which they live.

4. Child returnees: risks

Children returning from a jihadist conflict zone form an important part of the broader jihadist threat to their domestic countries. There are three categories of child returnees: children who travelled to a jihadist conflict zone by choice; children who were taken there by one or both their parents; and children who were born there, having EU/Western Balkan parents.

What do we know about child returnees?

- These children likely witnessed horrific violence, tortures and executions. They also experienced war activities, loss of parents or family members and life in fear.
- Such events are likely to have affected them negatively in psychological terms, e.g. through PTSD and other traumas.
- Boys older than 10 were probably given weapons training, and might have participated in military activities, and potentially, in executions.
- They were indoctrinated by Daesh's propaganda and educated in anger and hate against Daesh's enemies.

These children are first and foremost victims of Daesh, due to the stress and trauma inflicted

on them by the violence they experienced. Nevertheless, some of them pose a security threat to their home countries, or might do so in future. The fact that young child returnees are both victims and (future) security risks, is flagged in the HLCEG-R interim report² as well.

Threat factors are:

- combat experience
- indoctrination
- parental attitude
- abstract danger of children born under Daesh: returnees might retain their Islamist attitude and may raise their children accordingly.

In assessing the potential risk of child returnees, it is important to differentiate between the following three age groups³.

1. Teenagers/adolescents (10-17 years)
 - Almost all boys received combat training, and many engaged in terrorism and acts of violence.
 - Separate subgroup: some children, aged between 15 and 17, travelled alone, and joined Daesh without their parents.
2. Pre-teens (4-10 years)
 - Suffered from indoctrination, but were most likely not engaged in terrorist violence themselves.
 - Probably have been exposed to terrorist violence.
3. Infants and toddlers (0-3 years)
 - Less time exposed to indoctrination, but suffered from poor living conditions and parental trauma, and may have witnessed or endured violence.

The level of risk these children pose depends on the age group: teenage returnees may pose a serious threat; pre-teens do not (at least, not

⁽²⁾ HLCEG-R interim report
<http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail.groupDetailDoc&id=36235&no=1>

⁽³⁾ <https://alde.livecasts.eu/child-returnees-managing-the-return-of-european-children-from-jihadist-conflict-zones>

directly); and while infants and toddlers certainly do not pose an immediate risk, they might present a serious resocialisation challenge. After their return, both child care and risk assessment tools should be implemented.

There are currently four approaches in place across EU countries regarding the return of children from Daesh:

1. no proactive aid to arrange children's return — no provision of travel documents;
2. granting children up to 9 years the right to return;
3. informing grandparents of the whereabouts of their grandchildren, and enabling them to try to arrange their return;
4. providing help to children in detainment camps.

After their return to their home countries, a risk assessment should evaluate and assess the current and future risk the children might pose in future, in case of a return to violence due to failed resocialisation.

When resocialisation is not supported by the best efforts available, child returnees may remain vulnerable to radicalisation or violent extremism at a later age, resulting in them possibly posing a security threat later, even after many years.

Key challenges relate to:

- how to implement a proper policy response;
- how to establish an adequate system to fulfil the psychological and care needs of child returnees;

- how to implement effective resocialisation plans, to prevent further radicalisation.

Another challenge is how to treat children exposed to Daesh indoctrination, in the case of children living in Daesh-held territory and children exposed to Daesh online propaganda in other areas.

Children growing up in Daesh-held territories were victims of Daesh's predatory or structural recruitment⁽⁴⁾ and indoctrination embedded in Daesh's schools, which operated as enlistment and training bases for children attending with parental approval, for children isolated from their adult family members and for children who were orphans. The presented data suggest that the indoctrination and training of orphans and foreign children was the most intense, having the aim of creating the next generation of strong and loyal Daesh fighters.

A different challenge relates to the tools used by terrorists to indoctrinate and recruit children on the internet: children's songs, video games (e.g. Super Mario ISIS), TV programmes targeting children, and mobile apps. In such cases, measures monitoring and regulating the time children spend online and the intensity of their online engagement should be used as a part of deradicalisation programmes. Children who were systematically manipulated through the programmatic methods of Daesh's indoctrination may pose a security threat.

In respect of presented challenges, the lessons learned at the meeting could help both policymakers and practitioners from Western Balkan and EU countries improve the current systems and tools used in their countries to

⁽⁴⁾ See Assad Almohammad's ICCT Research paper *SIS Child Soldiers in Syria: The structural and predatory recruitment, enlistment, pre-training indoctrination, training, and deployment* (February

2018) at <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ICCT-Almohammad-ISIS-Child-Soldiers-In-Syria-Feb2018.pdf> online.

deal with child returnees, child recruitment and child indoctrination.

Lesson 4.1. National guidance or action plans

- Draw up a national guidance or action plan for child returnees.
- Establish national mechanisms for child observation relating to care, trauma, safety risk and specific professional help.
- Produce an annual survey on the development and needs of child returnees.

Lesson 4.2. Support for parents and families

- Provide the best care to juvenile returnees after their return: preferably having them stay with family members (non-radicalised parents, grandparents or other family members), or if necessary, in a professional foster family or a professional observation or treatment centre.
- Provide family members with all necessary support to deal with the needs of child returnees.

Lesson 4.3. Social services support and knowledge

- Ensure that social services have sufficient knowledge and expertise.
- Establish proper coordination and exchange of information for all actors involved (concerns that a child is at risk of becoming involved in violent Islamist extremism must always be reported).

Lessons 4.4. Boost the democratic remit of schools

- Ensure that school efforts to promote democratic values meet children's needs by providing forums for discussing difficult issues, including violent Islamist extremism.

Lessons 4.5. Effective safeguarding processes and actions

- Protect children from further harm, and make it less likely that they will pose a threat in future.

An existing good practice example is the protection and evaluation programme in France, described below.

Box 4 Protection and evaluation programme (France)

The programme is based on:

- systematic referral to the juvenile judge for protective measures
- evaluation of every individual situation by youth judicial protection services
- a medical-psychological assessment
- schooling which starts as soon as possible
- local units for prevention of crime and radicalisation, and family support, chaired by the prefects, to ensure the overall follow-up of these children and their families
- specific training for professionals.

The need for prevention of radicalisation and discrimination is not limited to the child returnees alone. Early prevention is also necessary in families where radicalised parents have small children. There are many examples of radicalisation of youngsters, both outside and inside the family unit, and each case requires a tailored response.

Denmark's Aarhus tool for practitioners dealing with extremism in children is a model example.

The prevention programme aims to prevent further violent radicalisation of youngsters who do not yet represent a danger or security risk, but who may do so if their radicalisation process continues in a violent direction, and who may then perpetrate acts of terrorism.

In such cases, there are five aspects requiring attention:

1. development and behaviour
2. family relationships
3. school and day care
4. health care
5. recreation and friendship.

Specific anti-radicalisation measures are recommended in cases where risk factors of violent radicalisation are identified. It might be necessary to mobilise family, peers, school, clubs, etc. in the process of helping youngsters to reject radicalisation. The children's own voices have to be heard.

In some cases, removing a child from a family might be necessary, in the interests of the child's welfare, when it may not be appropriate or feasible for the child to remain in the care of radicalised parents. In such cases, foster care is arranged, or increasingly, non-radicalised grandparents may be required to step in.

Following the survey on dealing with child returnees of the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator amongst EU Member States, Norway, Switzerland and the Western Balkans, a meeting was held in which the following 10 recommendations were put forward.

- Make use of the RAN 10-step approach to delivering family support (5).
- Actively offer services to individuals, even if they don't request it.
- Coordinate individual cases with all relevant partners.
- Develop risk and needs assessment tools tailored for children (including a gender approach).

- Provide controlled religious counselling where appropriate.
- Develop tools to better communicate European values.
- Consider refugee children coming from former Daesh-controlled territories to like child returnees, in terms of interventions.
- Interview accompanied and unaccompanied minor asylum seekers.
- Focus on the positive long-term development of children.
- Foreign assistance: explore how to best support children in former Daesh-controlled territories (providing education and psychological assistance).

⁽⁵⁾ See the RAN YF&C H&SC Ex post paper *Working with families and safeguarding children from radicalisation: step-by-step guidance paper for practitioners and policy-makers* (February 2017) at [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran_yf-c_h-](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran_yf-c_h-sc_working_with_families_safeguarding_children_en.pdf)

[sc_working_with_families_safeguarding_children_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran_yf-c_h-sc_working_with_families_safeguarding_children_en.pdf)

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