



## **Reviewing the Evidence Base on Migration and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*This paper examines the existing evidence base regarding violent extremism and radicalization as push factors for migration and displacement, with a particular emphasis on displacement and migration from Africa, the Middle East and Asia, to Europe. It explores the extent to which there is evidence that migrants and migration from these regions could serve as a means to counter violent extremism in source countries.*

*There is a significant gap in the existing academic and policy literature regarding the relationship between violent extremism and migration, both in terms of violent extremism as a driver of displacement and migration, but also the role that migration and migrants play in either countering or exacerbating violent extremism in source countries. Given the paucity of the evidence base, case studies of Nigeria, Iraq, and Afghanistan, offer the opportunity to consider the inter-relationships in greater detail. Analysis of these examples highlight the extent to which European policymakers should avoid oversimplified conclusions about inter-relationships and causality, as there are pertinent distinctions even at the sub-national level. Classic programmes that seek to address violent extremism by improving levels of economic opportunity and development may serve to increase migration levels. However, each of these cases suggest that addressing the quality of governance, systemic or targeted marginalization, identity based persecution and the lack of socio-economic opportunities which offer long-term 'social capital' prospects may be root-cause commonalities that can address both phenomena simultaneously through targeted aid and development programming.*

### **Executive Summary**

For over a decade, countering violent extremism (CVE) has played a prominent role in EU foreign policy, particularly within the context of EU counter-terrorism strategies in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. In response to a rapid increase in mixed migration flows to Europe, mainly in the form of asylum seekers and economic migrants from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, European policymakers have sought to better understand the drivers of displacement and “root causes” of migration from these areas. Yet there is relatively little academic scholarship or policy documents that seek to examine migration and violent extremism as interconnected phenomena. With both issues at the forefront of EU foreign policy, a better understanding of the linkages, or lack thereof, between violent extremism and migration would offer EU policymakers an opportunity to more efficiently and effectively allocate aid and development resources toward meeting both priorities: countering violent extremism and managing mixed migration flows.

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There are several contemporary examples in which the drivers of violent extremism and the drivers of migration would appear to overlap considerably, but the drivers and “root causes” of migration are multifaceted. Violent extremism and the activities of violent extremists are often a push factor for migration and displacement, but may not be the only or the most salient driver in a given context. Violent extremism and radicalization are direct drivers of migration in cases where specific groups, such as ISIS (Iraq) and Boko Haram (Nigeria) deliberately target certain communities. Given the multifaceted nature of these drivers and “root causes,” there is limited evidence available that suggests violent extremism – with the exception of examples of forced displacement – is either a cause or consequence of migration. Thus, one cannot conclude that a reduction in violent extremism and radicalization in a given context will reduce migration flows in certain source countries.

There is a limited evidence base that migrants and migration can serve as a means to counter violent extremism, in part because there is no scholarly consensus on the drivers of violent extremism, nor is there quantitative or conclusive evidence on what causes individuals to be radicalized or resort to violent extremism. Even in the cases in which violent extremism is a push factor for migration, the relationship between the two is by no means straightforward. There are, however, several hypotheses on the drivers of violent extremism that are strongly supported by existing literature, and in certain countries and contexts, many of these drivers overlap with the drivers of migration.

The examples of Iraq, Nigeria, and Afghanistan, all of which are source countries of irregular flows to Europe with high levels of violent extremism, highlight potential opportunities and risks for policymakers. In all three cases, we see that both the drivers of migration and violent extremism are specific to the national context, and include overlapping, cross-cutting, and multi-faceted factors:

- In Iraq, sectarianism, political interests, perceived marginalization and poor governance are the most identifiable drivers of violent extremism among the Iraqi population, and are also the primary reasons attributed to migration.
- In Nigeria, ethnic conflicts, the unequal distribution of resources, and protests against prevailing ideologies and power structures are seen as drivers of violent extremism; whilst migration is promoted by violence related to extremism, as well as desire of improved economic and social conditions that is enabled by the extensive Nigerian diaspora network.
- In Afghanistan, the roots of violent extremism are most typically attributed to frustrations over physical insecurity, government corruption, poverty and growing income inequality. It is the continued and chronic insecurity that are seen as the primary drivers of migration, a phenomenon that is enabled by a longstanding culture of mobility in the country.

Commonalities that can be identified between the three cases point to the fact that poor or unequal governance and service delivery are cited as root causes of both migration and violent extremism in these countries. Lack of prospects for a ‘future’, whether due to



instability, inequality or targeted policies of discrimination were also common. Therefore, the points where the drivers of violent extremism and the drivers of migration overlap considerably may offer an opportunity for the EU and its member states to integrate CVE programming into migration policies, and vice versa. However, these cases require going beyond the facile assumption that improving socio-economic conditions will ameliorate the root causes without commensurate efforts to improve the quality of governance, social inclusion and perspectives for socio-economic advancement.

There is some nascent evidence that migrants and migration can and do play a role in addressing some, but not all, of the underlying drivers of violent extremism, including promoting economic development and cross-cultural understanding, as well as representing authentic voices that counter the narratives and propaganda espoused by violent extremist groups. There may be contexts in which violent extremism is a push factor for migration, yet migration is also a potential mitigating force against the drivers of violent extremism. While granularity of analysis is required, it appears that there is more likely to be a convergence between drivers of violent extremism and migration where migration is conflict or violence related. In other contexts, however, where the drivers are socio-economic, the ameliorating actions may result in higher rates of migration.

Yet these three cases also highlight the extent to which any attempt to incorporate CVE programming into efforts that seek to address the “root causes” of migration, risk operating under overly simplistic theories regarding both violent extremism and migration. Until drivers of both phenomena, and their relationship to each other are well-understood, efforts to tackle the root causes of one risks exacerbating the drivers of the other. This might particularly be the case where efforts to curb migration deprive communities of an opportunity to mitigate the dangers of violent extremism, thus making them more susceptible to violent extremism and its consequences. At the same time, programmes that seek to mitigate the impact of violent extremism by improving issues of economic or social marginalisation, might also encourage migration that has been proven to increase as poverty levels fall.

Therefore, there is a need to distinguish between drivers of refugee movement and drivers of economic migration, as well as whether European policymakers are trying to stem all migration from source countries as opposed simply to discouraging migration from said countries to Europe. Similarly, questions remain regarding the efficacy of programmes to counter violent extremism, as well as the effectiveness of aid and development programmes designed to address “root causes” of migration. Efforts to counter violent extremism and curb migration through aid and development may even prove counterproductive. In certain contexts, there may be opportunities for the EU to incorporate CVE into its migration policies, and vice versa, but policymakers should proceed with caution and a high degree of context specificity, given the limited evidence base regarding violent extremism as a push factor for migration and displacement, and the efficacy of CVE programmes.



## Introduction

Since 2005, countering violent extremism (CVE) has become an increasingly integral part of EU foreign policy, particularly within the EU's broader counter-terrorism strategy.<sup>2</sup> More recently, unprecedented mixed migration flows into Europe from Africa, the Middle East, and Asia have renewed interest in the drivers and “root causes” of migration.<sup>3</sup> The interrelationship between these two phenomena, both the extent to which violent extremism and radicalization are drivers of migration, and the extent to which migration could serve as a mitigating factor for rising violent extremism, remains almost entirely unexamined by policymakers and academics.<sup>4</sup>

Given the centrality that both CVE and managing mixed migration have for EU foreign policy, specifically in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, there is a need not only to continue to refine our understanding of both phenomena individually, but also to examine how both phenomena interact with each other. The limited existing scholarship and analysis that does address the intersection of violent extremism and migration largely focuses on the susceptibility of displaced populations to violent extremist ideologies and the degrees to which migrant communities are incubators of radicalization.<sup>5</sup> A more nuanced understanding of the nexus between violent extremism and mixed migration may enable more efficient and effective allocation of aid and development resources, potentially incorporating CVE programming into migration policy, and vice versa. More importantly, a better understanding of the relationship between violent extremism and migration may aid policymakers to ensure that efforts to counter violent extremism do not undermine efforts to manage mixed migration flows, and vice versa.

This paper is broken down into four sections. The first examines the extent to which existing literature indicates violent extremism and radicalization are push factors for migration and displacement. The second explores three specific case studies where violent extremism and large scale migration intersect: Afghanistan, Nigeria and Iraq. Building upon the analysis established in sections one and two, the third section examines the extent to which migrants and migration are (or can be) a means to counter violent extremism and radicalization and debates potential opportunities for integrating CVE programming into migration policy, and vice versa, as well as the possible risks of such integration. The paper concludes with a section discussing the implications of these findings on EU CVE and migration programming, as well as recommendation for EU policymakers going forward.

It should be noted that the focus of this paper is on cross-border migration rather than internal migration and internally displaced persons (IDPs). The term “migrant” is used

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<sup>2</sup> EU Foreign Affairs Council. *Council conclusions on counter-terrorism*. (February 9, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Carling, Jorgen and Talleraas, Catherine. *Root causes and drivers of migration: Implications for humanitarian efforts and development cooperation*. Peace Research Institute Oslo (2016).

<sup>4</sup> Schmid, Alex P. and Tinnes, Judich. *Links between Terrorism and Migration: An exploration*. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (May 2016).

<sup>5</sup> RESOLVE Network. *Building Consensus and Setting Priorities for Research on Violent Extremism: Working Paper on Findings from Expert Consultations*. (September 2016).



to encompass asylum seekers, refugees, and economic migrants, and the broad use of the term “migrant” should not be construed as a commentary on the legal status of the populations and communities described below, or the legal protections that they should or should not be afforded. Many of these migrants may be irregular migrants, whose movement takes place outside the regulatory frameworks of source, transit and destination countries. Similarly, the term “mixed migration” is used to capture the complexity of contemporary migration flows, and includes the movement of refugees, asylum seekers, economic migrants, environmental migrants as well as smuggled persons, victims of trafficking, stateless persons, and unaccompanied minors.

## **Section I: Violent extremism and radicalization as push factors for migration and displacement**

The drivers and “root causes” of migration are multifaceted, often overlapping, and rarely follow an easily discernible causal chain in which certain variables definitively lead to migration.<sup>6</sup> There are distinctions to be made between temporary displacement (including internally), due to conflict, natural disaster or other forms of short term insecurity; more systemic levels of refugee movement and asylum seeking due to protracted conflict, instability or persecution (by the government, local authorities or non-state actors), or protracted failures to meet basic and humanitarian needs in refugee contexts; or the migration that is driven by chronic poverty or the desire for social or economic advancement. Many people increasingly move for a combination of these reasons, complicating the definitions, as well as the international norms that apply in response.<sup>7</sup>

European policy debates about “root causes” of migration have traditionally been divided. One side views refugee movement within the framework of conflict or crisis-driven migration, thus focusing on humanitarian action, peace-building, and in the long-term, looking at addressing systemic factors for conflict prevention. The other side of this debate seeks to address the root causes of economic or social migration under the over-arching umbrella of “migration management” whereby innate desires for migration in the southern hemisphere are addressed as part of labour-force planning in the north. The logic of “prevention” of unplanned, illicit migration has subsequently extended to European policy thinking with poverty alleviation and economic development in source countries often put forward as a means to stem, reduce, and manage irregular migrant flows from developing countries.<sup>8</sup>

While conflict is often a push factor for migration, there is limited evidence available that violent extremism is a cause or consequence of migration.<sup>9</sup> The clearest examples in

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<sup>6</sup> Cummings, Clare; Pacitto, Julia; Lauro, Diletta and Foresti, Marta. *Why people move: understanding the drivers and trends of migration to Europe*. Overseas Development Institute: Working Paper 430 (December 2015); Carling, Jorgen and Talleraas, Catherine. *Root causes and drivers of migration: Implications for humanitarian efforts and development cooperation*. Peace Research Institute Oslo (2016).

<sup>7</sup> Carling, Jørgen, Gallagher, Anne T. and Horwood, Christopher. *Beyond Definitions: Global migration and the smuggling-trafficking nexus*. Regional Mixed Migration Secretariat, Nairobi (2016).

<sup>8</sup> Carling, Jørgen and Talleraas, Catherine. *Root causes and drivers of migration: Implications for humanitarian efforts and development cooperation*. Peace Research Institute Oslo (2016).

<sup>9</sup> Deniz, Yesil. *Violent Extremism and Migration*. EDAM Center for Economic and Foreign Policy Studies. (May 2016).



which violent extremism and radicalization are direct drivers of migration are cases where specific groups, such as ISIS (Iraq and Syria) and Boko Haram (Nigeria) deliberately target certain communities, or where widespread campaigns of violence over a protracted period coincide with socio-economic justifications for mobility, such as the Taliban in Afghanistan. In these cases, the migrant is not merely moving to escape conflict or the effects of conflict, but rather, to avoid being the specific targets or collateral damage of violent extremism.

At present, there is no scholarly consensus on the drivers of violent extremism, nor is there qualitative or conclusive evidence regarding what conditions or variables cause individuals to be radicalized or resort to violent extremism.<sup>10</sup> While violent extremism is a “global and interrelated trend,” the reasons why an individual joins Boko Haram in Nigeria or the Taliban in Afghanistan are unique to local contexts and personal circumstances.<sup>11</sup> That said, several broader hypotheses stretching across numerous case studies on the drivers of violent extremism do have merit,<sup>12</sup> and there are contexts in which the drivers of violent extremism and the identified drivers of migration overlap. A 2015 study conducted by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), for example, considered seventeen hypotheses regarding violent extremism, and found that only five of them were “strongly supported” by existing literature.<sup>13</sup> The table below places these five drivers in the left column. The right column lists the general drivers of migration, as identified in recent academic and policy literature.<sup>14</sup>

The table below highlights the relatively limited extent to which some of the drivers of violent extremism and drivers of migration may be intertwined, placing a focus on violence, insecurity and inequality. Where they notably diverge is that violent extremism appears to be heavily underpinned by identity perceptions, politics and persecution, whereas the commonly accepted drivers of migration are primarily socio-economic. Based on the drivers outlined in the table above, efforts to address the root causes of violent extremism may have the effect of encouraging, rather than discouraging, migration. You could broadly conclude, however, that the correlation between violent extremism and migration may prove salient or strong in the cases where conflict or violence is the key driver of migration, but in other contexts, the ameliorating actions to counter violent extremism may result in a higher degree of economic or socially motivated migration.

<sup>10</sup> Modirzadeh, Naz. *If It's Broke, Don't Make it Worse: A Critique the U.N. Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*. (January 23, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Lindborg, Nancy. *The Causes and Consequences of Violent Extremism and the Role of Foreign Assistance*. Testimony Submitted for the Record Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs. (April 12, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Allan, Harrit; Glazzard, Andrew; Jespersen, Sasha; Reddy-Tumu, Sneha; Winterbotham, Emily. *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*. RUSI (October 16, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> Allan, Harrit; Glazzard, Andrew; Jespersen, Sasha; Reddy-Tumu, Sneha; Winterbotham, Emily. *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*. RUSI (October 16, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Cummings, Clare; Pacitto, Julia; Lauro, Diletta and Foresti, Marta. *Why people move: understanding the drivers and trends of migration to Europe*. Overseas Development Institute: Working Paper 430; and Carling, Jorgen and Talleraas, Catherine. *Root causes and drivers of migration: Implications for humanitarian efforts and development cooperation*. Peace Research Institute Oslo (2016).



General Drivers of Violent Extremism “Strongly Supported” by existing literature <sup>15</sup>	General Drivers of Migration supported by existing academic and policy literature <sup>16</sup>
The search for <b>personal and group identities</b> among those who feel this has been undermined by rapid social change can increase the vulnerability of the young to radicalization	Political <b>insecurity, conflict, and violence</b> that drives people to flee their country for fear of their physical safety.
The growth of <b>religious and ethnic identities</b> (particularly if they compete with loyalties to the state or are exacerbated by marginalization) can be exploited by extremist ideologues	<b>Economic insecurity</b> in source countries and opportunity (comparative, real, and perceived) abroad. Note: the <i>ability</i> to migrate (financially and logistically) is crucial.
Government failure to provide <b>basic services</b> (health, education, welfare) allows extremist groups to meet these needs and build support as a result	Broader <b>economic development</b> , and economic transitions from “very poor” to “poor,” “lower middle class,” and “middle class” is likely to increase migration. Thus, economic development reinforces, rather than reduces migration. Thus, there is a “two-way relationship between migration and development, and poverty eradication has a marginal impact on migration”
In the <b>absence of peace and security</b> , populations are often ready to accept any entity that offers stability	<b>“Cultural” and “social” factors</b> such as familial support/pressure to migrate, migration as a common practice within certain cultures and communities, reinforced by success stories (real and perceived), increasingly transnational identities further reinforced by modern ICT
Where <b>inequality and institutionalized discrimination</b> coincide with religious or ethnic fault-lines, there is an increased likelihood of radicalization and mobilization	<b>State asylum policies, visa regimes and border controls.</b> Border controls and visas shape migrant flows, as migrants adapt their routes and destinations according to existing policies, and the smuggling market is often dictated by the presence of political and physical barriers such as visa restrictions or fences. Asylum policies also play a major role in shaping routes and preferred destination countries, depending on the source community.

<sup>15</sup> Allan, Harrit; Glazzard, Andrew; Jespersen, Sasha; Reddy-Tumu, Sneha; Winterbotham, Emily. *Drivers of Violent Extremism: Hypotheses and Literature Review*. RUSI (October 16, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> Cummings, Clare; Pacitto, Julia; Lauro, Diletta and Foresti, Marta. *Why people move: understanding the drivers and trends of migration to Europe*. Overseas Development Institute: Working Paper 430; and Carling, Jorgen and Talleraas, Catherine. *Root causes and drivers of migration: Implications for humanitarian efforts and development cooperation*. Peace Research Institute Oslo (2016).



As previously noted, the drivers of migration vary widely depending on the context, particularly when considering forced displacement and refugee flows versus economic migration, and a granular and context specific analysis is required. The subsequent section applies this analytical framework to three case studies: Nigeria, Iraq and Afghanistan.

## **Section II: Case Studies and Identifying Potential Opportunities**

In certain contexts, the existing overlap between violent extremism and large scale migration in several contemporary contexts represents both an opportunity and a risk for European policymakers. Certain cases could allow for more effective and efficient deployment of aid and development resources via programmes that integrate CVE programming into migration policies, and vice versa. Yet even in cases in which violent extremism is a salient push factor for migration, the relationship between the two phenomena is by no means straightforward, and predicting the ways in which policy interventions might impact the relationship is fraught with challenges. The following case studies highlight potential opportunities and risks:

### **Case Study 1: Nigeria**

Scholars and analysts disagree on which are the most salient drivers of violent extremism in northern Nigeria, which has most recently manifested itself in the Islamic State in West Africa, a group more commonly referred to as Boko Haram. While there is no consensus regarding the extent to which radical Islam, religious education (or lack thereof) and outside influence are drivers of violent extremism in northern Nigeria, the vast majority of analyses indicates that economic and political marginalization (real and perceived) among various communities in northern Nigeria, government corruption, dissatisfaction with provision of government services, and heavy-handed military responses by the government are all key drivers of violent extremism in northern Nigeria.<sup>17</sup>

Although it lacks the ideological and religious components of the conflict in northern Nigeria, violent extremism in Nigeria's Niger Delta region shares many of the same drivers. The "economy of conflict" in the oil-rich Niger Delta is complex, but economic marginalization and underdevelopment, corruption, and dissatisfaction with the way in which oil profits are allocated to the local community are widely cited as underlying drivers of violent extremism in the Niger Delta.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, in Nigeria's Middle Belt,

<sup>17</sup> Olojo, A. *Nigeria's Troubled North: Interrogating the Drivers of Public Support for Boko Haram*. The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (14 October 2013); Onuoha, Freedom C. *Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?* United States Institute of Peace: Special Report (June 2014); Alasia, Ibifuro Joy. *Demystifying Extremism in Nigeria: Understanding the Dynamics of Boko Haram*. African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (23 October 2015); Babalola, Oluwatosin. *Combating Violent Extremism and Insurgency in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Boko Haram Scourge*. The Center for Global and International Studies and The Foreign Military Studies Office (2013); and Walker, Andrew. *What Is Boko Haram?* United States Institute of Peace: Special Report (June 2012).

<sup>18</sup> Newsom, Chris. *Conflict in the Niger Delta: More Than a Local Affair*. United States Institute of Peace: Special Report (June 2011); Ikelegebe, Augustine. *The Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria*. Nordic Journal of African Studies 14(2): 208-234 (2005); Dambazau, Abdulrahman. *Nigeria and Her Security Challenges*. Harvard International Review (2014); and Sayne, Aaron. *What's Next for Security in the Niger Delta?* United States Institute of Peace: Special Report (May 2013).





where thousands have died amid a cycle of violence between Christian and Muslim communities as well as farmers and pastoralists in recent years, state and local government policies that discriminate against certain groups over others, as well as endemic corruption, have exacerbated tensions between communities struggling to cope with poverty, unemployment and the acute effects of climate change, thus fuelling ethnic and sectarian violence.<sup>19</sup>

Detected Nigerian arrivals at European border-crossings along the “Central Mediterranean route” has increased from 449 in 2012 to nearly 40,000 in 2016. The 37,554 Nigerians detected in 2016 comprised 21% of all detected irregular arrivals to Europe via this route, the most of any nationality, and represented a 71% increase in Nigerian arrivals from the year before.<sup>20</sup> The drivers of migration out of Nigeria are multifaceted. The conflict in northern Nigeria stemming from the on-going Boko Haram insurgency has displaced over 2 million Nigerians, close to 200,000 of whom have fled to neighbouring Niger, Cameroon and Chad. Yet forced displacement due to violence is only one driver of migration from Nigeria, and only affects a portion of those who leave the country every year. A perceived lack of economic opportunities throughout the country is widely cited as a driver of migration for Nigerians who seek employment and educational opportunities within Africa as well as in Europe, with irregular migration to Europe via the Mediterranean emerging as a key transit route for tens of thousands of Nigerians in recent years.<sup>21</sup>

As noted above, existing research indicates that political and economic marginalization stemming from and exacerbated by governance failures are drivers of violent extremism in northern Nigeria, the Niger Delta, and the Middle Belt, which indicates that while CVE programming should be tailored to each particular circumstance, questions of good governance are at the heart of violent extremism throughout Nigeria. Outside of forced displacement, available research suggests that acute inequality and perceived lack of socio-economic opportunities within Nigeria, and better opportunities abroad, both within Africa and further afield in Europe, are one of the key drivers of migration from Nigeria.

The most salient overlapping driver of both violent extremism and migration in Nigeria, therefore, is a perceived government failure to provide basic services and a perceived lack of economic opportunities. As a result, programmes that focus on good governance, service delivery, and fighting corruption, rather than programming with a narrow focus on expanding livelihood opportunities and job creation, would have the dual effect of engaging two of the most salient drivers of both violent extremism and migration in Nigeria. At the same time, EU policymakers should be aware that economic development in and of itself is not likely to reduce migrant flows out of Nigeria, as most research

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<sup>19</sup> Human Rights Watch. *New Wave of Violence Leaves 200 Dead*. 27 January 2011; United States Institute of Peace. *Economics and Conflict: Measuring the Costs of Conflict in the Middle Belt States, Nigeria*. Insight Letter (Spring 2015); and The Economist. *No end in sight to violence in Nigeria's Middle Belt*. (5 April 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Frontex. *Risk Analysis for 2017* (February 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Isiugo-Abanihe, Uche C. and International Organization for Migration Nigeria. *Migration in Nigeria: A Country Profile 2014*. IOM (2016); Mberu, Blessing U. and Pongou, Roland. *Nigeria: Multiple Forms of Mobility in Africa's Demographic Giant*. Migration Information Source (June 30, 2010).



indicates that emigration from low-income countries increases with economic development, and only decreases once a country reaches upper-middle income levels.<sup>22</sup>

## Case Study 2: Iraq

Existing literature on violent extremism in Iraq indicates that although a range of variables, such as sectarianism and political interests – both foreign and domestic - are important components of the on-going conflict, perceived marginalization and poor governance are the most identifiable drivers of violent extremism among the Iraqi population. A recent report by Mercy Corps based on three years of public polling, for example, concluded that injustice (perceived or real) stemming from poor governance is the key driver of violent extremism in Iraq, and that levels of violence decrease when marginalized groups begin to believe that the government is going to be more responsive and fair.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the emergence in Iraq of what eventually became the Islamic State (ISIS), after the military defeat of its precursor Al-Qaeda in Iraq, is largely attributed to a failure by the Iraqi government and the international community to address Arab Sunni perceptions of political and socio-economic marginalization relative to other ethnic groups.<sup>24</sup>

Existing scholarship suggests that the drivers of migration from Iraq are less clearly discernible than the drivers of violent extremism. Like Nigeria, forced displacement as a direct result of conflict in certain areas of the country accounts for a certain amount of external migration flows into neighbouring countries and various countries in the Middle East. Yet there is relatively little information available about the drivers of migration from Iraq into Europe, or secondary migration among Iraqis displaced in the Middle East who then migrate to Europe. Similarly, it is unclear the extent to which the staggering increase in irregular Iraqi arrivals in Europe in 2015 (90,130 in 2015 compared to only 382 in 2014) was a result of Iraqis being “pulled” by the emergence of smuggling networks that developed around Syrian demand for smuggling services, rather than drivers in Iraq.<sup>25</sup> A February 2016 study by the International Organization for Migration, in a non-representative sample of 379 Iraqis emigrating from Iraq to Europe, found that 80% of those interviewed cited “no hope for future” as their primary reason for migrating, with only 10% citing “general violence” as the main push factor.<sup>26</sup> The results indicate that the key driver of migration from Iraq to Europe is less attributable to violence and conflict, than it is to a belief that socio-economic prospects are bleak and unlikely to improve.

Although more systematic research would need to be carried out, the literature on drivers of violent extremism and drivers of migration referenced above suggests that

<sup>22</sup> Clemens, Michael. *Does Development Reduce Migration?* CGD Working Paper 359. Washington DC: Center for Global Development (2014).

<sup>23</sup> Proctor, K and Tesfaye, B. *Investing in Iraq's Peace: How Good Governance Can Diminish Support for Violent Extremism*. Mercy Corps (December 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Berge, Wietse van den. *Countering Violent Extremism in the Kurdistan Region in Iraq*. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (May 10, 2016); Boghani, Priyanka. *In Their Own Words: Sunnis on Their Treatment in Maliki's Iraq*. Frontline (28 October 2014) and al-Qarawee, Harith. *The Rise of Sunni Identity in Iraq*. The National Interest (5 April 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Tinti and Reitano, “Smuggler, Saviour” op.cit.

<sup>26</sup> International Organization for Migration Iraq Mission. *Migration flows from Iraq to Europe*. Displacement Tracking Matrix (2016)



good governance is again at the heart of many people's decision to join or support violent extremist groups, as well as their decision to leave Iraq in search of socio-economic opportunities abroad. Therefore, programming that directly addresses inclusive governance and better representation in government institutions could have the dual impact of engaging both the drivers of migration and violent extremism.

It should be noted, however, that engaging perceptions of political and economic marginalization is by no means a straightforward process. It requires programming uniquely designed for each individual community that is being targeted. Perceptions of what good governance would look like and what people expect from their government can vary widely depending on the community. Whereas members of one community might wish the state were more present in their everyday lives, others might wish for less interaction with state officials. A "bottom up" approach to governance that includes local actors and civil society organizations is essential, and should be pursued in place of devoting resources to strengthening and propping up formal institutions that function at national, regional, or even provincial level, but may lack legitimacy. As the aforementioned Mercy Corps report concludes, developing a stronger cooperative relationship between civil society and government, improving the capacity of local actors to play a role in good governance, and setting up mechanisms for local feedback are essential.<sup>27</sup>

### **Case Study 3: Afghanistan**

In Afghanistan, the drivers of violent extremism identified by recent scholarship and policy analyses conclude that the most salient drivers of violent extremism are grievances that stem from frustrations over physical insecurity, government corruption, poverty and growing income inequality.<sup>28</sup> Although recent studies indicate that violent extremist ideologies are widely unpopular among the majority of Afghans, these ideologies are the key to translating existing grievances into radicalization.<sup>29</sup> That said, the process from grievances to recruitment to radicalization is rarely a linear one.<sup>30</sup> One recent study, for example, found that marginalization and "bad governance" were the most salient push factors of violent extremism, with "social capital" grounded in the ability to increase social status through obtaining material things, as a key "pull factor."<sup>31</sup>

The key factors driving migration from Afghanistan is conflict and insecurity, though both drivers are "interlinked and inseparable" from economic factors that push Afghans

<sup>27</sup> Proctor, K and Tesfaye, B. *Investing in Iraq's Peace: How Good Governance Can Diminish Support for Violent Extremism*. Mercy Corps (December 2015).

<sup>28</sup> Porges, Maris L. *Radicalization Processes in Afghanistan*. CTC Sentinel (18 January 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Idrees, Muhammad. *Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Central Asia and Afghanistan*. Central Asia Policy Briefs #41. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and OSCE Academy (September 2016); and Porges, Maris L. *Radicalization Processes in Afghanistan*. CTC Sentinel (18 January 2012).

<sup>30</sup> Fazli, Reza; Johnson, Casey and Cooke, Peyton. *Understanding and Countering Violent Extremism in Afghanistan*. United States Institutes of Peace: Special Report (2015).

<sup>31</sup> Fazli, Reza; Johnson, Casey and Cooke, Peyton. *Understanding and Countering Violent Extremism in Afghanistan*. United States Institutes of Peace: Special Report (2015).



to migrate both internally and externally.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, distinctions between economic migrants and refugees in the Afghan context are increasingly hard to define,<sup>33</sup> and existing literature often does not distinguish between the two when discussing drivers of migration from Afghanistan.<sup>34</sup>

While insecurity and a range of socio-economic factors drive Afghans to migrate in general, there are certain push and pull factors that have been identified among Afghans who seek to migrate to Europe in particular. Afghans who choose to migrate to Europe, most often irregularly due to a lack of legal avenues, are primarily motivated by a lack of economic and social opportunities in neighbouring countries within the region, the unpredictability that comes with “boom and bust” cycles of international aid and donors, and mistreatment by government authorities and local populations in Pakistan, Iran, Gulf States, India and Turkey.<sup>35</sup> Within the context of decades of forced displacement and migration and cyclical violence, near universal access to information technology that allows Afghan migrants to communicate with each other globally, particularly with members of the established Afghan diaspora, has not only increased aspirations to migrate to Europe, but made it more feasible for a greater number of Afghans.

In the Afghan context, migration has long been used as part of a resilience strategy for those affected by decades of war and cyclical conflict.<sup>36</sup> Migration is a key coping strategy for Afghans, an estimated 76% of whom have experienced displacement in their lifetime.<sup>37</sup> Yet unlike Iraq, the presence of overlapping drivers of violent and extremism and migration does not necessarily translate to clear opportunities for incorporating CVE programming into efforts to curb migration. In fact, existing literature suggests that leveraging migration as a means for development and peace-building would be a more effective approach to addressing the issue of violent extremism.<sup>38</sup> As a result, European policymakers would do well to consider in what ways they can encourage policies that engage the Afghan diaspora and allow for Afghans to migrate cyclically, plugging into economic hubs in the region and finding various legal and formal avenues for generating income through migration.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Lopez-Lucia, Elisa. *Migration and Conflict in Afghanistan*. GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1243. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham (2015).

<sup>33</sup> Amiri, Rahmatullah. *Continuing conflict, continuing displacement in southern Afghanistan*. Forced Migration Review Issue 46 (May 2014).

<sup>34</sup> Lopez-Lucia, Elisa. *Migration and Conflict in Afghanistan*. GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1243. Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham (2015).

<sup>35</sup> Hakimi, Hameed. *Understanding the Drivers of Migration to Europe: Lessons from Afghanistan for the Current Refugee Crisis*. Vision Europe Summit (October 26, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Hakimi, Hameed. *Understanding the Drivers of Migration to Europe: Lessons from Afghanistan for the Current Refugee Crisis*. Vision Europe Summit (October 26, 2016).

<sup>37</sup> Maastricht Graduate School. *Complexities and Challenges in Afghan Migration Policy and Research Event*. IS Academy Policy Brief No. 14 (2013).

<sup>38</sup> Agah, Asif. *Migration-Development Nexus in the Post-Conflict Setting: Some Evidence from Afghanistan*. GSID-Nagoya (2014).

<sup>39</sup> Maastricht Graduate School. *Complexities and Challenges in Afghan Migration Policy and Research Event*. IS Academy Policy Brief No. 14 (2013).



### **Section III: Migrants and migration as a means to counter violent extremism and radicalization**

At present, there is no scholarly consensus on the drivers of violent extremism, nor is there qualitative or conclusive evidence regarding what conditions or variables cause individuals to be radicalized or resort to violent extremism.<sup>40</sup> As a result, the evidence base that migrants and migration are or could be a means to counter violent extremism is limited, the research that does exist indicates that some hypotheses however warrant further exploration.

There is some evidence, for example, that migrants and migration do play a role in addressing some of the underlying drivers of violent extremism. Migrants and migration are a mechanism for promoting economic development through the remittances which they return. While the overall development benefit accrued for a country through remittances has been widely debated, there is little controversy that on an individual family level, remittances play an important income smoothing and resilience role. This could serve to reduce the catalytic factors which prompt radicalisation, but there has been no systematic study upon which to conclude this.

Similarly, migrants, with their experience living in contexts outside those in which violent extremism and radicalization may be incubating, can represent authentic voices that share a lived experience that counters the narratives and propaganda espoused by violent extremists.<sup>41</sup> There has been no study that the authors of this paper could identify that has specifically looked at the likelihood that those migrants either voluntarily or forcibly returned may contribute to rising violent extremism in their source countries. In fact, examinations of the experiences of returnees is altogether understudied.<sup>42</sup> A 2003 study observed that “the way returnees perceive ‘home’ and the way they define their identity influences their reintegration process.”<sup>43</sup> There is an assumed difference between voluntary and involuntary returnees, where the latter is assumed to have a more antagonistic attitude towards their home state, thereby presumably increasing the likelihood that they may feel alienated, or be drawn to deviant behaviour (including criminality) or to insurgent groups. For voluntary returnees, those who herald from populations with a high degree of transnational mobility, the concept of ‘home’ may have little value, and their reintegration process be relatively superficial. For others, even when they are keen to return home, may feel a sense of estrangement or challenges of re-rooting themselves back into their communities due to the diversity of their experiences in transit or within Europe.<sup>44</sup> Whether this makes them more susceptible to radicalisation is a question as yet

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<sup>40</sup> Modirzadeh, Naz. *If It's Broke, Don't Make it Worse: A Critique the U.N. Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*. (January 23, 2016).

<sup>41</sup> Koser, Khalid. *How migration can help fight violent extremism*. World Economic Forum (February 18, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> This is not due to lack of interest, but more to the technical challenges of undertaking sustained longitudinal research with the returned population once it has been nominally ‘integrated’ into the source community under the purview of a sovereign state.

<sup>43</sup> Tania Ghanem, “When Forced Migrants Return ‘Home’: the psychological difficulties returnees encounter in the reintegration process”, Refugee Studies Centre, Working Paper No. 16, University of Oxford, October 2013

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



unexplored in any systematic way, but presumably would be highly unique to each individual situation.

Migrants can play a role in undermining some of the drivers of violent extremism highlighted above by including socio-economic inequality by helping certain communities mitigate the negative impact of existing inequalities, institutional discrimination, and marginalization that can lead to violent extremism.<sup>45</sup> However, one can conclude that just as there are contexts in which violent extremism is a push factor for migration, migration is also a potentially a mitigating force against drivers of violent extremism. This hypothesis would need to be further examined, and it would be equally necessary to consider the extent to which negative experiences as a migrant might serve as driver of violent extremism and radicalization in source and destination countries. Furthermore, the extent to which migrants who are displaced by violent extremism are in turn susceptible to being radicalised, particularly in cases of protracted displacement, warrants further investigation. Governments that host large populations of refugees displaced by conflict, as is the case in Pakistan regarding Afghan refugees and Kenya regarding Somali refugees, often portray refugee populations as a security risk. Limited research indicates that those who are displaced are susceptible to violent extremism in circumstances where education and employment opportunities are poor and freedom of movement is limited,<sup>46</sup> and violent extremist groups have sought to recruit refugees and displaced persons into their ranks, but there is a paucity of information regarding the extent to which displaced or returned populations are particularly vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremism.

#### **Section IV: Implications for EU Programming / Recommendations**

The three cases of Nigeria, Iraq, and Afghanistan underscore the extent to which any attempt to incorporate CVE programming into efforts that seek to address the “root causes” of migration, and vice versa, risk operating under overly simplistic theories regarding both violent extremism and migration. Furthermore, the relationship between violent extremism and migration in all three contexts are ones in which a poorly designed policy intervention premised on a misdiagnosis of either phenomena risks exacerbating one driver even if it ameliorates the other. The risk of such an outcome is particularly acute in which efforts to curb migration might deprive communities of an opportunity to mitigate the dangers of violent extremism through migration. Efforts to stem migration could therefore have the adverse effect of making certain communities more susceptible to violent extremism and its consequences.

The drivers of violent extremism and radicalization are case-specific and not always well understood, nor are the drivers and “root causes” of migration, which means understanding both within case-specific contexts is essential. In particular, the need to distinguish between drivers of forced displacement and refugee movement as opposed to socio-economic migration is required, as is a growing acknowledgement that the

<sup>45</sup> Koser, Khalid. *Migration as a solution to violent extremism*. The World Bank (December 17, 2015).

<sup>46</sup> Koser, Khalid and Cunningham, Amy E. *Migration and Violent Extremism in Contemporary Europe*. World Bank (3 March 2016).



categories of “asylum seeker” versus “economic migrant” and “conflict” versus “post-conflict” are increasingly hard to delineate. Governance and service delivery failures, inequality, marginalization and lack of ‘a future’ that offers opportunities for accrual of social capital and advancement, however, are key threads which require a sharper focus, greater research and targeted programming. One such area would include understanding and addressing the radicalisation effects on receiving countries, and how CVE initiatives could be mainstreamed into asylum seeker reception, processing and subsequent refugee integration (or return) initiatives.

In determining whether there is an opportunity to integrate CVE programming into migration policy, it is essential that policymakers differentiate between efforts to stop forced displacement and end refugee producing situations, from efforts in which European policymakers are trying to stem migration from source countries and discourage migration from said countries to Europe.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that serious questions remain regarding the efficacy of programmes to counter violent extremism and how to evaluate them, as well as the effectiveness of aid and development programmes designed to address “root causes” of migration. One of the great risks of such programming is that while a lack of measurable results might be frustrating for policymakers, efforts to counter violent extremism and curb migration through aid and development may even prove counterproductive. In certain contexts, there may be opportunities for the EU to incorporate CVE into its migration policies, and vice versa, but policymakers should proceed with caution given the limited evidence base regarding violent extremism as a push factor for migration and displacement, and the efficacy of CVE programmes.

## **Recommendations**

1. Move away from the view that migration is something that can be reduced through “preventive” measures like poverty alleviation and economic development. Migration is an important development strategy for many individuals, driven by a range of social, economic and cultural factors, for which outside assistance cannot be a mere substitute.
2. It would be more effective to find ways in which the EU could leverage migrants and migration to counter violent extremism: here the role of diaspora groups in conflict resolution, in political parties, in supporting local economic development (through investments in education or infrastructure, for example) or in providing humanitarian relief, should be monitored carefully. Remittance flows increasingly far outweigh the scale of ODA, and as such are an important dynamic to understand within the context of both better migration management and addressing the root causes of violent extremism. However, it should be noted that efforts to improve or amplify the efficiency of remittances may well result in higher rates of migration as they will result in greater disposable income and a higher return on investment for the migrant.
3. In cases where it does appear that the drivers of violent extremism and the drivers of migration overlap, think beyond platitudes of “livelihood



opportunities” and “job creation” and consider other necessities such as basic service provision, educational opportunities, most importantly “good governance” as defined by local communities. All of the above are development outcomes that can mitigate violent extremism and make communities more resilient to extremist ideologies. In the case of service delivery, however, who delivers those services is also of relevance – effectively improving government service delivery in previously marginalised communities may ameliorate the perception of inequality or isolation, whereas delivery through external service providers may enhance it, as well as the perception that there is better to be had overseas.

4. Consider that if migration is an important means for communities to mitigate the impact of violent extremism, the EU could pursue policies that encourage an array of legal migration options for migrants from communities at risk of radicalisation in order to increase community resilience. Possible options include developing robust seasonal labour migration schemes to and from the EU; support for inter-regional migration regimes that allow for migrants to plug into economies in their own region, and providing incentives and support to countries that host refugees that encourage integration of refugee populations.
5. In a given context, policymakers need to clearly define the “problem” they are trying to solve. A policy intervention that seeks to engage the drivers of forced displacement is different from one that seeks to stem broader mixed migration to Europe. The former is a humanitarian endeavour, and there might be clearly identifiable opportunities to incorporate CVE programming into migration policies; the latter is a calculated effort that seeks to use humanitarian aid and development cooperation for political ends, regardless of the aspirations or needs of people in the source countries.
6. The issues, and potential radicalisation risks, of migrant populations forcibly returned lacks any study, which reduces the possibility that return and reintegration could be made CVE sensitive. The limited information on returnee experiences suggests that (while each case is, of course, unique), much depends on the expectations and self-identity of the specific migrant. A greater understanding of these dynamics might allow for CVE approaches to be applied during the return and reintegration process. A common-sense conclusion is that returns in all cases should be undertaken in such a way as to maximise the dignity and ensure the rights of the returnee. Reintegration efforts to countries or regions with existing extremist elements, should provide long-term support both to returnees and their host communities, including psycho-social support and monitoring.





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