

The R2COM project: some considerations for the future of CSOS IN P/CVE

Luisa Ravagnani | Nicolò Ricci Bitti | Margarida Damas

OPEN ACCESS

Double blind peer review

How to cite this article: Ravagnani, L., Ricci Bitti, N., & Damas, M. (2025). The R2COM project: some considerations for the future of CSOS IN P/CVE. *Rassegna Italiana di Criminologia*, XIX, 1, 005-014 <https://doi.org/10.7347/RIC-012025-p005>

Corresponding Author: Luisa Ravagnani, email: luisa.ravagnani@unibs.it

Copyright: © 2025 Author(s). This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Pensa Multimedia and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. *Rassegna Italiana di Criminologia* is the official journal of Italian Society of Criminology.

© The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest. This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors

Received: 15.10.2024

Accepted: 02.01.2025

Published: 31.03.2025

Pensa MultiMedia

ISSN 1121-1717 (print)

ISSN 2240-8053 (on line)

[doi10.7347/RIC-012025-p005](https://doi.org/10.7347/RIC-012025-p005)

Abstract

The rise of violent extremism represents a significant challenge to global peace and security. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) play a pivotal role in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE): by addressing the root causes, supporting exiting extremist individuals, fostering community projects and search for an inclusive dialogue, their role is undoubtedly an asset for international, regional and inter-institutional strategies. Among these frameworks, the R2COM-Radicalisation and Violent Extremism Prevention in the Community- project, an important EU initiative financed by Erasmus+ Programme, KA2-Cooperation Partnerships in Adult Education, has emerged as a central hub for enhancing the capabilities of NGOs in the reintegration of violent extremism terrorist offenders (VETO) and in P/CVE activities. This paper examines the multifaceted role of CSOs and NGOs in P/CVE, focusing on their contributions to community engagement, education, and policy advocacy. It draws on recent academic literature to highlight the effectiveness and challenges of CSOs' involvement in P/CVE efforts, their still underestimated role, and the differences in approaches throughout Europe.

Keywords: Civil Society Organizations, Non-Governmental Organizations, preventing and countering radicalization, resocialization, disengagement

The R2COM project: some considerations for the future of CSOS IN P/CVE

Introduction

The evolving threat of violent extremism has necessitated the development of innovative frameworks, plans, and strategies for Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism. The experiences that have followed one another over time have made the importance of the active participation of the community in prevention and contrast projects increasingly visible, making it essential to reflect on the role that civil organizations must assume, the levels of collaboration to be put in place with State actors, the economic resources to be allocated to the purpose and the evaluation of the proposed approaches.

In an attempt to provide valuable point of view for the above-mentioned topics, the R2COM – Radicalization and Violent Extremism Prevention in the Community clarifies that *«The [project] will pursue this [prevention] by improving the competencies of NGOs' professionals in the area with sustainable, tailor-made, and needs-oriented training programs. Hence, R2COM intends to improve the management of individuals prone to radicalization by increasing the success of NGOs' interventions. It will also promote co-operation and the establishment of dynamic synergies amongst NGOs in the EU and beyond»* (<https://www.r2com-project.eu/>).

Due to this direct reference to civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations, however, the first point arising is related to the field of definitional issues and to the explanation of what it is meant by the recall to these legal entities.

Considering the existence of numerous and divergent definitions, it seems appropriate to resort to widely shared fonts referable, first of all, to the European Commission's Communication of September 2012 *“the EU considers CSOs to include non-State, not-for-profit structures, non-partisan and non-violent, through which people organize to pursue shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, social or economic”* (COM, 2012).

These kinds of organizations are usually built around a citizen's group work and they *“act as intermediaries between the public and the state, advocating for the interests and needs of citizens”* (Edwards, 2013).

In addition, the Institute for the Strategic Dialogue (2010) identifies CSOs as a system of voluntary civic and social organizations and institutions that form the basis of a functioning society as opposed to the structures of the State or of the private and economic sector (Ravagnani, 2022). Consequentially, CSOs involve a large group of people who shares values, targets and communities as any other kind of organization involved in the public life (OSCE, 2007).

Similarly, UNESCO (2017) offers a clear definition of an NGO as a *“non-profit, voluntary citizens' group that is organized on a local, national, or international level to address issues in support of the public good. NGOs perform a variety of services and humanitarian functions, bring citizens' concerns to Governments, advocate and monitor policies, and encourage political participation through provision of information”*.

In most of the cases, they are *“private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development. They are distinguished by their non-governmental status, which means they operate independently of direct governmental control, although they may receive government funding”* (Vakil, 1997).

Since that counter (violent) extremism has become perceived as one of the main goals of international and European strategies, a greater awareness is required to build new and more efficient approaches in this field, involving a large number of professionals. In this process, CSOs and NGOs' role(s) was widely recognized as crucial in addressing the root causes and mitigating the spread of extremist ideologies. As Prislanić, Černigoj and Lobnikar (2018) suggest, the involvement of various practitioners, namely from the local setting and the civil society, could help the essential understanding of the involved community's social and cultural characteristics, fostering prevention strategies of a greater range.

Nevertheless, even well directly involved in the main understanding of society strata, engaging many professional workers and academics, still *«there is no uniformity in the way in which this part of society should be involved in P/CVE»* (Ravagnani, 2022).

Due to that, an emerging question arises: are nowadays CSOs and NGOs still to be considered pivotal for P/CVE strategies and actions?

To better start the analysis, it is required to understand that, for instance, as Dinham and Lowndes (2008) claim, every P/CVE strategy should integrate contributions from three distinct sectors: **a) public Sector:** this includes entities such as local councils, police forces, social care agencies, and health services, which are essential in providing a coordinated response to extremism; **b) business Sector:** local businesses and private providers of urban services also play a crucial role, offering resources and opportunities that can help mitigate the factors leading to radicalization; **c) community Sector:** comprising non-profit organizations, service providers, and citizens' groups, this sector is particularly vital. It not only helps to prevent social polarization and violence but also plays a key role in identi-

fying and addressing potentially violent or dangerous behaviors before they escalate (ENoD, 2014).

A special consideration needs to be done for the community sector, that is indispensable in P/CVE efforts due to its grassroots connections and ability to engage directly with individuals and communities. This sector, by working closely with public and private sectors, community organizations contribute to a more holistic approach, ensuring that the strategies deployed are comprehensive and effective in countering and preventing the multifaceted nature of radicalization.

Moreover, the community sector's role in early detection is critical, as these organizations often serve as the first point of contact for vulnerable and at-risk individuals, supporting and redirecting them from potentially harmful paths. Not to be forgotten, these organizations are very careful in the work to protect and safeguard human rights, a central aspect to deal with when working on the field and increasing their specific level of trust and credibility (Ravagnani, 2022).

The analysis of documents useful to define the role of NGOs and CSOs in P/CVE started with an online research conducted through key words (in English) on different research engines (general and academic) and related to the period 2000-2021 (Ravagnani, 2022).

The total number of considered documents is of 274 but only 168 have been considered pertinent. The analysis of the selected papers considers three variables:

- 1) The type of publication (academic, informative, theoretical, empirical...)
- 2) The different approach in discussing the role of NGOs and CSO (analytical, supportive, critical...)
- 3) The existence of strategies for the monitoring of the proposed outcomes in terms of resocialization and reintegration of former radicalized person (presence of follow up protocols, peer to peer evaluations, verification of the obtained outcomes in the long period).

35 papers have been analyzed in-depth in order to define the state of the art with regard at the role of NGOs and CSOs in P/CVE. The first part of the in-depth analysis explains which types of documents have been considered and offers a proposal of quadripartition based on the content.

The second part, organized in five fundamental questions, aims at facilitating the definition of strategic elements connected to the role of NGOs and CSO in P/CVE.

The most part of the available information on the role of CSO and NGOs in PCVE are deducible from a plethora of different documents that, for an easier understanding, can be organized in four different groups:

- 1) **Academic documents** (articles published on thematic journals, books or other kind of documents belonging to academia)
- 2) **Reports of National and International Organizations**

(reports or any other document that contains the official position of the organization itself, suggested guidelines and key recommendations)

- 3) **Documents written by NGOs/CSOs** (documents written for internal/external use, final or mid-term reports linked to specific PCVE projects, suggested guidelines and key recommendations)
- 4) **Other type of available grey literature, also coming from media** (journalistic insights, specialized press...)

According to the contents of the mentioned documents, it is possible to outline four different approaches that clearly describes the role of NGOs and CSOs in P/CVE and exit works from different perspectives.

- a) **Consideration of the complementary role that NGOs and CSOs play in regard of institutional strategies** - The 2006 United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the UN Security Council Resolution 2014/2178, (The Resolution urges the empowerment of all the relevant members of civil society in PCVE) as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encourage a multi-stakeholder collaboration at different levels, between state and non-state actors, to achieve peace, security and development. However, to achieve so, there must be a formal recognition of the role of NGOs and CSO through a State plan that integrates their activities, since without this formal recognition, there is the risk that these organizations can't be recognized as relevant actors in P/CVE strategies. Without the necessary legitimacy, CSOs can find themselves in the position to work in a risky situation or working in isolation from the mainstream PCVE discourse with the result of reducing the effectiveness of their approaches. Moreover, they often have to deal with financial problems deriving from difficulties in finding the necessary funds.
- a) **Presentation of general guidelines useful for NGOs and CSO that want/are involved in P/CVE and exit work.** This type of documents is meant to offer support to NGOs and CSO that start working (or already work) in the field of P/CVE (OSCE 2020). They normally are organized in general topics that can be relevant for a large number of different approaches, are supported by existing practices, can be based on the collaboration with State actors and ask for the engagement in a genuine partnership with civil society and drawing on expertise available within civil society and the community (OSCE, 2007).
- c) **Consideration of specific approaches that have been implemented by CSOs and NGOs when involved in P/CVE and exit strategies.** This kind of approach is quite common, as the RAN collection of inspiring practices (2019) shows. The implemented projects can develop mixed strategies, involving also the abovementioned approaches.
- d) **Consideration of the role of CSOs toward theories and empirical data.** This kind of approach start from

the theorization of the role of NGOs and CSOs in P/CVE, supporting the presented theories with existing empirical approaches (Aslam, 2021; WARA, 2020)

Difficulties and challenges

It is important to underline that CSOs and NGOs works are not as smooth as silk: in many cases, they can suffer or struggle to fulfill their goals due to two main dimensions: a) they work directly on the field, b) by their inner intrinsic difficulties.

As well known in literature, according to Ravagnani (2022) the discontinuity of the implemented actions, the scarcity of follow-up protocols, the lack of empirical data on the obtained outcome or shared professional standards, and the rare or non-sufficient references to the training of professionals, to the multi-agent approaches and the difficulties in identifying and sharing information are highlighted by far as some of the main challenges.

Moreover, it is not to be forgotten that gaining the trust of communities could be as difficult to realize as easy to say: in some contexts, they could be linked to political agendas (Eubank, 2021), pulling away a healthy relationship.

Plus, the seeking of adequate resources and capacity by limited funding and resources can determine the entire organizations actions sustaining P/CVE programs effectively (Papp et al., 2022).

Linked to this aspect, it is important to keep in mind that in the majority of the cases, CSOs and NGOs can be not entirely independent, due to the fact that they could be linked to state actors driven projects not institutional provided, usually involving some degree of state cooperation and approval.

Surely, the strong bondage with the specific environment lead CSOs and NGOs to be the best option to make emerging an open dialogue work environment: they also are *“mainly engaged in the protection of human rights (in general or with regard to specific vulnerable groups), thus being considered fundamental factors when dealing with P/CVE strategies, which increases their level of trust and credibility”* (Ravagnani, 2022).

It is for this reason of the importance of grassroots organizations in countering extremist narratives. By underlining the wide variety of approaches, it is confirmed the added value to manage the needs and the difficulties of this intervention field (RAN, 2022). In fact, in most of the cases, due to their structure and their purpose of existence, these organizations often have a deeper understanding of local dynamics.

This specific-capacity lead to tailor to measure the interventions to the specific community needs: through community-based programs, CSOs and similar organizations can create spaces for dialogue and understanding, which are essential for preventing radicalization (Barzegar, Powers and Karhili, 2016).

By equipping individuals with the knowledge to critically assess extremist messages and most of all, countering the extremist effects directly on the ground during several phases of the radicalization processes, is well known that CSOs and NGOs contribute significantly to the prevention of violent extremism (Papp et al. 2022).

Even if with country driven differences (RAN, 2016; Molemkamp, 2018), their capacity also plays a vital role in advocating for policies and strategies that support P/CVE institutional efforts. For example, by engaging with policymakers and participating in policy dialogues with a bottom up dynamic, CSOs are manage to influence the development and implementation of effective counter-extremism strategies. This collaborative efforts between CSOs and state institutions can lead to more comprehensive and coordinated approaches to better evolve the P/CVE (Barzegar, Powers and Karhili, 2016).

Hard and soft approaches

When thinking about the role played by CSOs and NGOs in P/CVE strategies, it is important to highlight two contrasting perspectives found in the literature. The first is the “hard security approach”, which emphasizes surveillance, policing, and the enforcement of specialized anti-terror laws (Spalek, Imtoul, 2007). In contrast, the “soft security approach” focuses on understanding the social, cultural, and political factors that drive violence, as well as the contexts and dynamics that allow extremist ideas to emerge, grow, and persist (Stern, 2009).

The first one typically excludes the involvement of CSOs and NGOs, as its primary focus is on the surveillance and repression of potential radicalization or violent extremism risks. This approach relies heavily on repressive measures, which are implemented exclusively by security agencies, excluding the intervention by CSOs and NGOs (Pickering, McCulloch and Wright-Neville, 2008; Prislán, ernigoj and Lobnikar, 2018). However, this method has been shown to be ineffective and, at times, even counterproductive. Consequently, the main approach shifted to a less aggressive and prevention-oriented core strategies (De Goede and Simon, 2013).

In contrast, the “soft security approach” offers a different perspective, emphasizing inclusion, social integration, and social cohesion as key outcomes. Within this framework, NGOs and CSOs work alongside institutional actors to achieve these goals, presenting a compelling alternative to the hard security approach (Hadji and Hassan, 2014; Halafoff, Lam and Bouma, 2019).

It is showed by Nye (2008) that engaging through soft power approaches means to do not involve coercion, but full fill the goals thank to the power of inner attraction and persuasion based on shared cultures and shared choices. Thanks to awareness campaigns and useful tolls, always by supporting all the society strata, soft power approaches can better reach goals and counter toxic narra-

tives and deal with propaganda (Berardinelli and Guglielminetti, 2018).

The "soft security approach" has emerged as the most widely adopted strategy in P/CVE efforts, largely because state actors increasingly recognize the significant contributions that NGOs and CSOs can make. This approach emphasizes the importance of collaboration with these organizations, which are uniquely positioned to offer insights and interventions that complement and enhance the efforts of government agencies.

Moreover, CSOs play a crucial role in promoting the involvement of key societal groups, such as schools, families, and youth, in the prevention of radicalization (Ravagnani, 2022). These groups are essential to any comprehensive P/CVE strategy, yet they often fall outside the direct reach of state actors. CSOs and NGOs bridge this gap by facilitating programs and initiatives that engage these groups in meaningful ways. Linked to that, youth engagement is another correlated critical area where CSOs can make a significant impact.

In essence, the "soft security approach" relies heavily on the involvement of NGOs and CSOs to fill the gaps that state actors cannot always address effectively on their own. Their participation not only enhances the overall effectiveness of P/CVE strategies but also ensures that these strategies are more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and responsive to the needs of diverse communities.

Why them?

According to all the documents analyzed during the Ravagnani (2022) research, there are clear differences in the type and extent of their suggested involvement. The most widely supported reasons for considering NGOs and CSOs as key actors in P/CVE efforts include the following:

- 1) Facilitation of social inclusion and integration: CSOs and NGOs play a crucial role in integrating marginalized individuals into society (Choudhury, 2017; De Goede and Simon, 2013). Social exclusion is a significant push factor for radicalization and is intricately linked to various forms of inequality, such as those based on religion, gender, race, and poverty, all of which require targeted attention (Lister, 2000; Sajoo, 2016).
- 2) Direct and ongoing engagement with communities: these organizations maintain continuous and close contact with the communities they serve; their ability to dig into cultural and linguistic barriers and establish trustful relationships makes them uniquely effective in their roles (ENoD, 2014).
- 3) Credibility and experience: these organizations are often seen as credible and experienced entities, particularly in working with specific groups: they are well-positioned to identify and address the grievances that can make individuals more susceptible to radicalization (OSCE, 2018).

- 4) Influencing public opinion: CSOs can play a significant role in shaping public opinion on critical issues, guiding societal perspectives on fundamental topics.
- 5) Preventing polarization and violence: due to their informal, widespread, and permanent presence in local communities, these organizations are well-placed to prevent social polarization and violence, they can also intervene promptly in emerging conflicts and are capable of detecting early signs of radicalization within communities, thereby preventing its escalation (ENoD, 2014).
- 6) Collection of relevant information and offering alternative narratives: CSOs often have direct contact with local residents, allowing them to gather crucial information. They can also provide alternative narratives to radicalized individuals or those at risk of radicalization, especially when these individuals are hesitant to engage with state actors.

EU existing Good Practices

If research has shown that CSOs can have different roles and tasks within the P/CVE realm, mostly within "soft security" approaches, what does the EU have to say about it? And what good practices are there to build upon?

According to the most recent policy documents in the P/CVE field, namely the European Commission's *Strategic Orientations on a Coordinated EU Approach to Prevention of Radicalisation for 2024-2025*, local actors, which include NGOs and CSOs, are called in to work on the topic, mostly following a whole-of-society approach (European Commission, 2024). When doing so, NGOs and CSOs practitioners are mentioned, more clearly, within two EU thematic priorities, namely "Prevention of radicalisation in prisons and probation settings, post-release measures, rehabilitation, and reintegration" and "Local dimension, polarisation, and resilience building". In a nutshell, these invite Member States to adopt comprehensive approaches, focused, on the one hand, on maintaining a continuum of support, mostly following a criminal justice system intervention, thus inside prisons-through-the-gate-into-communities, but also to look at the local vulnerabilities and create tailored and bottom-up solutions. Consequently, a clear window of opportunity arises for NGOs and CSOs working at the local level, who are given some leeway to work within the three possible scopes of prevention, namely *i)* primary, *ii)* secondary, and *iii)* tertiary. (An example is given by Ravagnani, Romano, 2019). But, yet again, what does the EU signal as the best practices to develop to achieve this?

Looking firstly at how to promote reintegration and safer and more positive post-release adjustments, the EU draws a clear action plan, **by leveraging sustainable risk assessment and reintegration to promote a continuum of support**. For such, a holistic approach is recommended, combining vulnerability assessment with cognitive-behavioural approaches. When considering the local work to

build resilience, **policies and practices towards cooperation** are presented as the way forward, enabling better coordination at the local and national level, and building resilient and empowered communities. However, irrespective of the different focus and recommendations, common calls for action are easily traced, namely in what concerns developing tailored tools for assessment and case management, needs and practices-oriented capacitation efforts, and well-devised cooperation schemes.

As a result, and when mapping the EU landscape, several projects and practices arise, with different scopes, target groups, and focuses, even if only a few look at how to maintain a continuum of support in P/CVE through civil society. Further, and recognising how evaluation is a challenge in the P/CVE field, scanning for best practices, with open-ended results, is a demanding job, often without the best possible results. In fact, and as demonstrated by Costa, Liberado, Esgalhado, Cunha and Neves (2021), most P/CVE-focused programmes rely on an unstructured and primarily qualitative evaluation, especially so as outcomes, especially if not positive, can question the efforts developed and, the consequent investment these require.

Nevertheless, some clues can be found in the work developed by the Radicalisation Awareness Network, which summarised some promising and best practices. Amongst these, the RRAP- Radicalisation Risk Assessment in Prisons- Toolset, a battery of assessment tools that consider how radicalisation in prisons can be assessed and managed at different levels, namely macro, meso and micro, can be signalled, since its approach combines assessment with efficient training efforts. However, some good practices can also be signalled to ensure NGOs and CSOs involvement in Northern Europe, either in the Aarhus model¹ or within Exit institutions. As a result, and building upon European recommendations to mobilise previous best practices and already existing tools, new practices are to be developed, recognising the need to account for the local settings and the specific challenges faced if thinking about the post-release reality, accounting for the volatility, vulnerabilities, and challenges that describe the prison-community transition, straining transitioning individuals, their families and the overall community (Walkenhorst et al., 2018).

The R2COM experience

Now that a (small) number of general considerations have been made, it is time to properly come to the R2COM –

Radicalisation and Violent Extremism Prevention in the Community- project, making it possible to forge the main analysis. The R2COM project aims to prevent radicalisation in the post-release setting and within vulnerable groups, doing so via the enhancement of the critical role of NGOs.

Financed by Erasmus+ Programme, KA2-Cooperation Partnerships in Adult Education, the R2COM-Radicalisation and Violent Extremism Prevention in the Community- project, has emerged as a central hub for enhancing the capabilities of NGOs in the reintegration of violent extremism terrorist offenders (VETO) and in P/CVE activities.

R2COM boasts a wide geographical reach within its partnership network, spanning Southern Europe (including the Balkans), Eastern Europe, and Northern Europe, creating a truly comprehensive framework. The project is supported by 8 key partners and over 200 trainers worldwide, bringing a considerable amount of know-how on experience for this project (<https://www.r2com-project.eu/>). Additionally, many of the project's partners are also end-users, ensuring a more precise alignment with the needs and interests of NGO professionals. Due to this reason, the result of the project's objectives sounds more relevant and better suited to bridge theory and practice in the field of countering radicalization.

How? Through evidence-based strategies in equipping CSOs and NGOs professionals with the necessary skills and knowledge for reintegration project works and P/CVE efforts. Evidence-based practices refer to methodologies that are rooted in thorough research and validated by empirical data, demonstrating their effectiveness. This approach gains more and more reliability and consistency in the project outcomes, especially if applied for long-time processes, trying to demonstrate and provide true-based examples for EU institutions.

The emerging Transitioning Vulnerabilities to Radicalisation Assessment Tool (TV-RAT), the assessment tool developed by the R2COM project, for example, was created to be a large-scale guide tool for professionals in P/CVE. By answering civil society's needs, it helps to analyze *“different levels of vulnerabilities to radicalisation as well as areas for intervention, requiring an individualised and non-stigmatising assessment process, in which the transitioning individual is pivotal to its successful outcome”* (Damas and Afonso, 2023). For this reason, professionals equipped with evidence-based knowledge usually better use best practices, improving the success rate of interventions.

Moreover, the project has shown that CSOs and NGOs frequently operate in high-stakes environments where prompt and decisive actions are essential, especially in response to emerging radicalization threats.

Therefore, having access to a comprehensive repository of validated knowledge allows the professionals to implement strategies that are proven to be effective across different settings.

Training programs developed under the R2COM ini-

1 The Aarhus model is developed in the Aarhus municipality in Denmark, bringing together different front-line practitioners, working to mitigate discrimination and radicalisation, on the one hand by working directly with communities, and in the other, by working with vulnerable individuals, using risk, vulnerabilities and needs' evaluations to guide support, which also mobilises communities and families (Radicalisation Awareness Network, n.d.)

tiative were specifically designed: 1) to create a community, 2) to collect, and 3) impart, where necessary, evidence-based knowledge, highlighting the importance of ongoing learning and adaptability. These training modules cover a range of topics including, for example, the psychological and social dynamics of radicalization (Dornescu, 2019; Papp and Örell, 2021), the ethical and legal considerations in reintegration (Cherney, 2021), follow-up/aftercare provisions (Ravagnani, 2021), and proper answers to the needs of NGOs' professionals (Damas et al. 2023): in other words, "what works" and "what does not work" in the involvement of NGOs in Preventing and countering violent extremism.

By establishing a structured and validated wide range of frameworks for action, thanks to the great participation of different kind of organizations for structures and goals, the R2COM project ensures that CSOs and NGOs professionals are not only well-versed in current best practices but are also trained at modifying their approaches to align with the evolving dynamics of violent extremism, also thanking the wide range of covered topics.-

As Durnescu (2019) underlines, this holistic approach allows to align P/CVE activities with other community-based programs to better address radicalization's root causes, such as social exclusion, economic deprivation, and educational deficits.

Secondly, as one of the objectives, the EU project further underscores the importance of partnerships and collaborative efforts, and this is the reason why CSOs and NGOs are encouraged to work closely with local governments, law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, and other civil society organizations. It is important to remind that the entire R2COM project was driven by the experience itself managing to create community sense and good practical example to help the making of.

Even if well-consciousness of the difficulties mentioned above, such as the difficulties of sharing information and create a common ground for work on the field, these partnerships enable a more coordinated and comprehensive response to the challenges posed by violent extremism, allowing NGOs to draw upon a broader pool of resources and expertise. As Harris (2019) explain, the "*effective P/CVE strategies are built on the foundation of strong, multi-sectoral partnerships that bring together diverse perspectives and resources*".

Linked to these two goals, it is important to remind that another expected outcome of the R2COM project was prioritizing the development of an innovative and forward-looking knowledge and skill base for CSOs and NGOs professionals engaged in reintegration activities. This initiative acknowledges that the field of P/CVE is continually evolving, with new challenges and opportunities emerging regularly. Therefore, it is essential for NGOs to be equipped with cutting-edge knowledge and skills to maintain their effectiveness.

Another crucial element of this knowledge base is the emphasis on cultural competence and sensitivity. The R2COM project recognizes that effective P/CVE inter-

ventions must be culturally, socially, and religiously relevant to the target populations. This is the reason behind the training programs under R2COM that include modules on cross-cultural communication, conflict resolutions and facilitation programs, well knowing that culturally competent interventions can resonate efficiently in counter narratives of radicalization.

Lastly, the R2COM project places significant importance on the management of individuals vulnerable to radicalization, as well as those who are already radicalized, within community framework. This strategy is grounded in the understanding that successful reintegration and de-radicalization efforts require a comprehensive, community-based approach (Reis and Soaraes, 2018; Ravagnani, Örell, Shabani and Simões, 2024).

But how to do so? One of the central strategies promoted by the R2COM project, as already for many of the organizations involved, is the use of personalized interventions that cater to the specific needs of individuals vulnerable to radicalization. These interventions are informed by detailed assessments of each individual's psychological, social, and economic background. According to Papp and Örell. (2021), "instead of risk assessment, focus on risk and *needs* assessment and *management* in rehabilitation and reintegration work [...]: assess the offender's risks, as well as their needs and personal, social and educational resources", which has also been recognized by the EU Strategic Framework mentioned above.

Establishing trust is a central component to encourage people to disengage from ideologists and come to the reintegration programs, making central for the entire project the importance of building trust and rapport with vulnerable individuals (Khosrokhavar, 2017; Christensen, 2019). Thus, the involved professionals are trained to adopt a non-judgmental and empathetic approach, creating a safe space for open dialogue and self-reflection.

In addition to propose the common ground for the implementation of individualized interventions, the R2COM project advocates for community-based approaches in order to better prevent the radicalization processes. This usually involves engaging families, religious leaders, and community elders in P/CVE efforts, thereby creating a supportive environment that reinforces positive behaviors and discourages extremist ideologies, because it is well known that when community is engaged it helps to success in P/CVE programs and allure of extremist narratives (Damas et al.2023)

The project also addresses the complex challenges of reintegrating individuals who have already been radicalized, both in prison both outside: whenever prisoner or former, people have to navigate and cope with resettlement difficulties (Ravagnani, Romano, 2017) in a different world and an evolving identity (Damas, 2021). This process requires a multi-faceted approach that includes psychological counseling, vocational training, and community service.

In conclusion, is possible to say that due to the fact that CSOs and NGOs occupy a central role in the P/CVE

ecosystem, often serving as the primary interface between vulnerable populations and broader societal initiatives aimed at preventing and countering radicalization, the R2COM project has significantly contributed to refining and optimizing this role, thereby ensuring that NGOs can maximize their impact in P/CVE efforts.

For this reason, it is important to underline that the R2COM project highlights the critical role of advocacy and policy and institutional influence, at any specific case by case or regional level, in the optimized role of NGOs within P/CVE. This kind of organizations, thanks to their on-the-ground experience, are called to make the difference due to their uniquely position, so to advocate for policy changes that address the structural and systemic factors contributing to radicalization. Engaging in policy dialogues and influencing policy making processes allow the CSOs and NGOs to create an enabling environment for P/CVE specific local interventions (Institute for the Strategic Dialogue, 2010).

Conclusive considerations and future recommendations

The EU R2COM project represents a milestone in fostering and enhancing “the involvement of non-governmental organizations in preventing and countering violent extremism, especially in the follow-up/aftercare provision of newly released individuals” (<https://www.r2com-project.eu/>).

In fact, it is out of any doubts that by providing crucial insights and tools for enhancing the role of these kind of organizations in reintegration and P/CVE efforts had continued to prove that their role is now fundamental than ever.

Thus, by promoting evidence-based knowledge, optimizing CSOs and NGO roles, efforts and strategies, developing an innovative knowledge and skill base, and improving the handling of vulnerable and radicalized individuals, the R2COM project has contributed to a more effective and holistic approach.

As the nature of violent extremism continues to evolve, the lessons from the R2COM project will be instrumental in guiding future measures to prevent and counter radicalization. By empowering CSOs and NGOs professionals with the necessary knowledge, skills and tools, the project ensures that they continue to play a pivotal role in building resilient communities and fostering peace and security in society.

The experience of R2COM can lead to provide some advice for the future, such as, for example, the evolution of the core of the strategies. In these terms, policy improvement becomes a must: preventing and countering violent extremism efforts are likely to evolve with the integration of the best practices thanks to the regional connections of professionals and teams. Moreover, the international and regional collaboration need to be increased with cooperation between states and international organizations (as an expected outcome) in order to share

information and resources, improving the effectiveness of prevention strategies.

Also, the community involvement has to be carried on: by one side, the prevention of violent extremism will continue to be focused on involving local communities, including families, schools and non-governmental organizations, with a massive work on education and awareness, even with focused campaigns to raise consciousness of the dangers of radicalization and promote values of tolerance and inclusion; by the other side, implementing collaborations at an institutional level would help the policymakers to be better linked both at the community and the territory.

Finally, it is just a matter of time that important technological such as artificial intelligence and predictive analytics innovation will be fully integrated: these tools, always with the respect of human rights and necessary counter-effective measures could become important assistants. The main P/CVE will continue to need to adapt to new forms of extremism: strategies will need to be flexible and capable of quickly change in tactics and strategies.

In conclusion, the R2COM project and its network of CSOs professionals involved during several years must be thanked in making great steps forward and examples for the future in a difficult field of work.

References

- Anheier, H. K., & Salamon, L. M. (1999). *Global civil society: Dimensions of the nonprofit sector*. Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies.
- Aslam, M. M. (2021). The critical role of Civil Society Organizations (CSO) in combating terrorism. In *Civil Society Organizations Against Terrorism* (pp. 63-78). Routledge.
- Awan, I., & Zempi, I. (2016). The affinity between online and offline anti-Muslim hate crime: Dynamics and impacts. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 27, 1-8.
- Barzegar, A., Powers, S. & Karhili, N. (2016). *Civic approaches to confronting violent extremism: Sector recommendations and best practices*. Institute for Social Policy and Understanding.
- Berardinelli, D., & Guglielminetti, L. (2018). Preventing Violent Radicalisation: the Italian Case Paradox. In M. Tomita (Ed.), *Groups with special needs in community measures - the 7th edition. International Conference: Multidisciplinary perspectives in the quasi-coercive treatment of offenders*. (pp. 28-33). Timisoara: Filodiritto.
- Berger, J. M. (2018). *Extremism*. MIT Press.
- COM (2012). European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, 492 final, Brussels, 12.9.2012. <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0492:FIN:EN:PDF>
- Costa, V., Liberado, P., Esgalhado, G., Cunha, A. I., & das Neves, P. (2021). One size does not fit all: Exploring the characteristics of exit programmes in Europe. *Journal for Deradicalization*, (28), 1-38.
- Cherney, A. (2018). The Release and Community Supervision of Radicalised Offenders: Issues and Challenges that Can Influence Reintegration. *Terrorism and Political violence*, 33, 1, 119-137.

- Choudhury, T. (2017). Campaigning on campus: Student Islamic Societies and Counterterrorism. *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 40(12), 1004–1022. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2016.1253986>
- Christensen, T. W. (2019). Civil actors' role in deradicalisation and disengagement initiatives: When trust is essential. In S. J. Hansen & S. Lid (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Deradicalisation and Disengagement*. Routledge
- Damas, M. (2021). *Desafios da vida pós prisão: O estigma prisional e a readaptação à vida extra muros*. [Master Dissertation] ISCTE-IUL, Lisbon.
- Damas, M., & Afonso, S. (2023). Preventing radicalization through adequate assessment and support during reintegration. *Justice Trends*, Issue n.11. Preventing radicalisation through adequate assessment and support during reintegration - JUSTICE TRENDS Magazine (justice-trends.press)
- Damas, M., Afonso, S., Liberado, P., & Santons, C. (2023). *Assessing the risk of radicalisation and extremism in the community*. r2com_radicalisation_assessment_in_post-release_settings_desk_research_external_version.pdf (r2com-project.eu)
- De Goede, M., & Simon, S. (2013). Governing Future Radicals in Europe. *Antipode*, 45(2), 315–335. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8330.2012.01039.x>
- Dinham, A., & Lowndes, V. (2008). Religion, resources, and representation: Three narratives of faith engagement in British Urban governance. *Urban Affairs Review*, 43(6), 817–845. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087408314418>
- Durnescu, I. (2019). Towards a holistic approach to deradicalization. *Justice Trends*, Issue nr. 5.
- Edwards, M. (2013). *The Oxford Handbook of Civil Society*. Oxford University Press.
- Eubank, N. (2021). The role of NGOs in counter-terrorism: A review. *International Journal of Security Studies*, 12(3), 45–62.
- European Network of Deradicalisation (ENoD). (2014). *Final Report*. Berlin: Violence Prevention Network. <http://www.violence-prevention-network.de/projekte-mainmenu-37/edna>
- Foley, F. (2022). Counterterrorism and Human Rights. *Contemporary Terrorism Studies*, 434.
- Hadji, A., & Hassan, N. (2014). The role of CSOs in countering violent extremism (CVE): A case of actors in East African Region. *Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum (UMYDF)*.
- Halafoff, A., Lam, K., & Bouma, G. (2019). Worldviews education: cosmopolitan peacebuilding and preventing violent extremism. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 40(3), 381–395. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13617672.2019.1600113>
- Holmer, G. (2013). Countering Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilding Perspective. *Special Report 336*. Washington D. C.: United States Institute of Peace (USIP).
- Horgan, J. & Braddock, K. (2010). Rehabilitating the terrorists? Challenges in assessing the effectiveness of de-radicalization programs. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 22(2), 267–291.
- Institute for Strategic Dialogue. (2010). *The role of civil society in counter-radicalisation and de radicalisation: A working paper of the European policy planners' network on countering radicalisation and polarisation (PPN)*.
- Khosrokhavar, F. (2017). *Radicalization: Why some people choose the path of violence*. New Press, The.
- Lister, R. (2000). Strategies for social inclusion: promoting social cohesion or social justice? In P. Askonas, A. Stewart (Eds.), *Social Inclusion: Possibilities and tensions* (pp. 37–54). Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Molenkamp, M. (2018). *The role of family and social networks in the rehabilitation of (violent) extremist and terrorist offenders*. Ex post paper. ran_pp_role_family_social_networks_rehabilitation_extremist_terrorist_offenders_06-07_03_2018_en.pdf (europa.eu)
- OSCE (2007). *The Role of Civil Society in Preventing Terrorism*. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/3/26732.pdf>
- OSCE (2020). *A Whole-of-Society Approach to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism. A Guidebook for Central Asia*. Transnational Threats Department
- Papp, S., & Orell, R. (2021). *Returning to Extremism. An Overview on terrorist reoffending and current challenges*. RAN. RAN Practitioners.
- Papp, S. Z., Orell, R., Meredith K., Papatheodorou, K., Tadjbakhsh, S., & Bretch, H. (2022). *The role of civil society organisations in exit work*. Directorate-General for Migrants and Home Affairs. RAN.
- Pickering, S., McCulloch, J., & Wright-Neville, D. (2008). *Counter-terrorism policing: Community, cohesion and security*. New York: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-76874-8>
- Praxl-Tabuchi, F., Ipe, J., Rosand, E. (2022). *A Blueprint for Civil Society-Led Engagement in UN Counterterrorism and P/CVE Efforts*. Global Center on Cooperative Security.
- Prislan, K., Borovec, K., & Mraovic, I. C. (2019). The Role of Civil Society and Communities in Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation. *Policija I sigurnost*, 29(3/2020), 223–245.
- Prislan, K., Černigoj, A., & Lobnikar, B. (2018). Preventing Radicalisation in the Western Balkans: The Role of the Police Using a Multi-Stakeholder. *Revija Za Kriminologijo*, 69(4), 257–268.
- Reis, S., & Soares, M. (2018). Radicalization prevention in prisons and in the community. *Justice Trends*, Issue nr. 2.
- RAN (2016) *Exit Work in a multi-agency setting*. Ran_exit_work_multiagency_setting_milan_01112016_en.pdf (europa.eu)
- RAN. (2019) *Ran Collection of Approaching and Practices*. Ran_collection approaches_and_practices_en.pdf (europa.eu)
- RAN (2022). *RAN Study Visit to Paris on 'Effective management of the prison-exit continuum*. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/whats-new/publications/ran-study-visit-paris-effective-management-prison-exit-continuum-online-event-07-08-december-2021_en
- Ravagnani, L. (2021). *Rehabilitation work with convicted offenders outside of prison*. RAN. bcdcdac0-8e3c-4ed8-a62a-cd14c56363c5_en (europa.eu)
- Ravagnani, L. (2022). State of play: NGOs and CSOs' role in P/CVE within the criminal justice system. *Literature review*. RCOM. r2com_t1.1_sota_v1.3_finalversion.pdf (r2com-project.eu)
- Ravagnani, L., Orell, R., Shabani, V. B., & Simões, S. (2024). Local action, big impact: empowering civil society for evidence-based reintegration and radicalization prevention. *Justice Trends*, Issue n.12
- Ravagnani, L., & Romano, C.A. (2017). Il radicalismo in carcere: una ricerca empirica. *Rassegna Italiana di Criminologia*, XI, 4.
- Ravagnani, L. & Romano, C.A. (2019). P4HR: i diritti umani entrano nel trattamento penitenziario. *Rassegna Italiana di Criminologia*, XIII, 3.
- Sajoo, A. B. (2016). The fog of extremism: Governance, identity, and minstrels of exclusion. *Social Inclusion*, 4(2), 26–39. <https://doi.org/10.17645/si.v4i2.541>
- Spalek, B., & Imtoul, A. (2007). Muslim communities and counter-terror responses: Hard approaches to community engagement in the UK and Australia. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 27(2), 185–202.

- UNESCO. (2017). *What is an NGO?* United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, <https://www.un.org/en/civil-society/page/about-us>
- Stern, J. (2009). Mind over martyr: How to deradicalise Islamist extremism. *Foreign Affairs*, 89(1), 95-108.
- Walkenhorst, P., & Fehrmann, S. E. (2018). Jugendarrest, Jugendstrafvollzug und Jugenduntersuchungshaft: Grundlagen–Wirkungen–Perspektiven. *Das Gefängnis auf dem Prüfstand: Zustand und Zukunft des Strafvollzugs*, 265-311.
- Wara, Y. A. (2020). The Roles of Civil Society Organizations in Fighting Terrorism: A Comparative Analyses between Nigeria and Tunisia. *The Journal of International Lingual Social and Educational Sciences*, 6(2), 167-182.
- Warso, Z., Sczaniecki, M., Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, (2013). Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), *Stakeholders Acting Together on the Ethical Impact Assessment of Research and Innovation – SATORI*.
- Vakil, A. C. (1997). *Confronting the classification problem: Toward a taxonomy of NGOs*. *World Development*, 25(12), 2057-2070.