# Discussion Paper
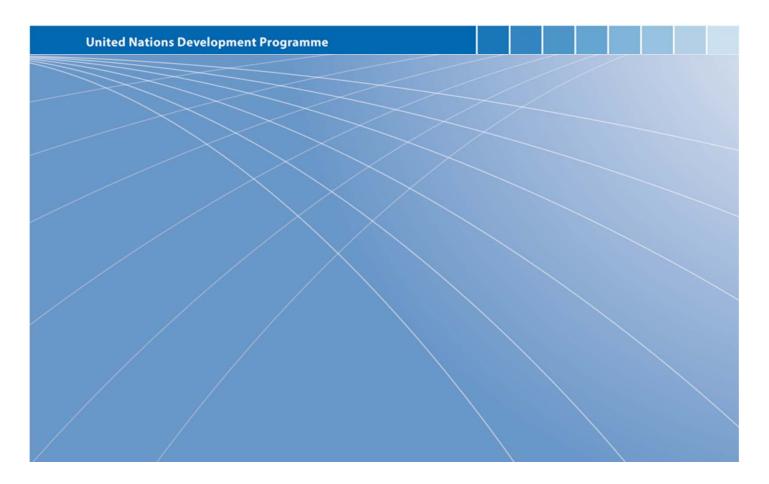
## Root Causes of Radicalization in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States

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# Executive Summary

The incidence of radicalization and violent extremism is of growing concern worldwide. In Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (ECIS) radicalization is increasingly seen as a threat to the peace and development of nations and communities. In order to preserve peace and increase development the creation of development-based programmes for countering radicalization and violent extremism is imperative. To create such programmes, it is necessary to first understand what the drivers or root causes of radicalization are, and then to establish practices that mitigate their effects. This paper looks at the roots of radicalization and other influencing factors of radicalization in the region to provide an initial assessment of the elements that should be included in counter radicalization programmes.

Radicalization is the process whereby individuals and groups move from mainstream beliefs to extreme ideologies. While radicalization may be a precondition for violent extremism, it does not imply that those who are radicalised are predetermined to becoming violent extremists. Rather the two exist on a continuum where radicalization presents only the potentiality for violent extremism.

Relative deprivation, weak state capacity, and denial of basic needs are the three root causes of radicalization looked at in this paper. Often seen as the main cause of radicalization, relative deprivation is the tension that develops from the difference between what people think should happen and what does happen to them. While weak state capacity creates an unstable environment that restricts upward mobility, personal safety, and general security, potentially leading people to seek out groups and ideologies that can provide what the government cannot. The final root cause is a denial of basic needs. More than just food, shelter, and water, basic needs can also be things such as an identity or cultural values. When such basic needs are denied to people in a society, they will find groups and beliefs that will provide those basic needs.

Beyond the root causes of radicalization it is necessary to understand the basic modes and means of recruitment to radicalization.  Centers of recruitment are commonly thought to be mosques; in actuality it is more commonly mundane places such as schools, cafes, gyms, and especially prisons. Recruitment can also be through social networks, both online and offline, as recruiters of radicalization take advantage of the complex social networks in which people reside.

A look across the ECIS region provides context for a few commonalities concerning the demographics of those being radicalised. First, those under the age of 40 are more likely to radicalize, with younger people being targets in some contexts and older people in others. It is a mistake to think that only the young are being radicalised. Similarly, both uneducated and educated become radicalised. The main difference is that the educated help create an environment permissive to violence, while the uneducated are more likely to perpetuate the violence. More men become violent extremists than women. Yet with radicalization it can be difficult to ascertain if the same holds true, as women are viewed as influential in both radicalization and counter radicalization programmes. Finally, those who are socially isolated are targets of radicalization. Isolated individuals will be drawn to radicalised communities, and to the communities' beliefs, if they feel that they will be accepted or if they have a channel for their anger.

In order to look at the geographical areas that are being most affected by radicalization the paper uses data concerning terror attacks in the ECIS as a way to infer rates of radicalization in the region. There are two

main takeaways: 1.) places with separatist movements have more terror attacks; 2.) countries with ongoing protracted conflicts have more terror attacks.

Currently there is a dearth of counter radicalization programmes in the region, as well as data concerning many indicators of radicalization. Many of the existing programmes focus to a large extent on young, male Muslims. This is due to many factors, one of which is the perception of a growing threat to peace in the region in the form of foreign terrorist fighters. Governments are worried that citizens who have left to places such as Syria will return and wreak havoc. Unfortunately, this focus on young, male, Muslims leaves countries in the region vulnerable to other forms of radicalization.

As there are limited counter radicalization programmes in ECIS, it is necessary to look outside the region in order to garner information on best practices in the field. When looking at various programmes in counter radicalization there are a few general lessons that can be learned. The first lesson being that the more successful programmes seek to build resilience. Resilience is the ability to recover quickly from shocks or adverse events. Resilience is commonly viewed to help protect individuals and communities from becoming vulnerable to the root causes of radicalization.

Another lesson is that engagement of susceptible communities and individuals, as well as those already radicalised and their leaders, is a key aspect of successful programmes. Likewise empowering disenfranchised groups, especially women, is beneficial in terms of reducing the vulnerability of populations to radicalization.

The final lesson of successful counter radicalization programmes is the most controversial. Namely that reintegrating returning radicals into the larger society can be a better method of counter radicalization than prosecution.

If the goal of a counter radicalization programme is to increase peace, then UNDP is well suited to the creation of such a programme. Based on the research, mitigating the root causes of radicalization with a development approach will yield significant dividends, as much of the root causes are inequalities found in a society and best addressed through development rather than securitized programmes. Further, a development lens will allow for the successful application of many of the best practices learned by different counter radicalization strategies both within and without the ECIS region.

# 1. Introduction

Countering radicalization and violent extremism is of growing importance to countries throughout the world. Radicalization is seen as a threat to peace, as it is the seed of violent extremism. In order to be able to create programmes that successfully counter radicalization, it is essential to identify the root causes of radicalization. As each individual is subject to different internal turmoil and external stimuli, it is difficult to be able to positively identify all drivers of radicalization for all people. At best we are able to ascribe, in a general manner, certain underlying commonalities (root causes) across groups and individuals who have become radicalised.

The purpose of this paper is to present the root causes of radicalization in Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (ECIS). It will also show the manner in which regional dynamics affect both radicalization and current counter radicalization efforts. With the ultimate goal being to provide a basis for any future UNDP counter radicalization programming in the region in order to increase peace and development throughout the region.

## 1.1. Definitions

Before examining the root causes of radicalization it is necessary to explain a few concepts in order to create a common foundation on which to build. The first concept is peace. This is because peace, while not the focus of the paper, is ostensibly the underlying reason for creating any counter radicalization programme, as radicalization is perceived of as a threat to peace.

Oftentimes the term peace is deployed to promote various policies and ideas against opposition as "it is hard to be all-out against peace."[1] At its most basic peace is the "absence of violence,"[2] though it can also be much more than just the complete lack of violence. Yet while this basic concept of peace as the absence of violence may create a dualistic construct that overly simplifies the world, it also creates a model that can be applied to a variety of settings. One such setting is the focus of this paper, creating an environment than can counter the radicalization and subsequent conflict that is occurring throughout the countries that constitute the ECIS region.

With radicalization being "seen as a first, prerequisite step along the road towards terrorism",[3] it would hold that if peace is the absence of violence, and radicalization leads to violence, then in order for there to be peace we should end radicalization. Yet radicalization is merely one step along a continuum that can potentially lead a person to being a violent extremist.[4] Since it is but one step of many along a path it is important to keep in mind that "there is nothing preordained in the possible transition"[5] from becoming radicalised to becoming a violent extremist, "in fact, only a few radicals venture into terrorism".[6]

The conflation of radicalism and violence arises in part from the various historical circumstances that surround the word. This results in the confusion between radicalism and violence that arises when attempting to

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[1] Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, 3(1969): 167.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Jaime Bartlett and Carl Miller, "The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference Between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalisation", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 24, 1(2012):1.

[4] Omer Taspinar, "Fighting Radicalism, not 'Terrorism': Root Causes of an International Actor Redefined", *SAIS Review,* 29, 2(2009): 77.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

define what exactly radicalization is, as "there is no universally accepted definition in academia or government".[7] The word radical comes from the Latin *radix*, meaning root or going to the original or fundamental.[8] Historical usage of the word has mainly been for "liberal, anti-clerical, pro-democratic, progressive political positions",[9] but its current usage "tends to point in the opposite direction: embracing an anti-liberal, fundamentalist, anti-democratic and regressive agenda".[10] This change in usage shows the cultural contextualization that is always present in language. That context of radicalism changed following the attacks on 9/11 as prior to the attacks the long and continuing discourse on the drivers of extremism had been discussed in terms of terrorisms 'root causes'.[11] Yet, following the attacks "it suddenly became very difficult to talk about the 'roots of terrorism'"[12] as it became according to some "an effort to excuse and justify the killing of innocent civilians".[13] This lead to those who realized that there should be a discussion about the 'root causes' to begin "referring to the idea of 'radicalization' whenever they wanted to talk about 'what goes on before the bomb goes off'".[14] Thus radicalization and the 'root causes' of terrorism have become intertwined and synonymous in many discussions.

The use of radicalization to describe what happens before someone becomes a violent extremist or terrorist has led to the plethora of definitions that are used by academics and governments. Since the current usage of the word originated as a way to obliquely reference the concept of root causes in relation to violent extremism, it is no surprise that many of the definitions intertwine violence and radicalism. This can be seen in a 2008 Report by a European Commission's Expert Group's Report that stated that radicalization is the "socialization to extremism which manifests itself in terrorism".[15] As well as by experts such as Donatella Della Porta and Gary LaFree, who defined radicalization as "a process leading towards the increased use of political violence".[16] These types of definitions lead to the view that organizations that foster radicalization are 'conveyor belts' to extremist violence.[17,18,19] This view not only takes away the agency of the individuals involved, but it creates a tautological argument that allows for any group that is perceived to be radical to be persecuted by the state, in order to preserve the peace. This creates a dangerous precedent as political expressions such as protests and activism against "political oppression that, while illegal under national law, are accepted [in] international

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[7] Alex P. Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," *International Center for Counter-Terrorism: The Hague*, (2013):5.

[8] Royal Canadian Mounted Police, "Radicalisation: A Guide for the Perplexed", *Royal Canadian Mounted Police: National Security Criminal Investigations*, (2009):*1*.

[9] Alex P. Schmid, "Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review," *International Center for Counter-Terrorism: The Hague*, (2013):7.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Peter Neumann, "Perspectives on Radicalisation and Political Violence: Papers From the First International Conference on Radicalisation and Political Violence, London, 17-18 January 2008" *London:*