

Chapter 9

Prevention of Radicalization to Terrorism in Refugee Camps and Asylum Centers

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Only a minority of refugees and asylum seekers become terrorists, but some have committed major attacks, raising concern among host country governments and publics. This chapter identifies factors that contributed to or deterred the rise of violent militant groups and terrorists among refugees confined to camps during major historical migration crises. It then examines current efforts to mitigate the same risks among today's refugees in camp situations. However, more than half of refugees are not in camps, but are housed either among host country populations near the countries they fled from or in third countries, where many transition through asylum reception facilities before beginning to rebuild their lives. The main factors identified in the historical cases remain relevant to more recent situations: host government policies, security and radicalizer access, living conditions, opportunities for youth, and local economic conditions and resilience. Lessons drawn from programs by the United Nations and other stakeholders to address these factors also are relevant to third countries struggling to integrate refugees. As refugees become part of the wider society in new countries, other individual risk factors for radicalization to terrorism become key to prevention efforts. These factors are essentially the same as for non-refugees. Not all have been empirically validated, but to the extent that these are useful indicators, this chapter will examine how much they apply to refugees specifically and identify promising methods drawn from mental health, criminal justice, youth, and community programs to mitigate individuals' susceptibility to radicalization before they commit violence.

Keywords: terrorism, counterterrorism, radicalization, extremism, refugees, asylum seekers, migration, prevention, mental health, education, crime, Europe, Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, United Nations

The outflow since 2011 of more than five and a half million refugees fleeing conflict in Syria has made host countries increasingly apprehensive that these people, deprived of resources and traumatized by violence, will commit terrorist acts. Indeed, a small minority have, putting unprecedented pressure on governments to quickly identify radicalized individuals before releasing them into the community. A comparison drawn from academic research between historical refugee crises in which groups of refugees became radicalized and other crises in which they did not reveal sets of factors that appear to increase refugees' susceptibility to radicalization. For example, large refugee groups in the past faced prolonged internment in camps, sometimes alongside armed militants who had contributed to the conflict. Camp conditions also presented daily survival challenges that in some cases added to refugees' susceptibility to extremist recruitment. Although camps are no longer the norm for most refugees, many still face long periods of uncertainty in asylum reception centers or crowded urban accommodations with limited access to adequate housing, education, or employment.

What the historical comparison also shows is that many of these risks can be reduced with comprehensive policies from local, national, and international stakeholders to address long-term needs of refugee and host countries' needs. The United Nations (UN) and partner non-governmental organizations (NGOs) worldwide already have made significant policy changes in that direction for current and future refugee groups. However, the decision to commit a terrorist attack is usually an individual one, and, as in past cases, some refugees may experience certain mental and environmental stresses that can make them targets for radicalization or even push them to violence. Social service, criminal justice, and psychology research suggests that intervention measures developed for non-refugee populations at high risk for violence may be applicable to refugees, and some are being tried in well-constructed programs. However, long-term studies are rare on which interventions or overall reforms of refugee systems will best deter individuals' radicalization to terrorism and, even more importantly, their decisions to act.

Sourcing and Data Issues

This chapter, an expansion of the author's exploratory study for the RAND Corporation (2015), draws from academic, governmental, non-governmental, and UN literature on historical and current migration, counterterrorism, mental health, and criminal justice issues relevant to refugee radicalization concerns, enhanced by interviews with a small group of specialists from several disciplines and media reports on terrorist incidents or host community concerns.¹ The overall focus is on refugees and asylum seekers escaping armed conflict or large-scale persecution across international borders, not economic migrants and people fleeing natural disasters not associated with a conflict. Internally-displaced persons (IDPs) or migrants will be discussed only where their status offers insight into comparable refugee situations. The specific subjects of discussion here are refugees housed in camps for the short or long-term, and refugees and asylum seekers sheltered in migrant reception centers, usually on a temporary basis. The latter discussion will also touch on short- or long-term settlement in the local host country community, the more common outcome for refugees today. This chapter will not attempt to provide a broad assessment of preventing or countering violent extremism (PCVE) measures, a subject addressed in greater depth elsewhere, except to raise attention to programs applicable to refugees. Border control issues also are addressed in another chapter.

In the historical case comparison for the RAND study, we broadly defined radicalization as "the process of committing to political or religious ideologies that espouse change through violence."² It includes enlistment in armed militant groups, such as irredentists or ethnic supremacists, that may or may not have been designated by governments or international organizations as terrorist groups at the time. Since the Al-Qaeda attacks on the US in 2001, governments, despite retaining terrorists of all stripes on global watchlists, generally have worried most that some Muslims inside their countries will adopt a jihadist ideology that

advocates violence as a religious duty. This concern, rightly or wrongly, dominates policy debates about the risk of refugee radicalization today.

The literature we examined for the historical cases in the RAND study was quite broad in terms of geographic area, time, and type of product. The authors generally benefited from the ability to stand back from the events and weigh the credibility of a variety of sources, including government records, media reports, and in-person accounts. In some cases, previous quantitative studies existed. Drawing solid conclusions from the current refugee and asylum center literature is more difficult. Almost all the data on refugee and asylum seeker involvement in terrorism today is from Europe. Moreover, the data was analyzed soon after the Syrian refugee crisis peaked between 2013 and 2016, when border posts and reception facilities still were overwhelmed. Local authorities had to quickly recalculate how to cope with refugees at the same time law enforcement was responding to major terrorist attacks, and those factors may have influenced conclusions.

The issue that looms largest in any evaluation of either the risk of terrorism among refugees and asylum seekers or the efficacy of prevention measures is the very small proportion of refugees who resort to terrorism. Refugee specialists stress that violent extremism is more likely to trigger migration than result from it.³ The oft-cited data analyzed by the Cato Institute, a US libertarian think-tank, is illustrative of this: of the 3,391,203 refugees admitted to the US from 1975 to the end of 2017, 25 were terrorists; of those only three were successful. 11 of the 732,168 asylum seekers admitted from 1975 to 2017 later emerged as terrorists, including the 2013 Boston Marathon bombers.⁴ As for Europe, Sam Mullins of the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies notes that, although the data on total numbers of refugees and asylum seekers are not definitive, official EU statistics count 4,558,005 first time applications for asylum between 2011 and 2017. Mullins assesses that only 144 refugees or asylum seekers who entered Europe during the period have been credibly accused or convicted of involvement in terrorism.⁵

Recommendations for prevention measures are dependent on identification of “risk factors.” Governmental and academic sources provide lists drawn from known terrorism cases, but empirical assessments of the validity of the factors are few. The motives for engagement in terrorism between refugee and non-refugee individuals are very similar, as radicalization studies show. The literature sometimes conflates criminal activity, or just a propensity for violence, with a higher terrorism risk without fully documenting the specific conditions that would make the connection valid for refugees. It also presents correlations between numbers of refugees and numbers of terrorist incidents, both domestic and international, without demonstrating causation.⁶ Assessments focused on Europe sometimes mix concern about refugees with worries about the repatriation of European citizens trained by terrorist groups as “foreign terrorist fighters.” Several programs to avert radicalization show promise for addressing problems many refugees experience when they begin to integrate in a new environment. However, evaluations of program outcomes over time still are sparse.

Radicalization of Refugees in Camps: The Historical Experience

Any discussion of refugee radicalization in camp settings would have to address key historical cases in which camp-based refugee groups became militarized, conducted cross-border operations, and sometimes radicalized enough to mount terrorist attacks well outside their original regions. Examples that stand out are Palestinians in Lebanon after the creation of Israel, Afghan refugees in Pakistan during and just after the Afghan-Soviet war, and Rwandans in Zaire/Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) after the Rwandan genocide. Such “worst cases” contribute to impressions that refugees represent an inherent risk of violence, that they naturally become “refugee warriors” for a cause.⁷ Not all refugee situations, even camp

situations seemingly similar to those cases, present the same risks, and only about 40 percent of refugees reside in camps in recent years.⁸

A careful comparison of these cases with similar situations in which refugees did not radicalize reveals a set of common factors that appear to heighten the risk and perhaps could be mitigated in future such scenarios. In all of the cases, massive migration taxed the international relief community and the host country. The refugee camps were crowded, the refugees were suddenly impoverished, and often crime and violence, such as smuggling, rape, and murder occurred. However, one did not necessarily see organized armed groups or terrorists emerging.

For the RAND paper, we examined nine refugee cases in detail, supplemented by a less detailed examination of four additional ones.⁹ We initially selected 16 variables as potentially relevant to radicalization for both camp and non-camp settings. They included the refugees' numbers; reason for fleeing; ethnic and religious differences; legal status; type of housing; employment and education; the presence of armed groups; and receiving and sending state policies. From our examination of the historical literature, plus interviews with experts, six groups of factors, somewhat overlapping, emerged as most relevant for understanding why radicalization emerged in the "worst cases" but not in the others, although establishing a hierarchy would require further study:

1. The host country's administrative and legal policies, such as restrictions on refugee movement, registration, employment, and education.
2. Lack – or militant control of – security, particularly in and around camps.
3. Political and militant organizing among the refugees, sometimes with host country encouragement.
4. The type of shelter for refugees, notably isolated camps with poor living conditions and/or close proximity to the border of the country the refugees fled.
5. Conditions for refugee youth, including education and employment opportunities.
6. Local economic conditions and resilience within the host country, such as availability of public services or employment.¹⁰

Palestinians

As of 1950, 750,000 Palestinians had fled their homes, most to neighboring Arab countries. Those states often exploited displaced Palestinians to gain advantage in the overall Arab-Israeli conflict and initially, at least, did not officially recognize them as refugees. The Palestinians themselves did not first seek to integrate into the host countries, hoping to return home. Many settled in camps, where a dedicated UN entity, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), became responsible for humanitarian efforts.¹¹ The main factors of radicalization in this historical case appear to have been the political and militant organizing and lack of security in the UNRWA camps, partly attributable to host country policies – the host country, not UNRWA, being responsible for policing.¹² Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria treated the refugees differently, with different results which are discussed below.

Lebanon restricted the refugees' freedom of movement, employment, and education outside the camps and proved unable to provide security for the camps.¹³ As the number of refugees increased after Israel's occupation of the West Bank in 1967, Beirut ceded control of the camps to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). According to a University of London specialist who conducted research inside the camps, the militants offered important educational opportunities for youth alongside a liberation narrative that helped encourage attacks in Israel and globally.¹⁴ Even after PLO leaders were ousted in 1982, the camps remained trouble spots, where, in the 2000s, Islamist extremist groups vied for control.

Jordan, with the largest Palestinian refugee presence, gave the Palestinians citizenship, but King Hussein initially turned a blind eye to militant activity in camps and other Palestinian settlements, which became virtually self-governing states. Only after nearly succumbing to an attempt by armed Palestinian factions to overthrow the monarchy from the late 1960s to 1971, did Amman oust militant leaders and develop a strong internal security apparatus.

In Syria, which had intervened on the Palestinian side in Jordan, Hafiz al-Assad gained control by late 1970, also building a pervasive security apparatus. Damascus harbored Palestinian militants, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command, for its own ends, giving the regime insight into militant activities, while the groups mounted terrorist attacks outside Syria. Both Jordan and Syria allowed Palestinian refugees to travel internally and work outside the camps, although Damascus did not grant them citizenship, and both countries generally avoided internal terrorism from Palestinian groups after the 1970s.¹⁵

Afghans

Some 6.5 million Afghans fled drought and the Soviet invasion just before and during the 1980s, mainly to Pakistan and Iran. About 6.2 million fled internal chaos in the early 1990s following the Soviet defeat. The differences in the level of radicalization between the 1980s and 1990s in Pakistan and between Afghans in Pakistan and those in Iran are significant and include both camp and non-camp situations. Host country policies on freedom of movement and political activity, in particular, shaped the differences. In the first wave, both countries were welcoming. Informal camps arose in Pakistan, which allowed the refugees freedom of movement and economic activity, including establishing a trucking industry there. Refugees in Iran generally resided outside camps, moving freely to find employment, with the government providing access to education and health services. When the outflow of refugees became overwhelming during the Soviet invasion and after, Iran mainly cut benefits, while Pakistan forced the refugees into camps close to the Afghan border, notably into the tribal areas where Islamabad had less control, and restricted the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) access.¹⁶ Islamabad also increasingly encouraged NGOs associated with the Islamist militant groups fighting the Soviets to register and educate the refugees and recruit them for the war. Access to aid – at a time international refugee funding was declining – became dependent on membership in one of the militant parties Pakistan supported.¹⁷ Those parties contributed to the chaos of the Afghan civil war in the 1990s and the rise of some extremist groups still active today and attracted support from foreign fighter groups like al-Qaeda.

Rwandans

The refugee crisis during a civil war in Rwanda developed quickly following the massacre in mid-1994 of more than 500,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus by Hutu extremist militia and the subsequent takeover of the country by a Tutsi insurgent force. The UNHCR and other relief organizations were unable to separate the Hutu armed extremists and former Rwandan armed forces members from civilians among some one million refugees fleeing to Zaire, where the extremists already had prepared the ground for a state-in-exile. According to an academic study by Lischer, the relief community inadvertently allowed the militia members to distribute food to the refugees to gain support and supplied dual-use equipment to which extremists gained access. Extremists even dominated so-called “civilian” camps, using them for cross-border attacks.¹⁸ As in the Palestinian and Afghan cases, host country policies also contributed to militarization of the refugees. Uganda in the early 1990s had rejected resettling Tutsi

refugees and encouraged their insurgency. President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire supported the Hutus, but his successor, who renamed the country the DRC, opted to support the Tutsis. The Rwandan crisis grew into a series of armed conflicts throughout Africa's Great Lakes region.

How Can Radicalization in Camps Be Prevented?

In all of these cases, refugees' confinement in camps for long periods in itself played a direct role in their radicalization. The UNHCR in 2014 instituted a policy to better integrate camp refugees with the wider population around them, stressing that camps, albeit often necessary at the outset of a crisis, limit the rights of refugees "to move freely, choose where to live, work or open a business, cultivate land or access protection and service."¹⁹ Refugees may be prohibited from working outside the camps and may become dependent on relief aid for their daily needs and on rumors as the source of information about their futures. Where armed militants control the flow of both aid and information (or warring factions dwell side-by-side) it is no wonder that some refugees fall prey to radicalizers. With or without militants exercising control, an International Crisis Group (ICG) study in Turkey found that young people face particular stresses, as "children born in camps are constantly exposed to stories of suffering, sorrow, bloodshed and loss that magnify the trauma of living in a closed environment." Sexual abuse, even between children, can be "widespread."²⁰ A refugee to Europe told researcher Sam Mullins that while in camps he had felt "like a number" and that being there was a "destructive process."²¹ Budgets, however, often constrain access to psycho-social counseling. Conspicuous camps with apparent free-flowing handouts to refugees also can spark hostility toward the refugees within the host country population, increasing insecurity.

UNHCR's 2014 policy envisioned increased cooperation with host country governments and local communities to address security concerns and open greater opportunities for refugees to rebuild their lives. Reliance on camps could not be eliminated as the Syrian crisis exploded after 2013, but UN agencies have been working with NGOs both to improve camp conditions (with a view to transforming those that must remain as ordinary settlements, and to build new resources in local communities to help decrease resentment and enable them to absorb refugees into schools and jobs. Many refugees have been settled among host-country populations, with less than a quarter of Syrian refugees in Jordan, for example, still in camps.²²

Preventing Radicalizer Control/Influence: Camp Administration

Some of the historical crises suggest that camp tensions, including domination by armed groups, can be alleviated when civilians in camps are given a greater say in their own governance, selecting leaders they can trust and giving them outlets for peaceful resolution of grievances. It helps when they see familiar institutions from home re-established, but doing that requires careful consideration. For example, in the 1990s, Somali and south Sudanese refugees in Kenya, who had fled brutal inter-clan and tribal warfare, transplanted court systems that, in the Somali case "sometimes reflected clan or gender biases" and in the Sudanese case, were too reliant on corporal punishment. The latter system, moreover, soon fell under the influence of Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) insurgents.²³ By 2013, however, the huge Dadaab Somali refugee camp complex in Kenya was able to conduct elections that helped increase the representation of women and youth.²⁴ Jordan set up Sharia courts in the Za'tari camp, partly to provide official documentation to families, in the first years of the Syrian crisis.²⁵

Preventing Radicalizer Control/Influence: Security

The historical cases demonstrate that improving security, whether by better host country policing around the camps, sometimes with foreign assistance, or by tighter control of resources and improved protection inside the camps, can deter militant influence. To undercut SPLA influence in Kakuma camp, the UNHCR, by 2000, helped train Kenyan police and set up a guard force in which locals worked with refugees, providing work for both.²⁶ As the Syria crisis mounted in 2013 and 2014, camp administrators in Turkey greatly restricted access to camps, “to protect the refugees from the risk of provocation by outsiders visiting the camps and to preserve the dignity of the refugees,” according to a report by the Brookings Institution.²⁷ Jordan established a police presence in the Za’tari camp. In the face of continuing crime, such as sexual exploitation and human trafficking, Turkey’s Migration Directorate in 2018 began offering able-bodied refugees rent money incentives to leave camps as part of a plan to leave only vulnerable people under camp protection.²⁸ Refugees today, whether inside or outside camps, are usually registered with their biometric data such as iris scans, and given vouchers and debit cards. Some places even use iris scans in lieu of a card to shop for necessities.²⁹ European countries such as Greece also have improved intelligence gathering through undercover work or informants inside refugee concentrations to help detect infiltrators, according to Mullin’s research.³⁰

Preventing Youth Recruitment

Militants historically have sought to indoctrinate and potentially recruit youth in camp communities as evidenced in the cases of Palestinian and Afghan refugees. Interviews for the RAND study and academic literature on non-refugee radicalization stress that the factors influencing an individual’s risk differ little between refugees and non-refugees. Economic deprivation, for one, is not always relevant, but personal factors and peer influence usually are. Personal risk factors emerging from the literature on refugee youth (usually defined as between 15 and 24 years old) center on loss of access to opportunities for education, social entrée, and stable employment.

Providing Education

The Syria crisis prompted an international commitment to “No Lost Generation,” but tight aid budgets for refugee schools and host country restrictions on access to universities mean that education beyond the primary level is often lacking. In the 1990s, crime increased among Somali youth in Kenyan camps when secondary education was dropped, and decreased funding meant that militant Islamist groups assumed responsibility for educating Afghan youth in Pakistan.³¹ UNICEF, in 2014, found in interviews with a small group of Syrian refugee children in Jordan’s Za’tari camp that some wanted to join armed groups like the Free Syrian Army (FSA), partly because of boredom and lack of educational opportunities.³² More recently, with the assistance of foreign universities and several NGOs, college-level courses focused on teacher training, have been offered in the Dadaab camp complex in Northeast Kenya, which also has as many as seven secondary schools.³³ Several foreign universities and Google cooperated to set up a connected learning hub in the Azraq camp in Jordan.³⁴ Studies by the American University in Beirut produced recommendations to address obstacles to higher education for refugees in Lebanon, such as lost school documentation, noting that the Ministry of Education and Higher Education was taking tentative steps to resolve at least qualification issues.³⁵

Mitigating Discrimination

A youth's resentment of perceived social discrimination and injustice, worsened by gender-based and other forms of violence in and around the camps, can also increase susceptibility to radical pitches. A study in 2015 by the NGO Mercy Corps of non-refugee and refugee youth in three conflict states found that experience with injustice and discrimination, including perceived favoritism toward corrupt elites, was more important than poverty or lack of employment in their involvement in political violence. The NGO recommended coordinating "intercommunity peace building and governance reform" alongside jobs training and counseling in programs with a dedicated youth focus.³⁶ Young Somali refugees in Yemen were more likely to be radicalized than Somalis in Kenyan camps because they faced discrimination in Yemeni schools, according to a study published by the Belfer Center.³⁷ Indeed, part of the rationale for improving educational facilities in Dadaab was to avoid the discrimination refugees faced when they traveled outside the camp. The multi-agency "Amani" program begun in 2014 in Jordan for refugee and local communities' aims to reduce discrimination, gender-based and other forms of violence, coercion, and discrimination. A program originator, the Child Protection Sub-Working Group, coordinates UNHCR, UNICEF, and youth-oriented NGOs there to improve education and counseling, reduce school bullying, and increase access to the justice system for refugees and non-refugees alike.³⁸

Creating Work and Recreational Outlets

The search for employment is a constant problem for many refugee youths, but what work they can find is not often the type of activity that will build secure futures and offer meaningful social engagement or skirt militant influence. As families lose breadwinners, with some children having left on their own or becoming heads of households, child labor can become a default coping strategy in both camp and non-camp settings, keeping children out of school. Early in the Syria crisis, the Jordanian Ministry of Labor estimated that some 30,000 refugee children were working, some in risky or exploitative occupations.³⁹ More recently, American University in Beirut (AUB) researchers found that young Syrian refugees offered college scholarships often felt compelled to work instead to support their families.⁴⁰ In fact, there are often few counseling programs or meaningful activities for young refugee school dropouts or those over 18 that will help them integrate into new settings and build futures, according to an ICG report on Turkey, which recommends language and literacy courses, alongside enhanced sports and arts programs.⁴¹ Although some experts feel that activities like sports targeted at "keeping them off the streets" have little value, others see significant value.⁴² The Greek experience seems to support the latter. A local soccer club on the island of Lesbos began taking youth from local refugee camps, and in 2019, when Athens changed its laws to allow refugees and asylum-seekers to join national sports teams, an African migrant on the Lesbos team qualified for a Greek team, greatly boosting the morale of the refugees.⁴³

A key component of opening up opportunities for refugee youth (and their elders) is allowing them to leave the camp environment at least part of the time and obtain work permits, something some host countries are still reluctant to do. In early 2019 Ethiopia, host to the second largest refugee population in Africa, passed a law allowing refugees previously confined in some 20 camps to move around to find work and attend school with Ethiopians. The move is part of the national program to stimulate job creation, with 30 percent allocated for refugees, in response to new UN-sponsored refugee policies.⁴⁴

Preventing Host Community Hostility: Building Local Partnerships

It is indisputable that an influx of thousands of refugees into an area where resources already are scarce can trigger resentment and even violence. Host community engagement, then, is critical for creating viable jobs for everyone and lessening refugees' impact on schools, public and social services, and natural resources. This is central to the UN's Global Compact on Refugees, signed in December 2018, as well as the earlier Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) for the Syria crisis and the Alternatives to Camps strategy.⁴⁵ In 2012, when locals in Kenya blocked roads to refugee camps demanding jobs, the NGO CARE began plans to build up banking in the area and lessen the camps' impact on the environment.⁴⁶ Refugee organizations more recently worked with local businesses to better target vocational training – providing training, internships, and work placement to locals as well as refugees. They repaired schools in Egypt and Turkey and refurbished housing – providing rent subsidies to locals and refugees – and water and sanitation facilities in Jordan. In Lebanon, UNICEF is working with NGOs to give unemployed refugee and non-refugee youth digital skills and foster entrepreneurship, while the International Labor Organization (ILO) is helping integrate Syrian workers into Turkish workplaces. There are emerging efforts, also in Turkey, to better utilize the skills of Syrian refugees who arrived with higher education and experience as teachers, healthcare professionals, or as technical specialists, who could establish businesses. In 2018, the UN and partner NGOs placed 3,500 Turkish and Syrian people in jobs and supported 1,200 to start businesses.⁴⁷ In Bangladesh, where a renewed influx in 2018 of Rohingya refugees from Myanmar was overwhelming host populations, UNHCR's Joint Response Plan envisioned hiring local businesses as much as possible to supply food and other needs to refugee camps rather than relying on handouts of large shipments from outside.⁴⁸

Obstacles to Prevention Efforts

As in the historical cases, host country actions and inactions still complicate or even block measures to prevent radicalization. Security lapses remain a major pitfall. During the Syria crisis, some host countries backed combatants in the civil war, contributing to militarization of refugee groups. Terrorists also likely gained at least a temporary foothold in camps in some cases, although the reports are mainly anecdotal. Some attempts at reforming camp administration have fallen flat and funding for measures most likely to deter radicalization continues to fall short. Greater freedom of movement for refugees, including closing camps – however important for refugee futures – naturally will further complicate policing, but, as noted above, camps can be closed societies in which crime and abuse can flourish.

Extremist Recruitment

Sometimes countries failed to note terrorist recruitment. Turkey and Jordan initially supported, turned a blind eye to, or failed to control anti-Assad insurgents. Ankara, as recommended, separated Syrian anti-regime fighters from the general population in separate camps, but because Ankara sympathized with the insurgency and was facing such a large influx, it was unable to prevent recruitment of refugees by radical Islamist groups like the al-Qaeda-related Jabhat al-Nusra (JN) and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). As recently as 2018, interviewees told the ICG that, although Turkey was trying to stop ISIS activity, it was doing little against JN's successor Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).⁴⁹ Jordan, too, separated some FSA combatants but allegedly ignored recruitment efforts among civilians, including recruiters with loudspeakers openly walking through Za'tari Camp.⁵⁰ The counter-radicalization think tank Quilliam, in a report about youth recruitment, maintains that ISIS paid as much as \$2,000 (US) in costs for enlisting a refugee in Jordan and Lebanon. Indeed, Jordanian special forces in 2016

reportedly found an ISIS “sleeper cell” in a refugee camp near Irbid.⁵¹ Authorities in Germany say a member of ISIS’ intelligence unit arrested there in 2017 had previously been tasked with recruiting in refugee camps in Greece.⁵² In 2018, ISIS members fleeing the collapse of their territory in Syria began appearing as ordinary refugees in Greece’s Moria Camp, sparking clashes with Yazidis whom ISIS had persecuted, and only belatedly coming to the attention of Greek authorities, who began to move Yazidis to smaller facilities.⁵³

Bias and Corruption

Local host country prejudice and corruption has proved difficult to eliminate, increasing refugees’ trauma and discontent and stymieing counter-radicalization measures. Following a terrorist attack by the Somali-based al-Shabaab group on Garissa University College in 2015, Kenya, long suspicious of Somali refugee involvement in terrorism, sealed off the Dadaab Camp, preventing refugees from leaving for school or jobs. The perpetrators proved to be Kenyan and Tanzanian, not refugees. Dadaab residents also claim daily humiliation due to local corruption and bias, such as having to pay bribes to get “free” identity cards or to get guards to recognize personal documents, and say they face harassment for reporting crimes.⁵⁴ A commentary by academics in Jordan saw an increase in open individual corruption by civil servants and high-ranking officials there since the Syrian crisis began, despite an anti-corruption campaign by King Abdullah.⁵⁵ In Turkey, border officials remain susceptible to bribes from smugglers, although Ankara has taken steps to improve security.⁵⁶

Funding and Reform Shortcomings

Historically, funding for crises has fallen off after the first few years. Although planning for Syrian refugees is much better than past situations, many of the aid budget line items most critical to preventing radicalization are underfunded. In particular, in the 2018 annual report for the “3RP” plan for the Syrian crisis, “livelihoods and social cohesion” – the core of creating jobs in cooperation with host countries – was funded at only 17 percent in Lebanon and “resilience” (supporting education and health personnel and helping municipalities) at 37 percent overall. Female-headed households still have problems accessing employment in several countries and unaccompanied children remain at particular risk for meeting even basic needs. School attendance still lags in some countries.⁵⁷ Protection programs, including psycho-social services for children, were underfunded significantly in Iraq as of mid-2019.⁵⁸ Even though refugees are playing a greater role in camp administration, the effort bears closer scrutiny and follow-up. In early 2016, *Foreign Policy* reported that refugees in Kenya’s Dadaab camp complex felt they had no real control over their situation despite elections.⁵⁹

Camp Closure and Repatriation

International community efforts to eliminate camps have focused on first, housing refugees among the population in the host country (or a third country), or second, allowing them to return home if it is safe to do so. The first option is covered in the second part of this chapter. The second option) has been a serious consideration in a few current cases. Some Syrians have gone home as the regime has begun to regain control, although the percentage of Syrians returning remains very small as of mid-2019, with only two percent returning when the border with Jordan reopened.⁶⁰ Kenya has long wanted to close the Dadaab complex and has intermittently pressured refugees to leave. Although the international community has lately worked with Nairobi to prevent forced returns, continued insecurity and poverty in Somalia

has put those who have decided to go home at risk of radicalization. The Quilliam foundation found, for example, that al-Shabaab recruited former refugees by offering them needed aid.⁶¹

How Much Do Asylum Reception Centers Contribute to Radicalization Risk?

In the face of large-scale migration, reception centers for refugees and asylum seekers serve much the same function as camps and share some, but not all, risks. They provide refugees with basic necessities of life, including shelter, while the refugees await decisions on their future status, such as temporary or permanent resettlement in the host or a third country. Unlike those in border camps, refugees in asylum centers lack the option of immediately returning home, unless deported by host authorities. In fact, they may already have decided against returning, having deliberately traveled to seek resettlement. While refugee camps may persist for decades and become cities, asylum centers are designed for a short-term transition. Although most asylum facilities are farther from the spillover violence of a war front, other radicalization factors may remain including:

- host country government policies, such as employment restrictions;
- poor living conditions, with restricted access to information;
- radicalizer access to the refugees;
- lack of security, including exposure to intercommunal violence;
- lack of opportunities for youth; and
- difficult local economic conditions.

The level of radicalization risk differs across the various phases of the asylum process, from initial reception to full integration into the host community. The experiences of high and middle-income countries, such as European Union (EU) countries, Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, highlight particular risks in the transition from the refugee aid safety-net of a camp or asylum center to integration. The process of integration can intensify the influence of the factors above, but each phase carries some risk.

The Reception and Asylum Center Phase

In the EU, conditions for asylum seekers differ from country to country, despite attempts at standardization. Under the “Dublin Regulation” of 2003, as revised in 2013, member states are expected to follow some common standards, with the country of entry usually responsible for asylum applications, although responsibility can be transferred via a complex set of rules. Asylum seekers have the right to a personal interview and can appeal transfers to another EU country to ensure they get a fair hearing. Transferring unaccompanied children and detaining asylum seekers are last resort measures. The administrative phase for asylum claims is supposed to be about six months.⁶² Reception centers, as of 2013, were to provide a basic standard of living, counseling when needed, and protection for vulnerable people or those with special needs. They would allow access to the labor market within nine months. Additional, more specific guidance on standards for reception facilities, much of which the EU had already tried to apply as of 2019, was drafted in 2016.⁶³

Living Conditions and Bureaucracy

Asylum seeker housing varies across the EU and consists of either dedicated centers or a variety of facilities, including hotels and private homes, although some countries just provide a housing allowance. The type of facility often depends on the phase of the asylum process:

for example, transit centers or initial reception centers in the first stage, the latter sometimes essentially a camp.⁶⁴ It is not uncommon for a country to spread asylum seekers around to avoid segregating them in one area.

Whatever the ideal situation might be, asylum seekers in some countries live with uncertainty and frustration about their status for more than a year, sometimes in accommodations that are far from recommended standards. In the UK before 2011, children were often placed in immigration detention facilities with their families for long periods of time; small numbers were still there as of late 2018.⁶⁵ Spain received 47,810 applications for asylum between 2010 and 2016 but resolved only 41 percent of those cases during that period, although the law mandates a three to six-month decision period. The large influx of Syrian refugees in 2015 was only one factor - Sub-Saharan Africans as of 2018 also faced major delays.⁶⁶ According to researchers who interviewed 1,000 refugees in the Netherlands, in 2013, many asylum applicants were assigned to rural areas far from jobs and schools, and the average stay was 21 months. Facilities also lacked privacy and schedules for personal activities or practice with the host language.⁶⁷ Elsewhere, people have too little to occupy their time. "People that come here are dying of boredom... We have people that have been here for a year, eighteen months, that have nothing to do but look at the internet," according to an asylum facility staff member Mullins interviewed.⁶⁸ They may feel completely detached from the host country: a Syrian refugee in Ireland told a researcher that people in his Direct Provision center felt "really isolated," with few, if any, outside contacts.⁶⁹

Radicalizer Access and General Security

Even if refugees and asylum seekers have been carefully selected for placement in a dedicated reception facility, authorities occasionally miss radicalized individuals. They may accept people to a facility, unaware they were already radicalized in the country or *en route* to the country, or had arrived as intentional terrorist infiltrators. Facility managers also may fail to prevent local radicalizers' gaining access to the residents. As the Syria crisis mounted, European authorities were said to have lost track of many refugees, who then blended into the population.⁷⁰ They also had a difficult time vetting asylum seekers who lacked identity documents or had deliberately destroyed them for a variety of reasons, often just to conceal personal factors that would preclude asylum. Anis Amri, a Tunisian who attacked the Berlin Christmas Market in 2016, concealed his petty criminal history. He pretended to be a minor and was housed initially in a youth asylum facility. Later radicalized in jail, he moved around Europe under various identities staying in asylum facilities.⁷¹ Immigration personnel missed some operatives from ISIS and other groups deliberately smuggled among the refugees, such as in the case of some of the November 2015 Paris attackers.

Outside, radicalizers also can gain access to asylum accommodations if visitors and newcomers are not checked carefully or staff do not report unusual activity. In 2015, when asked about "Islamic extremists using refugee reception centers as recruiting grounds," the Director of Norway's Police Security Service told *Dagbladet* newspaper, "It's a scenario we are aware of."⁷² Two Moroccan-national ISIS recruiters falsely claimed asylum in Portugal and brought over other asylum seekers, using access to asylum facilities there to indoctrinate them. The two became part of a continent-wide terrorist network, disrupted in 2016, planning attacks in Paris.⁷³ In Italy the same year, a young Somali imam, who preached sermons praising ISIS, al-Qaeda, and al-Shabaab, tried to recruit the residents of a refugee reception center to attack a train station. The residents turned him in to the police.⁷⁴

Refugees in identifiable asylum facilities face other threats that add stress and may increase susceptibility to radicalization. Anti-immigrant sentiment is increasing in many countries, and Muslim immigrants are often singled out. Facilities throughout Europe have been attacked by anti-refugee individuals and gangs, including fire-bombings, stabbings, and bludgeoning's. In

2015 alone, Germany recorded 900 incidents and Sweden recorded 50 incidents.⁷⁵ Anti-refugee activism is also pressing some countries to enact more restrictive laws that decrease options for refugees and asylum seekers.

Moving into the Host Community: The Integration Process

The integration stage, social scientists stress, is a gradual process in which refugees must renew or replace resources they have lost to begin to build a new future. These resources are more than material ones and include social and cultural relationships; status; and self-worth. According to migration specialists, a refugee also starts at an inherently unequal power position compared to the host society in multiple dimensions: economic, political, social, and cultural as well as individual, group, and community. Lengthy stays in asylum centers can either help the rebuilding process by providing language training and good local orientation, or hinder it by postponing orientation to avoid raising asylum seekers' hopes and restricting interaction with locals.⁷⁶

After what may or may not be a short stay in a camp, reception, or asylum facility, refugees are expected to reside in a variety of housing arrangements in the host community, acquire jobs or attend school. In Turkey and the Middle East, the UNHCR and NGOs usually are still responsible, in cooperation with the host country, for the settlement of refugees in communities in lieu of camps as discussed above. In Europe, the practice is generally to transition those approved for asylum into life in the new country, with assistance and counseling in the beginning. The status of those rejected for asylum and not deported, but no longer entitled to services, remains a troublesome question in some countries, especially when the country of a refugee's origin is unwilling to cooperate.

Housing

Refugees often have difficulty finding satisfactory housing, whether assisted by a refugee agency or on their own, because of financial or bureaucratic obstacles, social requirements, availability, or anti-immigrant bias. Some governments, such as Spain, have tried to avoid concentrating refugees in one city or neighborhood, partly out of fear that enclaves interfere with integration and may increase the risk of both exposure to radicalizers and anti-immigrant attacks. Immigration specialists there found in interviews conducted between 2016 and 2017, however, that refugees sometimes seek family or other people from home and move out of assigned areas, with or without authorization. If refugees do try to integrate, they often find that landlords will not rent to them.⁷⁷ In many locations, refugees must share housing because rents are too high, as in parts of Turkey, or the accommodation they find is in slum areas. Syrian refugees in Jordan had to resort to poor housing as they exhausted the money they had brought with them.⁷⁸ The Netherlands grants some asylum seekers a five-year temporary residence status, but permanent status, which requires command of the Dutch language, is needed to get mortgages and other services.⁷⁹

Employment

Finding a job is arguably the most challenging hurdle in the integration process for adults. Refugees who held professional positions in the home country are likely to find themselves in jobs with greatly reduced status, or unemployed. Some governments have raised barriers to employment: in Lebanon, Syrians are restricted to agriculture, construction, and environmental jobs, while Ireland, until 2018, banned asylum-seekers from working. Even where they are free to work, refugees may run out of initial financial assistance – 18 months in Spain, for example

– before they have secured a stable job, especially where the local economy is in a recession. A Syrian refugee told a Spanish interviewer that although assistance was ending, “neither of us have work, neither my husband nor me...we don’t know what will happen...we’re looking for work, but haven’t found any.”⁸⁰ In Germany in early 2018, 80 percent of refugees were unemployed.⁸¹ Refugees may have lost documents showing their professional certifications or be required by local boards to take additional training that can be hard to access. Turkey as of 2016 granted Syrians under Temporary Protection Status the right to work permits, with the caveat that they are not to work outside the province where they were assigned. Many have moved to find work, however, and legal uncertainty is one factor discouraging employers from hiring them, particularly for higher-skill jobs. Refugee doctors and teachers may serve only Syrians.⁸²

Youth Education and Integration

Refugee children, seemingly in a better position than adults to absorb new languages and assimilate into unfamiliar cultures, still face multiple obstacles. Where local governments, refugee agencies, and communities are unable to provide essential needs, radicalizers may step in. European Asylum Support Office (EASO) guidance recommends that children get access to education as soon as possible in the reception process so that they can begin social interactions, but there can be long waiting periods, lack of trauma support and tailored curricula, and long distances to go to attend school. In addition, some older children may have missed schooling, while those above compulsory school age may not qualify for secondary school, but be unable to access vocational training.⁸³ In Turkey in 2013, only 10 percent of urban refugees had access to education, for which they required a passport, police registration, and a residence permit, according to a Brookings report.⁸⁴ As late as 2018, the ICG found that unspecified “large numbers” of teenage Syrians, who often struggle with Turkish, were not in school, in part because Ankara had ruled that only government institutions could provide education in closed special temporary Arabic-language educational centers in 2017. Few youths there received support for trauma.⁸⁵

Discrimination inside and outside the classroom imposes additional stress. Syrian refugees in Turkey complain of teachers who assume they are “ill-behaved,” intensifying classmates’ biases and bullying, according to the ICG.⁸⁶ A migrant parent in Seville, Spain, told researchers that her children rarely experienced classroom bullying, but other interviewees in Spain complained of daily slights on public transportation and elsewhere in the community – forms of discrimination youth undoubtedly feel as well.⁸⁷ A study of first and second-generation immigrant youth in Barcelona found that social exclusion increased in-group loyalty and contributed directly to the type of rigid thinking or “sacralization of values” that can be signs of incipient extremism.⁸⁸

Where Radicalizers Move in

At any stage in the integration process, radicalizers may try to step in to fill gaps in aid provision or otherwise try to influence the refugees. We saw that in some cases, radicalizers tried to enlist refugees in border camps directly into armed groups. In urban areas in the Middle East or Western countries, they may try to fulfill, for example, educational, religious, or even recreational needs to recruit refugees for terrorism. One motive for Ankara’s requirement that the state provides education was to bypass extremist proselytizing, but ICG researchers found some civil society groups were offering Arabic-language religion and morals courses as well as athletics. Unregistered, the courses either escaped review by Turkey’s religion directorate or were checked by inspectors lacking Arabic skills. The groups were not necessarily extremist,

but some courses concealed jihadist ideology.⁸⁹ Amri, the Tunisian attacker on the Christmas market in Berlin, took classes at a Qur'an school in Dortmund, Germany, run by an alleged senior deputy to the head of ISIS' recruitment network in Germany.⁹⁰ In Spain, a Moroccan-born extremist allegedly offered boxing lessons to recruit disadvantaged Muslim youth to ISIS; he had ties to one-time boxing student Yahya Nouri, a co-conspirator in the disrupted 2016 ISIS plot to attack Paris.⁹¹

Detecting and Preventing Radicalization

Given several devastating attacks linked to asylum seekers in the past decade, governments face unprecedented public pressure to identify radicalized or at-risk individuals before releasing them into the community. Indeed, once refugees become part of the wider society, determining whether they are becoming radicalized is more difficult than in a camp or asylum facility where aid organizations and law enforcement may witness their actions. Counterterrorism specialists have developed, based on studies of known terrorists, lists of indicators, symptoms, and risk factors that an individual – refugee or non-refugee – may be embracing a violent extremist ideology or readying an attack. The question is whether refugees are more or less likely to exhibit those characteristics, even if only a small minority of them commit acts of terrorism. If a refugee does show such signs, when should the authorities be called in? When is it ethical for an asylum center staff member or aid worker to report a person in their charge? Will casting unwarranted suspicion in itself increase the risk that the person will be alienated and radicalized? What existing programs show promise for mitigating personal risk factors or defusing radicalization in the refugee context?

In a 2019 handbook on indicators of mobilization for attacks, the US National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) lists four general long-term “risk factors” for terrorism, essentially personal behavioral issues, that invite consideration in the refugee context: inability to cope with changes or perceived failures in relationships, school, or career; a history of personal use of violence and unstable mental state; social isolation; and possession of, or familiarity with, weapons or explosives.⁹²

1. **Coping with change and failure:** Clearly, refugees have experienced significant upheaval in their lives and additional stresses in adapting to a new country, but many, having survived earlier challenges, are better able to adapt to new conditions.⁹³ Perceived failure, such as the underemployment noted above, is another matter. Some psychologists have underscored personal “significance loss” as a key driver of radicalization.⁹⁴
2. **History of violence, mental state:** A personal history of using violence is rarer among those fleeing violence, although not unknown. However, studies show that the trauma and abuse that many refugees suffer can increase the radicalization risk.⁹⁵ Serious mental illness is rare, however, even among refugees and, although post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) can be more common than in non-refugee populations, the prevalence is still small and usually confined to certain population groups, like those who experienced torture or prolonged detention or are unaccompanied and orphaned minors.⁹⁶
3. **Social isolation:** This term refers to any individual deliberately withdrawing from his/her social network – not “social exclusion” caused by others – and has not been flagged as a risk specific to refugees. A possibly related concern in the refugee context is alienation in the form of what has been called a “culture and identity crisis.”⁹⁷ A preliminary study in late 2015 of first and second-generation Muslim immigrants in the US found that those who rejected both their own and the host culture, and faced

discrimination, suffered loss of significance and were more likely to radicalize than other immigrants.⁹⁸

4. **Familiarity with weapons:** As mentioned in the camp context, former soldiers or others with military experience may become part of the refugee mix if they are not filtered out. Particularly salient in this context in recent years are former child soldiers and indoctrinated youth freed from ISIS-controlled territory. A Kurdish-German trauma specialist in Iraq working with ISIS children in 2017 told an interviewer he is optimistic that such children can be rehabilitated, adding that previous studies have shown that at least half of people who have suffered similar trauma will not require clinical intervention.⁹⁹

Identifying Radicalization

Symptoms of radicalization can be hard to identify before an individual commits a violent act. Moreover, few of what the European Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) terms the “kaleidoscope” of social, political, and environmental factors contributing to radicalization – underemployment, limited education – have been empirically proven and, in any case, may not apply to a given individual.¹⁰⁰ The staff of refugee and asylum facilities in host communities nonetheless are often expected to spot potential radicalization among individuals in their charge. In some countries, personnel are also asked to report suspicious individuals to local or national authorities. Staff struggle with the professional ethics of unfairly stigmatizing a person, worrying, for example, whether the report will become a permanent record even if suspicions were wrong. The guidance, such as noting people who stop drinking alcohol, work out heavily, or become more religious, can be ambiguous. Moreover, many specialists assess that overemphasizing religious expression in particular can actually contribute to radicalization.¹⁰¹

As the numbers of refugees and asylum seekers grew, EU countries began to try to refine their guidance to refugee assistance staff, including offering additional specialized training programs, although the tension between law enforcement and refugee protection needs remains. In Germany, intelligence officers and police give asylum staff training on signs of extremism and how to distinguish what is of less concern. The effort helped staff at one facility flag an unaccompanied minor planning a mass killing.¹⁰² Denmark encourages broad collaboration among law enforcement and security agencies and a range of social, education, and health service organizations. A successful program for staff working with unaccompanied minors by the Danish Centre for Prevention of Extremism (PET) stresses the life skills and “motivational interviewing” methods used by PET. A RAN review of training programs in 2018 recommends training tailored to each asylum center staff, with the focus on safeguarding the individual, avoiding stigma, and partnering with refugees themselves. In Belgium, such training improved the quality of reporting, and reduced the quantity of less-useful observations.¹⁰³

Prevention Measures

Those who work with refugees and asylum seekers in Western countries sometimes utilize a variety of methods and programs developed in the last decade to address radicalization risk factors for both individuals struggling with trauma or mental issues, and groups such as youth trying to integrate in new societies. Additional programs are being developed, some of which strive to offer budget-sensitive interventions that non-specialists can implement. Beyond the individual, some community programs hope to modify or eliminate social exclusion and discrimination.

Mental Health Interventions

Even though severe mental illness is rare among refugees, practitioners have underscored the need for some level of psycho-social assessment and support, particularly for youth or anyone who has suffered abuse or traumatic loss. Expensive individual therapy often can be avoided except for cases of severe mental illness. Treatments may rely on counseling and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) administered by non-psychologists to mitigate trauma's potential to spur dangerous behavior. Some promising new interventions focus on the overall social environment. Psychiatrists have developed a model called Adaptation and Development After Persecution and Trauma (ADAPT) to help mental health personnel tailor interventions. It posits five psychological pillars of mental equilibrium that refugees may have lost: "systems of safety and security, interpersonal bonds and networks, justice, roles and identities, and existential meaning and coherence." A combination of "traumatic loss" and "extreme injustice," for example, may eventually trigger an outpouring of "complicated grief and explosive anger." The ADAPT model helped in treating PTSD in Iraqi refugees in Syria.¹⁰⁴

Researchers from the RAND Corporation, the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), and the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) developed a trauma intervention program for school children that may be applicable to refugee youth. Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools (CBITS) tries to reduce symptoms of PTSD, depression, and behavioral problems to improve overall functioning and coping skills. Although designed for mental health professionals, the method has been adapted for use by teachers and school counselors.¹⁰⁵ Mental health also is central to a specialized intervention program by the Netherlands National Support Center for Extremism focusing on immigrants who may have lived in ISIS territory and show signs of radicalization. Two experts, including one on mental health, assess each case and work with local center staff to implement an intervention plan over four "domains": shelter and family; security; care; and education and work.¹⁰⁶

Criminal Justice Desistance Methods

Criminal justice research and experience offer examples of promising intervention measures developed for at-risk, non-refugee populations to avert dangerous behavior. Some factors contributing to, or associated with, criminal behavior and recidivism are close to the risk factors associated with radicalization – to the extent that those factors are valid – and may be modifiable with similar methods.¹⁰⁷ In the criminal context, they include antisocial thought patterns (including unwarranted justification and rationalization), anti-social associates, poor family ties or being unmarried, unstable employment, few leisure activities, and substance abuse. The idea in the criminal desistance field is to first address "dynamic factors" (those that can change over time), such as changing the people a person associates with and providing meaningful work and leisure. One study found that marriage was a significant deterrent to crime among immigrants. The city of Malmö, Sweden, has examined how criminal gangs provide strong social networks as a means to alter the pattern for refugees at risk of extremism. For factors more difficult to address, including thought patterns, specialists often turn to CBT. They also try to change mental patterns by gradually easing restrictions on the person, including jail time, as risk factors improve, a process called "Risk-Needs-Response."¹⁰⁸

Youth and Community Programs

Several European programs are attempting to avert radicalization among refugee youth by addressing risk factors such as social bonds. Some also work across the wider community of non-refugee youth to reduce social exclusion by changing entrenched viewpoints. The German

NGO Ufuq (“horizon” in Arabic) receives federal funding for projects on education and youth that try to deter refugee youth from radicalization through encouraging them to join social organizations and strengthen their personal skills. Ufuq also provides civic education for both refugee youth and their native-born peers to change extremist narratives and reduce prejudice and racism.¹⁰⁹ Other European programs try to reduce extremist thinking in both communities by highlighting alternative views and the complexities in social issues. For example, the RAN polarization prevention model recommends a method in which mediators, rather than trying to bring opposite viewpoints together, first focus on the middle group as the target and change the subject to a question about the middle viewpoint.¹¹⁰ The EU Erasmus program focuses on marginalized youth and seeks to foster diversity. Its UK program guide for youth workers offers a variety of methods to loosen thinking, including sets of scenarios from different viewpoints. For example:

“When I walk in my neighbourhood, I notice these foreign students standing in street corners speaking in their own language. I feel unsafe.

[or]

Local youth workers in my neighbourhood are forming football teams and I notice that some of these people who are hanging about in street corners are great players. They really want to win the football tournaments just like I do and make our neighbourhood feel proud of us. I feel that we are more similar than I thought.”¹¹¹

Unintended Consequences in Prevention Methods

Governments are showing increasing interest in evaluating violent extremism prevention programs, but studies so far are few. Feedback from participants in asylum center staff training or recipients of handbooks on refugee screening has been scant.¹¹² Some smaller scale studies have nonetheless uncovered possible errors in early assumptions about risk factors and pitfalls in some radicalization prevention methods often used in the refugee context.

- **Mental Health:** A study evaluating resilience training in the Netherlands aimed at increasing self-esteem, empathy, and perspective-taking skills (ability to anticipate the reactions of other people) among Muslim adolescents with dual identity found that, although empathy increased, self-esteem also increased narcissism in some subjects, a factor in susceptibility to radicalization. The study also found that perspective taking could increase negative feelings about non-Muslims and positive attitudes toward violence.¹¹³
- **Desistance Efforts:** PREVENT, a program in the UK since 2003 to educate communities on radicalization risks and deter violence through preemptive interventions, has had some success in diverting people from extremism, but also has received significant public criticism as being discriminatory and possibly contributing to radicalization.¹¹⁴ Strengthening family and other social ties also can backfire. Studies of both Yemenis and West Bank Palestinians on factors *detering* radicalization show that close friends and family can make a person *more* likely to approve of violence in theory (although not necessarily to engage in it personally), and that family play a greater role than friends. Studies also show that traditional community leaders tapped as potential role models can lose influence among fellow refugees far from home.¹¹⁵
- **Civic Education and Engagement:** Refugee specialists recognize that refugees, like non-refugees, need an outlet for peaceful political expression, even in camp settings, and that political activism should not automatically be taken as a sign of radicalization.¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, political violence for some people is just one expression of legitimate political activism that they can rationalize.¹¹⁷ The NGO Mercy Corps has found that,

although the effect of civic training on youth can be neutral, training that sensitizes them to authorities' injustice can make them more likely to radicalize.¹¹⁸ In host countries, anti-refugee assaults can have a similar impact.

Conclusion

Refugees face a host of challenges, having lost their homes and communities, their material resources, and sometimes even their sense of self-worth. Those left in camps are in limbo, unable to start new lives, and dependent on humanitarian aid. Others settled among host country populations may find their new homes far from welcoming, with suspicious, even hostile, neighbors and legal systems that make education and jobs hard to obtain. At each stage, radicalizers may try to gain the refugees' trust, persuade them of the virtues of extremist ideologies, and even recruit them for terrorist attacks. Nonetheless, very few refugees become radicalized and even fewer commit acts of violence.

In the historical "worst cases," large groups of refugees, even entire camps, became radicalized. Today the main concern is an individual refugee's risk – essentially the same as for the rest of society. Although we have less understanding of why people do not radicalize than why they do, the message from many host country governments is that tighter security is the answer: no single terrorist refugee should be permitted to slip in. For that to happen, one would need to know how to identify a terrorist in the making long before he/she shows any signs, but the science is not developed enough for that. Alternatively, one could use the common risk factors thought to increase susceptibility to radicalization, as addressed above. Those factors still are too general, however, to identify in advance of any terrorist actions specific individuals at high enough risk to legally justify excluding them.

What host governments and the international community can do is to try to modify certain factors to mitigate any push toward radicalization they may create. Where camps are necessary this would mean giving refugees more control over their own lives, offering psycho-social support, providing post-primary education for young people, and building employment skills useful beyond the camp environment. Security measures will still be needed to protect refugees from abuse and discourage exposure to militants and radicalizers. Host communities must be supported in order to reduce hostility. When refugees leave camps for host societies or transition through reception and asylum facilities, they begin to take more personal control, but they also continue to need close, personally-tailored support to integrate successfully, whether by learning the local language and bureaucracy or rebuilding educational and job credentials. Some refugees continue to need mental health resources. Again, building host community receptivity – including countering anti-refugee extremism – is vital. Security measures in this phase must not only prevent radicalizer access to a refugee facility but also aid individuals there struggling with personal issues that might make them vulnerable to radicalization. That includes helping them develop positive personal associations.

The UN, organizations which support refugees, and many host governments already have taken steps to address risk factors that contributed to radicalization in past crises. Although their effectiveness over the long term has yet to be proven, the most promising programs benefit from coordination across agencies and fields of specialization, including careful cooperation between terrorism specialists in law enforcement and security services, refugee experts, and health professionals. They also consult the refugees themselves. Where costs are high, such as for individual mental health counseling, specialists are developing methods non-experts can apply. Nonetheless, the numbers of refugees have overwhelmed relief budgets, and full funding is probably impossible. What can be done is to give greater attention to programs that are seriously underfunded but directly address radicalization risks, such as livelihoods and community resilience initiatives or meaningful activities for youth.

Where programs fall short and societal biases prevent refugees from integrating successfully, studies have shown that their children may be even more likely to radicalize. Second-generation immigrants have conducted major terrorist attacks or volunteered abroad as foreign fighters. In Spain, where social exclusion of refugees is considered high in some areas, about half of 178 people arrested between 2013 and 2016 for terrorism-related offenses were second generation immigrants.¹¹⁹ Now that the major migration waves from the Middle East have eased, host country governments – and their citizens – must continue to foster policy changes that will ensure not only that today’s refugees can successfully create new lives but also that in the inevitable future crises those polices will discourage, not contribute to, terrorism.

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