

# Guidebook for the Operationalization of the Passege4Prevent Referral Mechanism in North Macedonia: From Structure to Agency

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## 1. Introduction

The burning issue of radicalization leading to violent extremism (VE) is one of the largest threats to the cohesion of Macedonian society in the last several years. The concepts of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and “returnees” mainly coming back to their home country from the battlefields in Syria and the wider region of the Middle East, have been some of the most important topics filling the headlines of Macedonian media. Taking into consideration the perplexed situation with these phenomena in North Macedonia, the international donor and non-donor community decided to coordinately invest both in state institutions and civil society, in order to strengthen resilience to VE in the country and in the wider region. This is the short background of the “Educate to Prevent – Strengthening Frontline School Workers and Parents to Build Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism” project, colloquially known as E2P. The project is financed by the European Union through the STRIVE program administered by Hedayah – the Centre of Excellence in tackling VE. The project is implemented by a consortium led by the Centre for Research and Policy Making (CRPM). In the earlier phases of the project, several path-breaking documents on countering violent extremism (CVE) through education were produced. Firstly, a baseline study on the perception of teachers and frontline school workers on radicalization leading to VE in three regions of North Macedonia was drafted (Stojkovski, Stefanovski and Aleksoski 2019). This product also contains a training needs assessment (TNA) on the needs of frontline school workers in order to improve their knowledge and training of radicalization leading to VE, as well as other related concepts. Based on the baseline, the project team produced guidelines and protocols in order to help frontline school workers and parents to Recognize, Prevent and Act (CRPM 2019) upon detecting radicalization cases in their areas of operation. Furthermore, a Training Program for Capacity Building of Teachers, Municipal Officials and Parents for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CRPM 2019) was drafted, based on which four trainings with local stakeholders were delivered. Lastly, a set of policy recommendations named Passage4Prevent (Risteska 2019) was sketched in order to map, and outline the relationship between multiple stakeholders in Macedonian society in order to act upon noticing cases of radicalization leading to VE.

This Guidebook aims at further operationalizing the Passage4Prevent referral model. Their primary goal is to facilitate the work of all stakeholders engaged in the referral mechanism, to

the extent which is possible. Starting with the government and the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism, and rounding up with institution on municipal level, this document aims at presenting the best practices and guidance on how to develop a functional and viable referral mechanism. Apart from CVE professionals such as the leadership of the NCCVET, this document targets frontline school workers, health practitioners, social workers, religious communities, local politicians and municipal administration representatives, as well as civil society representatives. Following the whole-of-society approach, all aforementioned groups of stakeholders are highly important in creating a safety net which can protect initially radicalized individuals, but even more important, to prevent future cases of radicalization leading to VE.

As any existing guidebook, the current one is also facing limitations. The primary limitation is the lack of information, as well as research data on the state of play regarding CVE in North Macedonia. This limits the possibility for one to project trends and proposes evidence-based activities within the referral mechanism. Another issue is the rather unclear relationship between some of the stakeholders involved in the proposed referral mechanism. This results with proposing at least two or more scenarios on how certain actors should act in concrete situations. On some occasions, this must be perceived as misleading. Lastly, the unequal organizational and functional development of some municipalities leads to lack of institutional and personal incapacities in some sub-fields of their work.

The document commences with the main definitions on key concepts related to radicalization leading to VE. Furthermore, it provides a detailed institutional mapping of the main institutions involved in the establishment of the referral mechanism. The third part of the Guidebook is dedicated to the main principles and approaches which should be followed by all involved stakeholders in the process. The last section delves deeper into highlighting the constitutive elements of the referral mechanism, and it explains in detail the mutual relationship between the bodies and institutions.

## 2. Main Definitions

Before delving deeper into exploration of the main actors and their interactions within the referral model in Macedonia, it is of utmost importance to define the main concepts related to prevention of radicalization leading to violent extremism. It is a rather difficult task to find overarching and fully encompassing definitions accepted by multiple stakeholders in the field in order to fully reflect their understanding of the problem. In this vein, the following definitions stem from different sources which are widely recognized as credible.

*Radicalization* is one of the most over-defined concepts. Just della Porta and LaFree (2012) compiled seven definitions of radicalization alone in their seminal introduction to the special issue of the International Journal of Conflict and Violence, titled “Processes of Radicalization and De-Radicalization”. The most simplistic one argues that “radicalization can be understood to be the strategic use of physical force to influence several audiences” (Ibid, p. 4).

*Extremism*, on the other hand, is defined as “believing and supporting ideas that are very far from what most people think is correct or reasonable.” (Ministry of Science Education and Technology of Kosovo 2018, p. 8)

*Violent extremism (VE)*, according to the same source, “refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to attain ideological, religious, or political goals” (Ibid, p. 9). VE can include various forms of political and/or sectarian violence. It is important to underline that VE is also an ideologically motivated tool used to legitimize violence.

*Violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (VERLT)* is an important set of concepts adopted by and propagated by the OSCE. VERLT is defined in the following manner: “Radicalization that leads to terrorism refers to the dynamic process whereby an individual comes to accept terrorist violence as a possible, perhaps even legitimate, course of action. This may eventually, but not necessarily, lead this person to advocate, act in support of, or to engage in, terrorism” (OSCE TNTD and ODIHR 2014).

*Indoctrination* is one of the concepts which are of utmost importance for this guidebook. One of the most widely used definitions of indoctrination refers to “the process of inculcating a person with ideas, attitudes, cognitive strategies or professional methodologies” (Snook 1972).

*De-Radicalization* is the last of this set of concepts, and to a certain extent, one of the goals of the potential users of this guidebook, when/if cases of radicalization leading to VE are being detected on community level. “The activities undertaken to change the mentality of radicalized individuals towards adopting or applying violent extremist ideologies to prevent them from taking violent actions in the future.” (Ministry of Science Education and Technology of Kosovo 2018, p. 9) most closely fits the definition of de-radicalization.

When discussing terms, definitions and causes of radicalization leading to violence, one must turn towards two other very important concepts defined as “push factors” and “pull factors”. They are highly important for one to be able to fully understand the various and multi-strata factors and causes at the root of VE and radicalization that leads to violence (Ibid, p. 9).

*Push factors* are the “negative social, cultural, and political features of one’s societal environment that aid in ‘pushing’ vulnerable individuals onto the path of violent extremism.” Push factors are what are commonly known as “underlying/root causes” such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, discrimination, and political/economical marginalization. (Hassan 2012)

*Pull factors*, on the other hand, “are the positive characteristics and benefits of an extremist organization that ‘pull’ vulnerable individuals to join. These include the group’s ideology (e.g., emphasis on changing one’s condition through violence rather than ‘apathetic’ and ‘passive’ democratic means), strong bonds of brotherhood and sense of belonging, reputation building, prospect of fame or glory, and other socialization benefits.” (Ibid)

The last set of definitions is the one which is the most related to the nature of this guidebook. These concepts can clarify some of the roles, ideas, goals and actions needed to be undertaken by the actors included in the referral model/mechanism established mainly on municipal level. A vast portion of these concepts, mechanisms and processes are presented in the recent OSCE Guidebook “Understanding Referral Mechanisms in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism – *Navigating Challenges and Protecting Human Rights* – A Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe” (OSCE 2019). Let us present the key ones which are considered highly important for this document:

*Countering violent extremism (CVE)* is defined as “proactive, non-coercive actions to counter efforts by violent extremists to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers to violence and to address specific factors that facilitate and enable violent extremist recruitment and radicalization to violence.” (Ibid, p. 7)

*Former violent extremists*, also referred to as “*formers*”, are “individuals who have disengaged from a path to violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism and who can play a useful role in raising awareness and communicating credible counter-narratives”. (Ibid, p. 7)

*Referrals* “include individuals who are referred to multiagency or other multi-stakeholder programs and who display observable behaviors indicating they might be at risk of or vulnerable to engagement in VERLT or already on the path to VERLT. Referrals also include individuals whom a program refers to an agency, institution, organization, or professionals for an intervention or other support following a professional assessment of the individual’s risks, vulnerabilities, and protective factors.” (Ibid, p. 8)

*Referral mechanism, or model*, is defined as “a formal or informal mechanism involving practitioners and professionals from different disciplines and/or agencies and organizations that aims to identify, assess, assist, and treat those individuals showing signs of being at risk of or vulnerable to engagement in VERLT or already on the path to VERLT.” (Ibid, p. 9)

The above noted definitions are only the cornerstone of a successful referral mechanism/model which can play a crucial role in preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE) on community and state level. Throughout this guidebook, the need for definition of other concepts, mechanisms and processes will reoccur. In these cases, OSCE’s Guidebook previously described, together with the entire set of documents produced within the earlier phases of the E2P project, will also act as points of departure for further clarification.

We now move to the presentation of the Macedonian “Passage 4 Prevent” referral model for prevention from radicalization initially drafted by Marija Risteska (2019). In order to grasp the full picture of the model, one needs to present both the structure and the agency, and the process of their potential intertwining. In this concrete case, we should firstly turn towards the main institutions and other important actors involved comprising the mechanism’s structure. Secondly, it is of crucial importance to underline the main principles on which the referral model is based



in order to set out the boundaries in which the described institutions should operate. Thirdly, the interaction between the institutions when dealing with potential referrals needs to be carefully described in detail, in order to vividly distinguish between the roles, actions and responsibilities of the main actors comprising the referral mechanism.

### **3. The institutional mapping – a structural approach**

#### **3.1. The National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter Terrorism (CVE and CT)**

The NCCVECT is the national coordinative body responsible for monitoring and analyses of the situation in the country in regard to CVE and CT. The Committee is also responsible for coordinating the activities of institutions engaged in activities aimed towards preventing VE and acts of terrorism. It has been established with a governmental decision in early August 2017 (Risteska [2019](#))<sup>1</sup>. In terms of organization, the NCCVECT is composed of representatives of numerous relevant institutions, and it is rather vast. Representatives and their respective deputies from 21 state institutions sit in the Committee<sup>2</sup>. It is represented and headed by the National Coordinator for CVE and CT, strengthened with two deputy coordinators, one for CVE and another for CT respectively. The governmental decision in detail stipulates the role and the competences of the NCCVECT, emphasizing the role of the National Coordinator (Art. 3, Par. 3) and his deputy coordinators for CVE (Art. 4, Par. 3) and for CT (Art. 4, Par. 4). A very recent mapping report published by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and drafted by university professors Bornarova and Bogoevska (2019) underlines that lack of institutional capacity of the NCCVECT to fully exercise its competences and role. This report clearly states that “the current status of the National Coordinator and the deputy coordinators does not provide opportunity for organized institutional action”, and further stresses that some members of the Committee lack the needed capacities for monitoring, analyses, and coordination of P/CVE activities. This finding clearly points to the direction of the needed capacity building of this pivotal institution in order to resemble a resourceful and competent anchor which can coordinate and monitor local community endeavors aimed at P/CVE.

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<sup>1</sup> Decision on Establishment of National Committee for CVE and CT (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 98/2017) ; <http://www.slvesnik.com.mk/Issues/396f0f904d6a4151aa9595d441b6a903.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of the Interior; Ministry of Defense; Ministry of Justice; Directorate for Execution of Sanctions; Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Ministry of Local Self-Government; Ministry of Labor and Social Policy; Ministry of Education and Science; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Information Society and Administration; Ministry of Transport and Communications; Directorate for Financial Intelligence; Directorate for Financial Police; Customs Administration; The Intelligence Agency; The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organized Crime and Corruption; Center for Crisis Management; Directorate for Protection and Rescue; Agency for Electronic Communications; Agency for Youth and Sports and the Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Religious Groups

### 3.2. The municipalities

In the Macedonian constitutional and political system, the municipalities are the unique and very important cells of local self-government. In a rather specific one-tier system of organization of local self-government which is peculiar for Europe, the role of the municipalities is strong, as they are being allocated many sets of competencies which seriously influence the quality of daily life of Macedonian citizens. All municipalities' competencies are stipulated in Article 22 of the Law on Local Self-Government adopted in 2002, whose amendments can only be made through a qualified two-thirds majority in parliament. This legal prerequisite only strengthens the role and the independence of the municipalities. It is important to note that all 80 municipalities in North Macedonia enjoy equal status in terms of organizational and functional dependency of the central government, which makes their role clearer and simpler in comparison to other countries. One peculiarity which needs to be highlighted is the special role of the City of Skopje which is comprised by 10 municipalities, and which shares the competences in these fields and areas. The delineation of competences is guaranteed by the Law on the City of Skopje.

In regards to P/CVE, almost every extant model of a referral mechanism highly appreciated worldwide has the municipality and the local community at the very core of its existence (OSCE 2019, p. 31). Glancing at the current legislation in place, within the numerous competences enlisted in Article 22, there is no trace of clearly spelled-out CVE related activities, which is quite understandable. Still, a lot of current powers of the mayors and the municipal councils can be put in function to indirectly serve the purpose of prevention. Normative expectations should not be very high because topics such as CVE and CT are rather new for the Macedonian society, but for neighboring countries as well. Quoting Risteska (2019) “one should bear in mind that the policy work on countering violent extremism has just started in the country and the vagueness might origin from the low level of knowledge and awareness of the national policy for countering violent extremism and the absence of a system of response to violent extremism.” Regarding the current normative setting, the municipalities are required to prepare the local action plans which contribute to the overarching National strategy for CVE (NCCVET 2018)<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/cve\\_national\\_strategy\\_eng\\_translation\\_sbu.pdf](https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/cve_national_strategy_eng_translation_sbu.pdf)

### **3.3. The Centers for Social Work**

The third set of institutions which is of great importance to the referral mechanism is the centers for social work. The scope of work of the centers, as well as their main competences are thoroughly described in and based on the Law on Social Protection. The centers are established as public institutions in order to perform activities closely related to social protection. The minimum prescribed legal prerequisites to establish a center is the having as employees at least one social worker, psychologist, pedagogue and lawyer. All four categories of employees need to have completed both higher education training, as well as to possess working licenses in their respective fields. Furthermore, a center can be established either for one or more municipalities (Art. 133). The current legal setting is sufficient to provide minimum services to potential referrals. Psychosocial counseling, as well as well-established social protection agencies is one of the key constitutive parts of a functional referral mechanism (OSCE 2019, p. 36).

Moving to the competencies of these institutions, they are set in a quite wide manner, which contributes towards potential successful actions within the referral mechanism. According to current state legislation, the centers can detect, follow and investigate social issues and problems; they can assess the current state of a person or a family; they can encourage and undertake any kind of actions in order to prevent or remove any causes of social risk; the centers can produce plans and programs for social protection; they can apply and conduct various forms of social protection in order to help individuals or families in need; the centers can also develop extra-institutional forms of social protection etc. (Art. 135). Many of these competencies are closely related to the potential referral activities of the centers within a functional referral mechanism on local level. One of the biggest shortcomings in terms of P/CVE noted in the IOM institutional mapping is that although the centers plan preventive activities in their annual programs, no financial resources are allocated for these activities. Thus, no P/CVE activities have been implemented so far (Bornarova and Bogoevska 2018).

### **3.4. The Schools**

Not only in universal terms are schools one of the most important parts of the chain when speaking of referral mechanisms, but they are pivotal when the current Macedonian model is being set. The entire E2P project positions high schools in the very core of the early detection and warning system which can initially map referrals. “Countering violent extremism by

engaging frontline school workers (teachers, principals, and administrative officials) is a particularly useful method of countering violent extremism among youth, in that education or lack thereof is a critical component of whether someone will develop extremist views in their lifetime.” (Risteska 2019) Previous project outputs already focused on underlining the preparation of guidelines and protocols (CRPM 2019) for frontline school workers, empowering them to detect early signs of radicalization leading to VE. Furthermore, the project team focused on the creation of a training program for the same category of stakeholders, emphasizing their important role in and out of the classroom (CRPM 2019). Both documents were developed based on the knowledge acquired through the preparation of the Baseline study for the perceptions of front-line school workers and community officials from Skopje, Kumanovo, Tetovo and Gostivar on radicalization leading to violent extremism (Stojkovski, Stefanovski and Aleksoski 2018). Among many of the findings, the baseline study noted that frontline school workers face difficulties in differentiating the main concepts, mechanisms and processes present in the realm of radicalization leading to VE, as well as C/PVE related issues. Furthermore, the respondents were largely unfamiliar with the existence and the substance of the national strategies for CVE and CT.

### **3.5. The Health Centers**

When creating a multi-agency and multi-sectorial referral mechanism in order to prevent VE, the health approach is one of the most important components which should be included. The health centers in North Macedonia are operationalized in the Law on Health Protection<sup>4</sup>. They constitute a part of the network for primary healthcare in North Macedonia (Art. 17). Based on several demographic, municipal and operationalization criteria, the network of health centers in the country currently amounts to over 30 public institutions. The minimum activities which each health center conducts are the following: ER and home treatment; urgent dentistry treatments; preventive healthcare of children enrolled in preschool daycare and schools; polyvalent patronage and health statistics (Art 73, Par. 1). In regard to the referral mechanism, it is important to stress that according to the current legislation, healthcare workers employed and engaged in the health centers should encourage and coordinate prevention activities in order to enhance the health of the patients, and they should fully cooperate with other resident physicians

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<sup>4</sup> Law on Health Protection (clean text) <http://zdravstvo.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ZAKON-ZA-ZDRAVSTVENATA-ZASHTITA-zakluchno-so-br.-37-od-2016.pdf>

which treat patients on higher level of healthcare (i.e. secondary, tertiary level of health protection) (Art. 73, Par. 3).

A crucial component of the healthcare system which is of utmost importance for the referral mechanism is the mental health. The legal fundament for the operationalization of mental health is laid out in the Law on Mental Health<sup>5</sup>. One of the main shortcomings of this legislation is its inability to recognize the prevention of mental health, but it only deals with the mapping of the mental health institutions, their competences, and the basic principles on which current patients should be treated and protected. Even within this sphere, the recent mapping report issued by the IOM has noted that visibility and recognition on local level had not been secured (Bornarova and Bogoevska 2018).

### **3.6. The Religious Communities**

Within a viable multiagency referral mechanism, the religious communities play a pivotal role because of multiple important reasons. In the last decade, religious radicalization has been one of the main forms of radicalization in the country, with potential to lead to VE. Inclusion of the main religious communities in the referral mechanism, primarily the Islamic Religious Community (IRC) and the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) “will provide opportunity for education, demystification of radical religious narratives and constructing of persuasive contra narratives.” (Risteska 2019) In regard to the infrastructure and outreach of the two communities, they are one of the most organized and widespread non-state actors in the state. The IRC is composed of the Djemat Council, the muftiates, the Assembly of the Muftiates, the Riasset of the IRC, the Reis Ululema, the Assembly of the IRC and the Constitutional Council (El Farouki 2006). The entire territory of the country is divided into 13 muftiates. On the other hand, the MOC is headed by the Archbishop and the Holy Synod (MOC 2019). The entire territory of the country is divided into 8 eparchies. Both religious communities have a dense network of mosques and churches, cleric personnel and religious schools. Their influence is strong and both communities have at least several hundreds of thousands followers in the country.

Both religious communities have already participated in countering/preventing violent extremism (C/PVE) activities. Representatives of both communities have participated in the

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<sup>5</sup> Law on Menal Health (clean text) <http://zdravstvo.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/ZAKON-ZA-MENTALNO-ZDRAVJE-zakluchno-so-br.-150-od-2015.pdf>

several round table events organized by the OSCE Mission to Skopje and the NCCVET throughout the country during 2018. In the course of these events, the discussion among the stakeholders “have depicted that the role of religion in prevention from radicalization that can lead to violent extremism is very special to representatives of religious communities and the rest of the community recognizes the need for them to be involved on two levels: (I) through working with families; and (II) through educating the youth and offering alternative interpretation to radical teaching of Islam or Christianity.” (Risteska [2019](#)) Furthermore, a representative of the IRC has been involved as a member of the Steering Committee of the E2P project since the very beginning of implementation of activities.

This guidebook now proceeds with the elaboration of the main principles on which these institutions should approach the work on C/PVE in North Macedonia. Additionally, two holistic approaches to treating C/PVE will be fully elaborated: the “Do No Harm Approach” and the “Whole of Society” approach.

## **4. Main principles and approaches in the work of C/PVE**

### **4.1. The Principle of participation**

In a multiagency approach towards developing an encompassing referral mechanism, where all the previously mentioned state institutions and other actors play specific roles, the principle of participation is vastly important. It ensures that all the involved actors will bear their own share of responsibility, by timely and effectively implementing the assigned activities. Apart from the formal actors inscribed in the referral mechanism which is described below in detail, following the whole-of-society approach to P/CVE, a successful model is “largely dependent on the active and continued participation of a wide range of actors in its implementation. In addition to the key actors outlined above, other important stakeholders include educators/teachers, law enforcement, academics/researchers, former violent extremists, the information technology and social media sector, journalists and media specialists. It is also important to acknowledge the influence of counterproductive community actors and formal or informal grassroots organizations that might adversely impact the P/CVERLT agenda.” (OSCE 2018, p. 32) The design of the referral mechanism should ensure as diverse participation as possible, in terms of variety of actors (OSCE 2019, p. 55).

There is not a single type/model of referral mechanism which can function as a “one-size-fits-all”. All known referral mechanisms vary both in terms of composition and procedures. Still, when participation on diverse actors is at stake, NGOs and other civil society actors are usually involved. Furthermore “a broad range of agencies, organizations, practitioners, and professionals are likely to be involved (e.g., mental health professionals, social workers, teachers, faith-based groups, youth workers, and sometimes the police), as well as participants representing varied backgrounds and skill sets.” (Ibid, p. 61). The wide range of actors participating in this newly established mechanism, calls for a new approach to sharing information and collaborating, mainly through communication and information-sharing protocols. In regard to the Macedonian case, these new prospective protocols are described in detail in the following section. For participants of the newly established mechanism, especially those which have no familiarity of any kind with the security sector, training and capacity building should be provided in order for them to become aware of the privacy and sensitivity issues which they will be facing. As an example, the EU RAN Center of Excellences stresses that actors “need to know what risk they



carry, by becoming involved in the mechanism, and what the impact of not addressing it (i.e., the threat or risk) would be.” (EU RAN 2016, p. 9)<sup>6</sup>

What the OSCE Guidebook advises is that depending on the actors’ interest to participate in the referral mechanism, as well as depending on the availability of resources, it could be wise to limit the number of actors in line with their interest, dedication, as well as their drive for taking initiatives and their wider institutional impact (OSCE 2019, p. 63). In the Macedonian case, these institutions and other state actors are limited to those described in the previous sections: the NCCVET, the municipalities, the centers for social work, the health centers, the religious communities, as well as CSO and at times the police, as an external actor. These actors are very much in line with what Ranstorp and colleagues (2016) recommend in their work on P/CVE.

#### **4.2. The Principle of Constitutionality and Legality**

The second principle which is important for setting up a functional and coherent referral mechanism is the principle of constitutionality and legality. The importance of this principle stems from the need to have constitutional and legal embedding of all undertaken activities within the referral mechanism. The Macedonian Strategy for CVE recognizes these principles, underlining that all institutional capacities and capabilities “will be effective and accountable to the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and in line with constitutional, legal and procedural rules and values” (Government of RM 2018, p. 16).

International documents also stress the importance of the government’s role to secure a favorable environment for tackling CVE and CT. For example, the Global Counter Terrorism Fund (GCTF) recently encouraged governments to “review and revise their domestic legal frameworks, as appropriate, to ensure that tailored interventions, such as referral mechanisms . . . for at-risk individuals, may be developed and implemented.” (GCTF 2018)

Unlike many of the P/CVE related activities, one specific element of the referral mechanism, especially calls for a rigorous legal framework – the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework. A clear and straightforward M&E framework will help for the stakeholders to understand “what has worked, what has not worked, where shortcomings lie, and what can be

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<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-papers/docs/policy\\_paper\\_developing\\_local\\_prevent\\_framework\\_guiding\\_112016\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/policy_paper_developing_local_prevent_framework_guiding_112016_en.pdf)

improved.” (OSCE 2019, 98) Furthermore, a regular and independent external review of the mechanism will ensure wider community trust, as well as acceptance from a wider pallet of stakeholders (Ibid, p. 99). This is something to be achieved by the NCCVET and the Macedonian government in the future, after establishing the referral mechanism.

### **4.3. The Principle of Rule of Law**

The Principle of Rule of Law is very closely intertwined with the previously described Principle of Constitutionality and Legality. Still, it has to be followed cautiously, in order not to overlap with activities such as policing, intelligence and counterintelligence activities etc. All institutional and non-institutional actors should conduct their activities according to the principle of rule of law. This is highlighted in OSCE’s document dealing with the role of civil society in P/CVE in South East Europe (2018, p. 13). It is also underpinned in OSCE’s Ministerial Declaration on P/CVERLT from 2015 (pp. 1-3)<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the rule of law principle is also one piece of the puzzle which constitutes multidisciplinary efforts to prevent individuals from becoming radicalized to violence (OSCE 2014). Balancing between ~~civil liberties~~freedom and security is one of the most difficult tasks for democratic states in the era of expansion of radicalization leading to VE. Still, “the democratic, rule of law-based state has to find a balance between freedom and security.” (Schmid 2013, p. 39) Governments should promote rule of law together with good governance both as an instrument of foreign policy (i.e. in terms of CVE from a transnational perspective) and in domestic politics as an approach which is helpful in regard to countering violent extremism and terrorism (Ibid, p. 63).

The Rule of Law principle is also enshrined in the Macedonian CVE Strategy. Firstly, the document highlights that Republic of Macedonia is a strong state with well-established governmental institutions, following the rule of law, as well as other systems and procedures (Government of RM 2018, p. 19). Shortcomings in terms of rule of law are also detected. On municipal and local level, weak trust-bonds between local police and other local actors, as regards the rule of law, have been noted (Ibid, p. 27). Similar findings have been extrapolated from the reports following the round tables organized by the NCCVET and the OSCE Mission to Skopje. In almost all the cities where these events were held, participants commented on the low level of trust between police authorities and the local communities. Looking at the Macedonian

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.osce.org/cio/208216?download=true>

CVE strategy, one could infer that the government understands the rule of law principle in the complex context of CVE. In this vein, in cooperation with Hedayah – Center of Excellence in Countering Violent and the Global Center on Cooperative Security, the country became part of a larger project for receiving strategic support in the efforts to prevent VE: “Every functioning society requires rule of law: investigation, prosecution, trial and detention. CVE does not seek to replace these approaches but rather to complement them. Any government that relies solely upon traditional counter-terrorism approaches and fails at complementing the rule of law with measures addressing the root causes of violent extremism shall ultimately endanger its own national security. CVE is not a soft option, but rather a strategic imperative.” (Ibid, p. 10)

#### **4.4. The Principle of Respecting Human Rights and Freedoms**

The principle of respecting human rights and freedoms is at the core of C/PVE activities. All activities undertaken within the referral mechanism should be in line with internationally recognized human rights. Primarily, this refers to the individuals referred within the mechanism. The obligation to strongly uphold the principle of respecting human rights and freedoms lies primarily within the government. “Governments have the responsibility to ensure security and respect for human rights, as well as uphold the rule of law and implement policies that counter discrimination, marginalization and exclusion. These are considered important components of any strategy to counter VE threats” (UN 2016)<sup>8</sup>.

Every CVE program and strategy should “protect human rights and not infringe upon civil liberties, in particular, the freedoms of opinion and expression, association and religion or belief, and that they do not stigmatize particular communities or groups. These rights are particularly at stake in efforts to prevent CVE, and governments must take care that any qualified restrictions are legitimate, necessary and proportionate.” (OSCE TNTD and ODIHR, 2014) Apart from being careful in designing programs which do not infringe human rights, it is also of utmost importance to remember that the “promotion of human rights is in itself a powerful deterrent to violent extremism and terrorism.” (UN 2016)

Strictly abiding to the principle of protecting human rights and freedoms largely contributes to avoiding stigmatization of the referrals, as well as building community support for the referral

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/plan-action-prevent-violent-extremism>

mechanism. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that the referral mechanism is focused on addressing the vulnerabilities in individuals demonstrating behaviors and manifestations that can lead to VE, and not on individuals who are simply expressing ideological, political, or religious beliefs that are protected by human rights law. (OSCE 2019, p. 42) Every government, including the Macedonian, should pay due attention to these nuanced differences in order to be successful in its C/PVE activities.

A last but very important component within the principle of protecting human rights and freedoms is the continuous oversight over its implementation. Firstly, it needs to be ensured that all necessary legal and policy frameworks are in place in order to provide tailored interventions for [C/PVE](#) activities which include “regular independent review for potential human rights impact and other unintended effects.” (OSCE 2019, p. 67) Furthermore, it is very important to ensure that “periodic evaluations of both the mechanism’s process and its outputs and outcomes, include an independent assessment of potential human rights impact” (Ibid 2019, p. 63). As it is underpinned in the OSCE Guidebook on understanding referral mechanism “there should be an independent external review process that seeks to identify any potential human rights risks associated with such activities, including potential stigmatization of specific ethnic or religious groups, and the violation of rights to privacy, expression, and religion.” (Ibid 2019, p. 70)

Glancing at the CVE Strategy produced by the Macedonian Government, protection of the basic values, human rights and freedoms, through proactive institutions is one of the specific objectives underlined in the Strategy (Government of RM 2018, p. 30). The protection of human rights and freedoms is also one of the national common guiding principles which the Strategy is based upon (Ibid, p. 5).

#### **4.5. The Principle of Data-Protection and Privacy**

As it is clearly shown in the following section where the referral mechanism is described in detail, the principle of data protection and privacy holds a very peculiar position. This is primarily due to the large portion of information shared on rolling basis between the actors within the referral mechanism. A lot of this information is personal and sensitive. In this regard, it is important for all involved stakeholders to “promote a multidisciplinary approach and enable the sharing of information among different agencies and organizations about referred individuals within the parameters of data protection and privacy standards (OSCE 2019, p. 33).

Every country which fosters a referral mechanism is often facing legislation which provides different standards and levels of data protection and privacy in regard to adults and juveniles. For these reasons, it is important to identify the existing legal and policy frameworks and to pay attention to these potential differences. “Such frameworks should include data protection and privacy laws and information-sharing protocols between the police and non-law enforcement agencies and professionals, and be regularly and independently reviewed for compliance with data and privacy protection laws (Ibid, p. 57). Still, these different ethical and professional frameworks and goals can sometime hinder information sharing. Very often, actors such as the police, may find information-sharing problematic with other institutions, agencies or other actors from the referral mechanism which are not normally usual interlocutors and who do not foster the securitized approach. In these cases, it often happens that the police, data-protection agencies and similar institutions raise concerns about “violating the privacy or data protection rights of the concerned individual.” (Ibid, p. 61) In this manner, one should underline that “the right to privacy is enshrined in human rights law, and data collection and storage must abide by certain important principles and operate within certain parameters.” (OSCE 2017) Based on these notions, there are some key takeaways for every country engaging into CVE activities, including the Republic of North Macedonia: The system must ensure that “the necessary data protection and privacy laws and independent oversight or other accountability mechanisms are in place and in accordance with international human rights law that guarantees the right to privacy.” (OSCE 2019, p. 67) It is also advised that other appropriate steps should be taken to “enable effective and efficient information sharing among agencies, practitioners, and professionals involved in any referral mechanisms” (Ibid).

Turning to the Macedonian CVE Strategy, it should be highlighted that the document does not allocate any space to issues such as data protection or privacy. Only in one place, personal data protection is mentioned as a guiding principle (Government of RM 2018, p. 5), but no concrete measures, steps or actions are proposed or further elaborated. In a prospective revision of the Strategy, international standards in the field of data protection and privacy must be taken into consideration.

#### 4.6. The “Do No Harm” Approach to CVE

Apart from the aforementioned principles, two approaches to dealing with CVE are especially important. The first approach which is widely recognized by an array of stakeholders is the so called “Do No Harm” approach. Policymakers and practitioners should always have in mind the potential negative consequences when undertaking CVE-related activities. In order for this to be avoided, the OSCE Guidebook has underlined six important considerations: “(1) Building support from the community whose participation in and engagement with the mechanism will be critical to its effectiveness and sustainability; (2) Focusing on behaviors that can lead to VE and not on legally protected beliefs and ideas; (3) Avoiding stigmatizing a particular religious or ethnic group; (4) Delineating an appropriate role for law enforcement, particularly given the risks of inappropriately criminalizing individuals referred to a mechanism that is designed for those who have not committed a crime; (5) Navigating social norms and attitudes around psychosocial care, which typically forms an integral component of referral mechanisms; and (6) Building on existing institutional capacities among a diverse array of agencies and organizations not geared specifically to CVE and coping with the challenges presented when such capacities and expertise are limited.” (OSCE 2019, p. 12) In the Macedonian context, all stakeholders involved in the referral mechanism need to follow as closely as possible these considerations in order to achieve respectable results.

Within the P/CVE approaches, the “Do No Harm” approach is often paired with the principles of “listening”, the local ownership and accountability approach, as well as international assistance (Anderson et al. 2012). If these approaches are combined, intertwined, and taken seriously into consideration, both in adoption of policy and its implementation “they could significantly influence P/ CVE approaches.” (Ernstorfer 2018, p. 50)<sup>9</sup> Another set of principles which needs to be paired with the “Do No Harm” approach are the so called RAFT principles: Respect, Accountability, Fairness and Transparency (CDA 2016)<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> [https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Dialogue\\_Chapters/dialogue13\\_violentextremism\\_ernstorfer\\_com.pdf](https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Dialogue_Chapters/dialogue13_violentextremism_ernstorfer_com.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <http://live-cdacollaborative.pantheonsite.io/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Do-No-Harm-DNH-Participant-Manual-2016.pdf>

It is very interesting to see how various stakeholders define the “Do No Harm” approach to CVE. For example, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, defines “Do No Harm” as a way “to minimize unintended harm, [where] activities should be based on robust analysis; careful selection of partners, methods and communication strategies; and be grounded in respect for human rights” (DFAT 2016, p. 2)<sup>11</sup>. The first guiding and overarching principle of DFAT’s approach to CVE is that “in delivering any development investment in a country affected by violent extremism, officers should ensure it does no harm. All reasonable steps should be taken to ensure investments do not inadvertently exacerbate conditions underpinning violent extremism, or cause harm to partners or staff” (Ibid 2016, p. 3). One of the most nuanced explanations of the “Do No Harm” approach comes from Georgia Holmer who links this concept to peace-building and development. She highlights the vast importance of the “Do No Harm”, defining it as an entire methodology “which helps practitioners think through the short- and long-term effects of certain initiatives or programs on a community. This practice ensures that well-intentioned programs do not have unanticipated negative consequences. Such consideration would add value to the implementation of CVE projects, especially those— such as community policing efforts—that are borrowed from and tested in more developed contexts, the viability of which may be lost in translation...” (Holmer 2013, p. 5)<sup>12</sup>

As a country which is aspiring to join the EU, institutions engaged in the referral mechanism in North Macedonia should also look towards European standards and values. In a document dating from 2014, the European Commission (EC) pairs the “Do No Harm” with the “Do Maximum Good” approach. They are also referred to as the “twin principles”. The idea of this combination is to guarantee that CVE interventions will not “cause human rights violations, exacerbate divisions between institutions and communities, and worsen existing grievances.” (EC 2014, p. 20)<sup>13</sup> Still, one must underline that the idea is not to jeopardize the effectiveness and the efficiency of the referral mechanism, or any other broader CVE activities, resulting with no action being taken (Khalil and Zeuthen 2016). If the implementers of CVE need to decide between doing no harm and talking no activity on hand, or undertaking activities which might

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<sup>11</sup> <https://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Documents/development-approaches-counter-terror-extremism.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR336-Countering%20Violent%20Extremism-A%20Peacebuilding%20Perspective.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/eu-ct-cve-guidelines-20171213\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/eu-ct-cve-guidelines-20171213_en.pdf)

result with some harm being done, probably it “would be more appropriate to adopt a ‘conflict sensitive’ approach, which aims to minimize harm.” (EC 2014, p. 20)

Looking at the Macedonian Strategy for CVE, the “Do No Harm” approach is not being included in the document. This does not *a priori* mean that the relevant stakeholder will not abide to its principle, but it is more than useful that this approach be clearly underlined in any other prospective version of this document. This will only reaffirm the commitments of the national and local actors to substantially tackle radicalization leading to VE.

#### **4.7. The “Whole of Society Approach” to CVE**

The second important approach, referred to as the whole of society approach, is one of the cornerstones of contemporary CVE activities, especially in regard to developing a functional referral mechanism. One of the most overarching definitions describes the whole-of-society approach as “an approach to preventing and countering violent extremism advocated by policymakers and practitioners that envisions a role for multiple sectors and civil society actors in prevention, intervention, and de-radicalization/disengagement rehabilitation programs. (OSCE 2018, p. 7) Furthermore, the OSCE Guidebook on referral mechanisms defines the whole-of-society approach as an “an approach to CVE advocated by policymakers and practitioners that envisions a role for multiple sectors and civil society actors in prevention, intervention, disengagement, and rehabilitation programs. (OSCE 2019, p. 9) The main message which the two definitions convey is the inclusion of multiple sectors and multiple actors within the referral mechanism. This is one of the central ideas of the proposed Macedonian referral mechanism as well.

Recent research has shown that countries which have decided to substantially engage in CVE activities have dedicated increased attention to operationalizing referral mechanisms following the whole-of-society approach. The central idea is to “emphasize the importance of a multi-sector, multidisciplinary, and multilevel collaboration” (Ibid, p. 12) between different stakeholders. Founded on evidence-based research, it has been shown that successful CVE initiatives are “rooted in a whole-of-society approach that harnesses the influence and efforts of civil society, in particular, families, women, youth, educators, and religious and community leaders.” (OSCE 2018, p. 8) These are the principle actors on which the Macedonian referral mechanism is pillared. Furthermore, it is important to stress the pivotal role of civil society, as it



is shown in the following section of this Guidebook. Civil society actors are very often credible, well-established, well positioned and rather experienced in “working with specific groups to help identify and address the grievances that make individuals more vulnerable to the influence of violent extremist groups.” (Ibid, p. 10)

Two characteristics of the whole-of-society approach are critically important. The first refers to its inclusiveness (Ibid, p. 26), while the latter is related to its effectiveness. In this vein, one should underpin the importance of the effectiveness which largely depends on “the active and continued participation of a wide range of actors in its implementation.” (Ibid, p. 32) Apart from all the actors participating in the Macedonian referral mechanism explained in detail in the previous section, many of which come from the side of the state, other important stakeholders which can occasionally be included in the referral mechanism are also “academics/researchers, former violent extremists, the information technology and social media sector, journalists and media specialists.” (Ibid)

It is widely recognized in the region of South East Europe and beyond, that the whole-of-society approach should be positioned in the center of CVE related activities (OSCE 2019, p. 91). This is why every referral mechanism should fit-in within the overall societal approach. Glancing at the Macedonian Strategy on CVE, the whole-of-society approach is considered as one of the common guiding principles for dealing with CVE, aligned under the principle of comprehensive national approach which is comprised of the Whole of Government Approach (WGA) referring to the Government and all its institutions, as well as the Whole of Society Approach (WSA) (Government of RM 2018, p. 5). Apart from mentioning briefly this important approach, the Macedonian CVE strategy does not allocate any further space for this issue.

## 5. The Macedonian Referral Mechanism – The Dynamic Approach

Before delving deeper into the agency of the referral mechanism, let us just take one step back and remind ourselves what a referral mechanism actually is. The OSCE Guidebook on understanding referral mechanisms defines it as “a formal or informal mechanism involving practitioners and professionals from different disciplines and/or agencies and organizations that aims to identify, assess, assist, and treat those individuals showing signs of being at risk of or vulnerable to engagement in VE or already on the path to VE” (OSCE 2019, p. 9).

The aforementioned sections already presented the key institutions which will be involved in the referral mechanism, underlining that there is institutional capacity in place, albeit possible improvements had already been underpinned. The core strength of the elaborated proposal is that we are discussing a “referral mechanism that is anchored at the community level and foresees a multi-agency structure allowing for risk assessment and support of the individual from different perspectives: psychological, educational, social, health, cultural and religious” (Risteska [2019](#)). An additional key strength of the proposed mechanism is the foreseen “cooperation between the involved multiple agencies that is clearly structured and regulated with a protocol and non-disclosure agreement that sets the rules for information sharing between the institutions about the individual and data protection, including non-disclosure to other agencies outside the referral mechanism.” (Ibid) All protocols and non-disclosure agreements defining the rules for information sharing, as well as data and privacy protection are being explained below and added as annexes at the end of the guidebook. An additional strength of the referral mechanism in terms of efficacy and efficiency is that “the proposed model does not foresee establishment of a new body but upgrading the scope of work of one of these bodies.” (Ibid) Instead of creating new bodies on municipal level which will be both money and time consuming, we opted for using the currently established structure and providing new agency and dynamics between the existing actors.

A very important contextual condition on which the success of the entire referral mechanism is largely based is the political setting, constituted mainly of the will of the key political actors that the proposed mechanism succeeds. For these reasons, it is of utmost importance to engage with relevant “policymakers, legislators, practitioners, and members of the community to help ensure the necessary legal, political, budget, and community support for the mechanism (OSCE 2019, p.

63). In reference to the political backing in North Macedonia, the crucial responsibility lies within the NCCVET. This accounts for primarily and central level and within providing strategic guidance and communication with government. On local level, it is the “strategic referral board consisting of the President of the Municipal Council, the Secretary General of the municipality and the Head of Public [Activities](#) Department that provide the political backing.” (Risteska [2019](#)) These relationships are discussed in detail below. In this manner, the referral mechanism on local level will be synchronized and coordinated with the Macedonian CVE Strategy as a guiding document.

We now continue with the presentation of the proposed referral mechanism as designed and proposed in the document “Passage4Prevent” – Referral Mechanism for Prevention from Radicalization written under the auspices of the “Educate to Prevent” EU funded project. Every actor within the mechanism has specific roles, competencies and responsibilities, all of them being peculiar and largely contributing to the prevention process.

### **5.1. The National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism (NCCVECT)**

Subsection 3.1 already described the structure of the NCCVECT in detail. It is now important to focus on its main roles and competencies within the referral mechanism. As a central institution, the Committee provides the aforementioned political support, the expertise, and creates the liaison with the Strategic Board whose competences are described below in detail. Furthermore, apart from the previously described principles and approaches, the Committee needs to abide also to several other principles such as: secure and safe citizens of the Republic of Macedonia; building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions that will support and develop public trust therein; ensuring an environment that is conducive to enhanced economic development; ensuring national unity and communities resilient to radicalization and violent extremism; and the principle of a comprehensive national approach. The NCCVECT needs to focus on the following main activities and competences:

- To ensure the coordination of the community-based referral mechanisms with the National Strategy for CVE;
- To coordinate and direct the activities of the Strategic Board;

- To offer expert support directly through the National Coordinator for CVE and CT and the Deputy Coordinator for CVE;
- To create a special proposed expert group composed from psychologists, social workers, theologians and mental health professionals specialized in radicalization that can lead to VE;
- To collect data on radicalization trends, needs for training and raising awareness and improvement of public services needed to strengthen resilience to VE and make this data available to the research and academic community in order to stimulate proposals for improvement and feasibility of the referral mechanism;
- To set up a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework that will produce data filtered by various criteria;
- Conceptualizing and participating in awareness raising activities (Risteska [2019](#) and OSCE 2019)

## **5.2. The Expert Team**

The Expert Team is one of the components which were not described previously, due to the reason that it will be deliberately created to serve the referral mechanism, and its members come from various institutions described before. According to the proposed mechanisms, the team should be composed of the following expert profiles: psychologist, social worker, health practitioner with preferred experience with VE (e.g. a psychiatrist), theologian with deeper understanding of extremist narratives and religious misinterpretations and a youth worker with proven experience in mentoring vulnerable youth (Risteska [2019](#)). In compliance with the proposed referral mechanism, the psychologist should be nominated by the management of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. This should be done in consultation with other relevant stakeholders, following inter, and intra – government communication principles (Rosand et al. 2018). The social worker is expected to be nominated by the same institution, following a similar cooperation model (HSCP)<sup>14</sup>. Furthermore, the health practitioner should come from the Ministry of Health, preferably in coordination with the largest and most prominent psychiatric clinic in the country which specialization in both juvenile and adult radicalization prevention. The broader public health approach to CVE should provide sufficient scope conditions for a

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<sup>14</sup> [https://hertsscb.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/role\\_sw\\_violent\\_extreme.pdf](https://hertsscb.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/role_sw_violent_extreme.pdf)

successful referral mechanism (OSCE 2019, pp. 12-3). The theologians add irreplaceable value to the Expert Team, especially in North Macedonia where perceptions for religious radicalization are significantly higher in comparison to other forms/types of radicalization (Stojkovski, Stefanovski and Aleksoski 2018). The two theologians should be nominated by the largest two religious communities in the country – the MOC and the IRC respectively. Lastly, the youth worker with experience in mentoring vulnerable groups should be nominated by the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy.

The two main competences of the Expert Team are:

- To undertake appropriate risk assessments; and
- To provide mobile support to the referral boards on local level. (Risteska [2019](#))

Risk assessment is one of processes which had not been defined at the very beginning of this Guidebook. Therefore, risk assessment can be defined as “the process involving the systematic gathering and interpretation of information pertaining to an individual to provide data for properly trained professionals to make decisions relevant to the likelihood that a specific individual will engage in harmful action and to assess the nature and severity of the harm.” (OSCE 2019, p. 9) On the other hand, each referral board, when in need, can ask for support from the Expert Team which can be delivered in the form of training, advising or counseling. In accordance with the designed referral mechanism, these requests should be channeled through the NCCVECT which subsequently decides on a case-by-case approach when and how the expertise will be provided (Risteska 2019).

### **5.3. The Strategic Board**

The Strategic Board is another piece of the referral mechanism puzzle which had not been described previously. Unlike the Expert Team members who should come from central institutions, all Strategic Board members come from the municipalities as the basic single-tier form of local self-government in North Macedonia. In the design of the referral mechanism it is envisaged that three members from the municipality should sit in the Strategic Board: the Secretary General of the Municipality, the President of the Municipal Council and the Head of the Sector for Public Works (Risteska [2019](#)). Representatives from plurality of municipal level institutions or agencies are at the core of every CVE referral mechanism (OSCE 2019, p. 29)

The Secretary General of the Municipality should be responsible for the following issues:

- To hold competencies on legal issues;
- To deal with data protection issues;
- To be responsible for the inter-agency protocols for cooperation and coordination;
- To coordinate the drafting of the local action plans for implementation of the Macedonian CVE Strategy;
- To draft an annual plan for local CVE activities;
- To produce work reports and submit them to the NCCVECT

The President of the Municipal Council:

- Promotes the importance of CVE activities on local level in Municipal Council sessions; and
- Decides on the municipal budget needed for the functioning of the Referral Board, the delivery of services, awareness raising and training (following the rules for proposing and adopting municipal budgets stemming from the Law on Local Self-Government and other applicable legislation)

The Head of the Sector for Public Works:

- Analyzes and monitors the state-of-play in regard to VE on municipal level;
- Coordinates the activities of the Referral Board members and the service providers;
- Is responsible for planning and overseeing implementation of activities by the Referral Board and the service providers regarding implementation of the individual support plans; (Risteska [2019](#))

“Going Local” is one of the most important steps which considerably increase the potential success of the referral mechanism. In this manner, the local components of the referral mechanism should not mirror the organization of the local self-government by default, but they should be established in places where considerable threat of radicalization leading to VE has been detected. While assessing which areas should be covered, the methodological example from

the Canadian province of British Columbia can be taken into consideration (Government of Canada 2019)<sup>15</sup>.

Apart from the individual roles and competencies of the members of the Strategic Board, the collective body has also numerous collective responsibilities in the process of CVE. The following proposed competencies should be considered as the most important. The Strategic Board should:

- Provide guidance on public relations and community awareness-raising activities;
- Provide capacity-building activities for the referral boards;
- Determine the CVE priorities on local level;
- Decide on confidentiality, information sharing and non-disclosure of information;
- Share anonymous information on cases, trends and developments in the municipality with the law enforcement representatives and the NCCVECT; (NB: the Strategic Board shares information in line with the agreed information sharing agreement and the Law on Data Protection with the police, and the police shares relevant (non-classified) information for prevention with the Strategic Board following the Law on Free Access to Information)
- Decide on the budget for local CVE activities;
- Decide on establishment of new, or expansion of the current scope of existing services that strengthen community resilience to radicalization leading to VE;
- Performs data collection on issues pertinent to VE (e.g. number of cases, resources at disposal, state-of-play regarding other capacities involved in the referral mechanism etc.) (Risteska [2019](#))

It needs to be highlighted that the Strategic Board is the central local component of the referral mechanism which provides the needed political support on local level. Taking into consideration the level of politicization of local level government in North Macedonia, one should foresee that in many cases, the central and the local government actors will belong to different political options. It is up to all stakeholders involved in the referral mechanism to secure the trust and the information-sharing and collaboration activities among the actors without daily politics interfering or undermining CVE activities.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/bt/cc/>

#### 5.4. The Case Management Board

The Case Management Board (or Case Assessment Board) is unarguably at the core of the referral mechanism, bearing the largest professional responsibility in the field. In the proposed structure of the mechanism, it is envisaged that the Case Management Board should be consisted of six members, professionals coming from different backgrounds, mirroring those of the Expert Team on central level. *One psychologist* should be appointed by the local/regional Center for Social Work. Alternatively, in municipalities where these centers do not exist, or their resources are scarce, the psychological support can be provided by members of the school support staff from one of the high schools or elementary schools on the territory of the municipality. *One social worker* should also be appointed to the Case Management Board by the territorially competent Center for Social Work. *One health practitioner* should be appointed by the competent Health Center performing activities on territory of the municipality in question. It is advised that the health practitioner should preferably have a background in psychiatry, or hold a specialization in juvenile and/or adult radicalization prevention. *Two religious community representatives* should be nominated by the largest two religious communities in the country – the MOC and the IRC respectively. In this manner, both Orthodox Christianity and Islam as two largest faiths in North Macedonia will be represented. Differing from the Expert Team on central level, the religious community representatives should not necessarily be theologians, but local priests coming from the respective eparchy/muftiate, visible, known and respected by the local community where the Case Management Board is functioning. The last member of the Board should be a *representative of the local community*, representing the specific ethnic community to which the referral (i.e. the individual being referred to the referral mechanism) belongs. “Five of the six professionals are permanent members of the Board whereas the community representative is interchangeable depending on the individual that is being assessed and supported through the preventive model.” (Risteska [2019](#))

This complex professional body has the following competencies according to the proposed referral mechanism:

- To appoint a case manager and a team; and
- To conduct risk assessment and to decide on a support plan for the individual that has entered the referral mechanism;



In regard to the appointment of the case manager, the Board appoints one person coming from the six professionals, accompanied by two other members in order to perform a psychosociological risk assessment of radicalization on the referral. “Based on the assessment and the presentation of the findings to the board, the members decide where the individual is to be referred and what type of support the mechanism should provide, determine how the monitoring and evaluation of progress will be assessed, and will charge the case manager with a plan for reporting back on results.” (Ibid) In exceptional cases, “the case manager or other relevant members of the assessment team might design a new intervention for the individual and/or recommend that the individual participate in an existing CVE program, such as ones focused on trust building with local police, developing online counter-narratives, trainings for youth on the negative implications of joining violent extremist groups, and providing non-violent alternatives for young people showing signs of VE” (OSCE 2019, p. 86)

### **5.5. The Case Manager**

The last constitutive element of the proposed Macedonian referral mechanism is the Case Manager. As described previously, the Manager is one of the members of the Case Management Board. Together with the two other members of the Board, working as a team, the Case Manager conducts the following activities:

- Heads and organizes the expert team work;
- Conducts the case assessment;
- Provides individual and community assessment;
- Develops individual support plans including specific goals and tasks for the task implementers; and
- Oversees the implementation of the entire set of activities related to the individual referral (Risteska [2019](#))

### **5.6. The Referral Process**

The five bodies/elements comprising the referral mechanism should be continuously engaged in constant communication and exchange of information regarding potential referrals. The OSCE Guidebook on referral mechanisms has identified a basic structure (roadmap) of how a scholarly

example for a referral process looks like. The key elements of the referral process are the following:

- I. The Referral
  - a) Avenues:
    - i. Online
    - ii. Hotline
    - iii. In person
  - b) Awareness raising
  - c) Voluntary nature
- II. Assessment of risks and vulnerabilities
  - a) How to assess?
  - b) Who to assess?
- III. Appointment of case owner
- IV. Development of intervention or broader support plan
  - a) What types?
  - b) Who implements?
- V. Monitoring and evaluation (OSCE 2019, p. 73)

The complex referral process begins with the first phase of the so called “Initiation”. Following the three proposed avenues for referring an individual to the system, an initial meeting of the Case Management Board should follow, and a Case Manager with two other Board members will be assigned to follow the case. Delving deeper into the three ways of including a referral into the proposed mechanism, let us begin with the filling of the online form.

*The online referral form* should be available on the website of the municipality and should contain a set of information which is provided in Annex 1. In many cases, referral information could come from teachers, other frontline school workers, religious communities, sport centers etc. Members of the community and other professionals should be given the opportunity to make referrals through an online form, mainly due to its efficiency and efficacy (Ibid, p. 74). “The referral form can be available on the web site of the municipality with a clear statement that the referral is completely confidential and any information given in the mechanism will be accessible only by the Referral Board. The referral may be treated as anonymous, but contact

information must be provided so that the Referral Board can contact the person making the referral. Furthermore, there should be a clear disclaimer that the information will not be shared with law enforcement or intelligence agencies unless there is a direct risk to public safety, in which case the municipality is obliged to cooperate with law enforcement. The referral form should also contain information on what follows after the referral. This includes a description of the process that outlines that the individual that is referred will be approached and if s/he agrees to be supported through the referral mechanism then a risk assessment will be undertaken and an individual support plan will be developed, tailor made to the needs of the referred individual.” (Risteska [2019](#) and OSCE 2019, pp. 74-5)

*The hotline* is the second avenue through which individuals can be referred. The main responsibility for opening a special hotline for CVE issues should lie within the municipality. As an alternative, taking a step forward, the municipality can open a hotline/helpline through which it can “provide important psychological support and advice to families, relatives and friends of individuals who are linked to violent extremism.” (Ibid) Furthermore, through inclusion of civil society in the referral mechanism activities, the operation of the hotline can be transferred to NGO or other non-state actors which show strong interest in CVE community service. Taking into consideration the specific Macedonian context and the multiethnic, multilingual and multi-confessional character of the society, according to the specific municipality where the referral mechanism is established, the hotlines can be operated in several languages such as Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Romani, Serbian, Aromanian, Bosnian etc. This multilingual approach is recommended “in order to create trust and psychological support, and to better provide expert counseling on how to act and who to turn to in a given situation.” (Risteska [2019](#))

The number of countries which have established a CVE hotline is growing. Countries such as Austria, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany and Luxemburg have been among the frontrunners (EU RAN 2017)<sup>16</sup>. One of the alternatives to a single hotline described in the previous paragraph could be the so-called double-pronged approach which foresees two hotlines, the first – a government – run hotline, and the latter – a civil society run hotline. This approach might be appropriate in order to cater “both those people who feel more comfortable contacting a

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<sup>16</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran\\_yf-c\\_h-sc\\_working\\_with\\_families\\_safeguarding\\_children\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-h-and-sc/docs/ran_yf-c_h-sc_working_with_families_safeguarding_children_en.pdf)

government hotline and those who prefer speaking to a non-governmental, community-led one.” (OSCE 2019, p. 75) A very vivid example of a hotline is presented in Annex 2, borrowed from the Austrian Extremism Information Center.

*The referral from an institution* is the last of the three avenues through which an individual can be referred in the referral mechanism. If any of the numerous stakeholders working with youth, such as teachers, other frontline school workers, health practitioners, representatives of religious communities or coaches in sports clubs notice that an individual may become vulnerable to radicalization leading to VE, they can inform the municipality in person, or through one of the two other avenues described previously (Risteska 2019). Based on the research results on the perception of frontline school workers in high schools in several parts of North Macedonia (Stojkovski, Stefanovski and Aleksoski 2019) it is recommended that schools include the option of the student to be referred to the preventive mechanism as one of the pedagogical measures.” (Risteska 2019)

The *second step* of the *first phase* is the *initial meeting*. As soon as an individual is referred, the Case Management Board should arrange the initial meeting. The primary goal of the initial meeting is that the individual is encouraged to materialize on the intervention and support offered through the program. The main objective of the initial meeting is to obtain voluntary consent from the referred individual. In cases when the referral is a juvenile, a parental consent, or consent from the guardian should be required in order for the individual to go through the process of assessment and receive intervention through the referral mechanism.

The *second phase* is the *assessment of risks and vulnerabilities*. The *first step* in this phase is the *risk assessment*. Risk assessment is defined as “the process involving the systematic gathering and interpretation of information pertaining to an individual to provide data for properly trained professionals to make decisions relevant to the likelihood that a specific individual will engage in harmful action and to assess the nature and severity of the harm.” (OSCE 2019, p. 9) The risk assessment framework in the Macedonian referral mechanism should be based on a plethora of primary and secondary sources:

- Interviews with the referred individual, family members, peers, teachers and other professional and private contacts who are closely affiliated to the referral;

- Observations of the social network of the referral – a basic Social Network Analysis (SNA) linking his contacts and individuals;
- In-depth analysis of the referral’s files related to his/her social, health and educational activities, gathered from the respective institutions which participate in the referral mechanism;

These types of sources “provide a multidimensional and objective evaluation of the referred individual” (Risteska [2019](#)). The outcome of the assessment should lead to the development of a support plan that is tailor made to the specific needs of the assessed individual. Since some of the sources are secondary, relying on the files and work of the different institutions included in the model with the individual prior to him/her being referred to the referral mechanism, the institutions need to sign an information sharing agreement that regulates privacy of the personal data shared between referral board members.

Still, all relevant stakeholders included in the process must take into consideration one thing, that relevant risk assessment tools face additional challenges:

- VE is a rare occurrence and although many individuals may fit a particular profile, the vast majority of them will never engage in such violence;
- None of the existing tools has been empirically validated — in part because of the low number of VE incidents; and
- Statistical analysis of the relevant risk factors associated with VE is made more complicated because “motivations for engaging in violent extremism may be dependent on varying cultural and historical contexts,” which risk assessment tools cannot take into account. (RTI – The Application of Risk Assessment Tools in OSCE 2019, pp. 80-1)

The *second step* of the *second phase* projects the development of an *individual support plan*. It is at the core of a referral mechanism to design, deliver, monitor and evaluate individually tailored “support plans that address the risk factors and vulnerabilities of those deemed most at risk of or vulnerable to VERLT and help steer the referred individuals down a different, non-violent path.” (Ibid, p. 29)

The main added value of the individualized support plan is that it is tailored to the identified vulnerabilities through the risk assessment, and takes into consideration the age, gender and

cultural background of the referral, as well as the socio-economic and the cultural characteristics of the environment where the referral is performing his/her daily activities, acting as important structural factors which influence the attitudes and the activities of the referred individual. The support plan should also clearly identify the “services to which the individual is referred, the frequency the individual should attend them and the short-term and long-term objectives of the support plan as well as the methods of monitoring and collection of data for measuring progress of the support provided to the individual.” (Risteska [2019](#)) This entire process needs to be closely followed and overseen by the appointed Case Manager and the other two members from the Case Management Board. The Case Manager should also act as a dedicated point of contact between the referral, his/her family, and the broader community (OSCE 2019, p. 60).

The services which must be taken into consideration to be included in every individual support plan are the following:

- Psychological counseling;
- Ideological and theological mentoring programs;
- Training and recreation such as: attending sport activities, engaging into arts, playing music instruments, attending theater, enrolling into programs such as vocational training, trainings for increasing employment skills etc.);
- Attending programs which emphasize conflict mediation, training management, tolerance and diversity management; and in some cases
- Receiving addiction treatment tackling the use of drugs, alcohol or treatment of gambling habits (Risteska [2019](#))

The *last phase (third phase)* of the referral mechanism is the *support phase*. This phase consists of two separate components. The *first step* is the implementation of the *support plan*. This process is managed by the Case Manager, but foresees the involvement of a vast number of professionals: social workers, health worker, youth workers, religious workers, school teachers, other frontline school workers, coaches from sport clubs, civil society representatives, as well as other profiles established in visible in the local community. The individual inputs coming from the different types of stakeholders can deliver separate interventions within the entire individual support plan. Another important element of the support phase is the time frame. The support offered through the referral mechanism should be delivered in a predefined time frame.

Nonetheless, depending on the implementation of the individual support plan, as well as on the feedback and the reactions from the referral, the “plan will be accordingly adapted to the needs of the beneficiary, including a possible revision of the time frame.” (Risteska [2019](#))

The *second step* of the *third phase* is the *reporting on the progress of the referral*. It had been already mentioned previously that a comprehensive plan for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is one of the most important components of the referral mechanism. This plan is vital for insuring a prospective effective support for individuals vulnerable to radicalization leading to VE. A comprehensive M&E framework should “track, including by gender and age, the number and disposition of referrals (noting the types of interventions or components of broader support plans) with which service providers were involved, and include available outcome indicators such as ones related to employment, education, health, and participation in societal and community affairs.” (OSCE 2019)

One of the main goals of this step is to gather both qualitative and quantitative data on referrals, gathered from the questionnaires filled personally by the referred individuals, but also by their relatives, peers and other knowledgeable persons. This activity will contribute towards increased knowledge in terms of the trends concerning CVE regarding the number, character, level of violent incidents, the forms and types of extremist rhetoric used by numerous stakeholders in society, as well as other useful information which can be further used to substantially tackle the problem of radicalization leading to VE. (Risteska [2019](#)) In this vein, these dedicated efforts will provide contributions for resolving the highlighted CVE problem in North Macedonia. Only through coordinated and dedicated efforts of all involved stakeholders in the referral mechanism, through the whole-of-society approach, the country will manage to deal with this burning problem sooner rather than later.

## **Annexes**

### Annex 1

Example of an online referral form based on the ReDirect – Calgary model<sup>17</sup>

Your referral is completely confidential and any information you give us will be accessible only to the Passage4Prevent mechanism. It is not shared with law enforcement or intelligence agencies unless there is a direct risk to public safety (which is very rare), in which case we are obliged to co-operate with law enforcement investigators.

If you wish, your referral can be anonymous to the person you are referring, however we will still need to collect your contact information so we can contact you if we need more information.

Following your referral, we will assess the information you have provided and will contact the person you are referring.

### Annex 2

Example of a hotline based on the Austrian Extremism Information Center

The Macedonian Extremism Information Centre was established in June 2020 and is operated by CRPM, the Center for Research and Policy Making. It is staffed by a three-person multidisciplinary and multilingual team. The hotline provides advice and referral to family counseling, youth workers, and employment services, and also offers face-to-face counseling. It is open between 9 am and 6 pm on weekdays.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.redirect.cpsevents.ca/make-a-referral/>



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