



Republic of North Macedonia  
Government of the Republic of North Macedonia



NATIONAL COMMITTEE  
FOR COUNTERING  
VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND  
COUNTER-TERRORISM

# National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism

## 2023-2027



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## 2023-2027

## CONTENTS

TERMINOLOGY .....	2
1. INTRODUCTION.....	4
2. OUR EFFORTS IN THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM .....	6
3. PREPARATION PROCESS AND STRATEGY STRUCTURE .....	6
4. GOAL, VISION, MISSION.....	7
GOAL .....	7
VISION .....	7
MISSION .....	7
5. GUIDING PRINCIPLES .....	8
6. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS .....	10
6.1 Strengths.....	11
6.2 Impacts and environment .....	11
6.3 Challenges and opportunities.....	12
7. PUSH AND PULL FACTORS FOR CVE AND CT .....	14
8. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES .....	15
9. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND MEASURES .....	16
1. PREVENTION.....	16
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities.....	16
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.2 Raising public awareness .....	17
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.3 Strengthened and resilient communities.....	18
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.4 Countering online radicalisation that lead to terrorism .....	19
2. PROTECTION.....	19
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.1 Proactive institutions for the protection of fundamental values, human rights and freedoms and increased citizen trust in institutions.....	19
3. ENFORCEMENT .....	20
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.1 Border protection measures .....	20
4. RESPONSE.....	21
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.1 Disengagement/Deradicalisation .....	21
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.2 Reintegration through resocialisation and rehabilitation .....	21
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.3 Strengthened coordination and promotion of cooperation.....	22
10. PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION .....	23
11. MONITORING AND EVALUATION .....	23
LIST OF ACRONYMS .....	26

## TERMINOLOGY

<b>Violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism/ terrorist radicalization <sup>1</sup></b>	A 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.
<b>Community</b>	Women, men, social groups and institutions based in the same area and/or sharing common interests. <sup>2</sup>
<b>Family</b>	A living community of parents and children and other relatives, provided they live in a common household. <sup>3</sup>
<b>Hate speech</b>	All forms of expression that spread, promote, incite or justify hatred based on intolerance towards one or several persons because of their personal characteristics or belonging to a certain group.
<b>Foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs)</b>	Individuals who travel to a state other than their states of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict. <sup>4</sup>
<b>Returnees</b>	Individuals who travel from the host country to the country of origin, country of citizenship or habitual residence, usually after spending a long time in the host country, either voluntarily or in a forced, assisted or spontaneous way.
<b>Disengagement</b>	A social and psychological process whereby an individual's commitment to and involvement in violent extremism is reduced to the extent that he or she is no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity. This process involves a change in behaviour (no longer using or justifying the use of violence). Still, it does not necessarily involve a change in an individual's commitment to a radical or extremist cause.
<b>Deradicalization</b>	The process of changing an individual's belief system so that he or she rejects violent extremist ideology and embraces mainstream, non-violent values. It implies a fundamental change in understanding resulting from activities intended to help individuals renounce radical or extreme ideas, beliefs, and groups with a link to violence.
<b>Rehabilitation</b>	A process enabling people to lead self-determined and self-sustained life and no longer have any extremist views that pose a risk to them or society (physical and mental recovery).
<b>Resocialisation</b>	Return to socially acceptable behaviour and norms.
<b>Reintegration</b>	Safe transition in the community where the individual will live according to law, including after the release from prison, that is, the process of social (friendships, family and community) and functional (conditions for housing, employment, work, health care) connections with the society.

<sup>1</sup> The terms "violent extremism" and "radicalization to violence" are aligned with the OSCE Consolidated Framework for Countering Terrorism (PC.DEC/1063) and the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (7th Review A/RES/75/ 291, July 2, 2021)

<sup>2</sup> The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe, OSCE

<sup>3</sup> Law on Family (clarified wording) "Official Gazette of RM", number 153/2014

<sup>4</sup> UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014) S/RES/2178

## FOREWORD

**Cognizant** of the contemporary security challenges in the country, throughout the region, Europe and worldwide.

**Guided** by the need to develop policies and practices to counter and combat violent extremism that can lead to terrorism.

**Committed** to building a society resilient to radicalisation and violent extremism that can lead to terrorism, given that terrorism is the most extreme consequence of radicalisation that may lead to violence and violent extremism.

**Ready** to implement the best European and international good practices for preventing radicalisation that lead to violence and countering violent extremism in line with the international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law.

**Convinced** that effective prevention can be ensured only through multi-disciplinary response, we collectively support, strengthen and defend our democratic and fundamental values, respect for human rights and the rule of law, against those who attempt to undermine them. To this end, we need to invest in social cohesion, education and inclusive societies where everyone feels that their identity is respected and fully belongs to the community.

**Recognizing** the leading role of the United Nations in international efforts against terrorism and endorsing the OSCE Strategy for Addressing Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century, which identifies terrorism as one of the most important causes of instability in the current security environment.

**Taking note** of the efforts, the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism (NCCVECT) extends its gratitude to all international, regional and domestic partners, governmental and non-governmental organisations that have given their support in the preparation of the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Violent extremism is a complex security issue that does not recognise borders, cultures, religious or ethnic groups. It is a phenomenon affecting all of us, and therefore an integrated response by all relevant institutions is required.

Countering violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism/violence is the foundation of the state's protection against terrorist acts, primarily because violent extremism and terrorism result from individual or collective processes of terrorist radicalisation that may be used as justification for violence to achieve certain goals (political, ideological, social).

In Resolution 2178 (2014), the Security Council clearly explains the link between violent extremism and terrorism, highlighting the importance of taking measures in line with international norms, and recognises the need for prevention: “violent extremism, which may be conducive to terrorism,” requires collective efforts, “including the prevention of radicalisation, recruitment and mobilisation of individuals into terrorist groups and their transformation into foreign terrorist fighters”.

Strategic planning of measures and activities for countering radicalisation that lead to terrorism and violent extremism is considered a top priority in building safe and resilient communities and ensuring fundamental values such as the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, citizen safety, cultural values and the inclusiveness of society.

Countering radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence and violent extremism is one of the significant challenges requiring:

- ⇒ **knowledge**, i.e., understanding of the phenomenon,
- ⇒ **recognising/identifying** the risks and push and pull factors,
- ⇒ **knowledge of required action** in the event of added risks that maximise the likelihood of radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence, and of the necessary measures for risk management, and
- ⇒ **perceiving or analysing** the impact of gender on people's opportunities, social roles and interactions. This perspective would make it possible to conduct a gender analysis and subsequently include a gender perspective in any proposed programme, policy or organization.

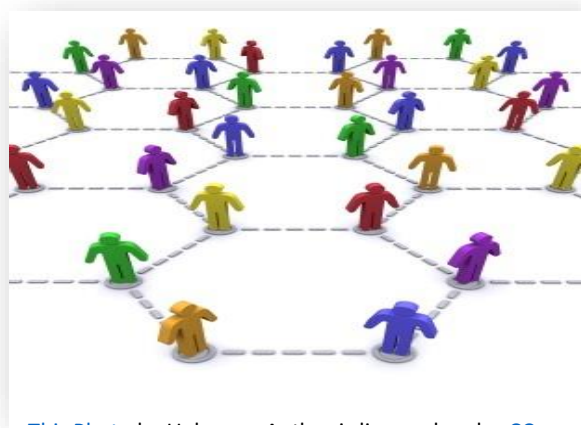
The Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism promotes participation, social inclusion and equality of all citizens.

In this regard, the recent opinion of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) of the CoE has been taken into account, and its recommendation that the state “takes all necessary measures to build an integrated society that is firmly based on the rule of law, the protection of human rights, including minority rights and

respect for diversity, and rejects the exclusivist ethno-nationalist policy that further cements the formation of parallel societies”.<sup>5</sup>

The Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism embraces the strong commitment of the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM) to develop and enhance the concepts for countering radicalisation and violent extremism that can lead to terrorism.

The 2023-2027 Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism is a continuation of the previous strategy, given the necessity for sustainable solutions and long-term interventions. Its scope takes account of the new challenges and impacts along with the plans for taking appropriate measures for intervention.



*Creating fair, inclusive, and pluralistic society, based on full respect for human rights, and ensured economic opportunities for all, is the most efficient method to eliminate violent extremism.*

*Tolerance and understanding for diverse ideas and cultures is in the focus of UNDP Sustainable Development Agenda (2030). The objective towards sustainable development calls upon the states to “promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, ensure access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”. Focused on eradicating poverty, reducing inequality, promoting values based on respect for diversities and acting without discrimination, it sets a broad range of activities aimed at countering violent extremism.*

<sup>5</sup> 2020-2022 National Strategy for development of the concept One Society for All and Interculturalism, available at: <https://vlada.mk/nacionalni-strategii>

## 2. OUR EFFORTS IN THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The Republic of North Macedonia is a credible partner in the fight against terrorism and a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. In this respect, there is strong support for the role of NATO in the fight of the international community against terrorism.

RNM signed and ratified all conventions for the fight against terrorism and terrorism-related protocols of the United Nations, including Resolution 2178 (2014) of the UN Security Council and the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism.

In line with the commitments from the Joint Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkan, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia approved the National Plan on Reintegration, Resocialisation and Rehabilitation of returnees from foreign armed groups and their family members (women and children).

The Standard Operating Procedures on reintegration, resocialisation and rehabilitation of foreign fighters and their family members are aimed at putting into effect the procedure which is based on the fundamental values for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, a whole-of-society approach, individual approach and treatment, and the principle of confidentiality.

## 3. PREPARATION PROCESS AND STRATEGY STRUCTURE

The National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism is a joint document of representatives of governmental institutions, relevant civil society/civic associations, the academia, and the international community.

Strategic priorities and objectives were established through discussions at organised debates, deriving from the analysis of the context that was presented through identified major challenges and opportunities for the preventive and proactive response of the state to prevent the process of radicalization that may lead to terrorism and violent extremism.

The National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism is envisaged for a period of five years (2023 – 2027), followed up by revision of processes and analysis with regard to further steps. The document includes four (4) strategic priorities and nine (9) strategic objectives, deriving from the situational analysis, along with activities aimed at pursuing the strategic objectives and priorities (shown in the Action plan).

The National Strategy calls for a multi-disciplinary response in the process of countering violent extremism in order to ensure the involvement of a wide range of governmental stakeholders, such as representatives of the security, social affairs, education, health, youth and sports sectors, as well as representatives of civil society, the inclusion of young people; families; women; religious, cultural and educational leaders; and media.



This approach pursues the active involvement of all relevant entities in the strategic planning process of future steps taken by the relevant state and non-state actors to prevent violent extremism, as well as in its response through the development of programs in the field of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention.

#### **4. GOAL, VISION, MISSION**

The aim of this strategic document of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia is to enhance the efforts in countering radicalisation and violent extremism that may lead to terrorism. Terrorism is the most extreme consequence of radicalisation and violent extremism. Preventive activities are vital in ensuring fundamental values such as democracy, human rights and security.

**The inclusiveness of our society is our strongest protection from terrorism threats. Our agenda should strive towards building resilient communities able to confront the radicalization to terrorism and protect the values of our constitutional order. <sup>6</sup>**

Building relations and promoting resilient communities is instrumental in countering violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism/violence.

#### **GOAL**

The National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism aims to uphold the values of tolerance and religious harmony, human rights, the rule of law and democracy, and protect society from violent extremism.

#### **VISION**

Society of resilient communities able to combat radicalisation and violent extremism that lead to terrorism.

#### **MISSION**

Countering and preventing violent extremism through evidence-based programs and policies, and identification of risks and respective interventions that reduce and eliminate these risks' impact.

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<sup>6</sup> National Strategy for development of the concept One Society for All and Interculturalism (2020 – 2022)

## 5. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

### HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS LED ACTION

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are the fundamental value of the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, and it is imperative for every democratic state to uphold and promote them. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Council of Europe documents ECHR - European Convention on Human Right - [https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention\\_eng.pdf](https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf), ratified international agreements, and a number of other documents related to the work of law enforcement authorities address the need for human rights and freedoms based action to be the first guiding principle of the new national strategies on CVE and CT. Human rights and freedoms led action is based on the following principles:

- **Participation in the decision-making process** (everyone is entitled to actively participate in decision-making processes affecting the exercising of their rights);
- **Accountability** and redress (effective legal remedies are needed in the event of human rights and freedoms violations);
- **Non-discrimination and equality** (everyone is entitled to exercise human rights and freedoms without any discrimination);
- **Encouragement and empowerment** (everyone is entitled exercise their rights). Individuals and communities need to be aware of their rights and participate in policymaking that affects their lives, while competent state authorities have the obligation to respect, protect and ensure human rights and freedoms);
- **Legality** (all procedures taken by institutions must be in compliance with the national and international law); and
- **Effective oversight, regular review and independent monitoring** of the compliance of state actions with the protection of human rights and freedoms.

### GOOD GOVERNANCE AND FOSTERING OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Good governance implies appropriate management of the state, society and resources. It strives towards protecting the people's interests and social, economic and political rights without discrimination on any ground.

Basic characteristics of good governance include participation, the rule of law, transparency, responsibility, equality and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency in actions taken and accountability of institutions.

## **WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY AND WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH**

The Strategy is based on the principle of a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach, bringing together all governmental institutions and relevant civil society/civic associations with the aim of protecting citizens from radicalisation and violent extremism.

To counter violent extremism, comprehensive, integrated, interdisciplinary and inter-agency action is required from institutions. The National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism (NCCVECT) retains its primary function to provide a coordinated response of all institutions in pursuing the four strategic priorities (prevention, protection, enforcement and response).

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEN AND WOMEN**

Full equality of women and men means equal rights, opportunities, conditions and treatment in all spheres of public and private life and the absence of cultural, social, economic and political conditions that generate unequal relations of power and unequal distribution of societal goods among women and men.<sup>7</sup>

Competent state authorities tasked with the fight against violent extremism and terrorism are committed, to the greatest extent, to promote the principle of equal opportunities among women and men.

## **PROHIBITION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ANY PERSON/GROUP BASED ON PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS, ESPECIALLY AGAINST PERSONS/GROUPS IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS**

Prohibition of discrimination is a fundamental value for any action taken by democratic institutions. Security authorities (police and other security agencies) guarantee that everyone is provided with equal rights without discrimination, and groups in socially vulnerable situations are addressed with special attention in the spirit of mutual understanding, respect and support.

## **LEGALITY**

Any planned and taken pursuits and activities are in compliance with the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, the law, other regulations based on the law and ratified international agreements.

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<sup>7</sup> Law on Equal Opportunities of Men and Women “Official Gazette of RM”, No. 201/2015

All measures and activities from the strategic plan that are in the function of preventing violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism, are in compliance with the international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law.

For effective preventing and countering violent extremism, the action is age - based and harmonized, with full regard to the gender equality.

Any violation of the legality principle should be addressed through appropriate mechanisms in order to remedy the conduct of law enforcement officers and other state authorities.

### **RESPECT FOR MULTI-ETHNIC AND MULTICULTURAL ASPECTS OF SOCIETY**

Multiculturalism implies a vision for a society that embraces different cultural groups with their cultural diversities in all areas of societal life. In multicultural communities, people retain, transfer, celebrate and share their unique cultural life, languages, art, traditions and behaviour.

### **REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

Countering violent extremism is made possible only through cooperation and coordination with all relevant entities at the national level. Regional cooperation is of key importance given that violent extremist threats know no borders/are often trans-national impact.

International cooperation is imperative concerning threats that cross the borders of one state or region and are by no means associated to a certain culture, religion, denomination or any other affiliation.

Problems related to violent extremism and terrorism are neither generated nor tackled only in one state or region. Just the opposite, the whole world is confronted with this challenge; therefore, one state cannot tackle it independently and succeed. The nature of these problems is international, and challenges are global. Therefore, a comprehensive response that includes a global exchange of information, experiences, knowledge and skills is required.

## **6. SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS**

To ensure appropriate strategic planning, a SWOT analysis was undertaken using statistical data, previous lessons learnt, situational analysis (academic and operational) and practitioners' knowledge. It considered the strengths deriving from the current situation, the challenges related to certain risks, and the opportunities for appropriate planning of new activities.

## 6.1 Strengths

In view of general trends, the new Strategy takes into consideration the strengths that may significantly reduce the risks of radicalisation that lead to terrorism and the development of violent extremist movements.

In respect of strengths, several aspects are taken into account, such as:

- **Continuity** of the strategic planning process. The new Strategy follows up on the process of implementation and lessons learnt from the 2018 – 2022 Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism;
- **Established institutional framework** for the coordination of activities at national and local levels. The National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism strengthened its capacities and actively participates in policymaking in the field of preventing violent extremism. An **inter-agency working group was established** at the national level to monitor the process of rehabilitation, resocialisation and reintegration of FTFs and their family members. **Nine (9) local multidisciplinary teams - LMT**, involved in working with FTFs and their family members were established at the local level as well as **six (6) Community Action Teams - CATs** that designed their Action Plans;
- **Cooperation** is established **with relevant civil society/civic associations** that became active partners in the prevention, rehabilitation, resocialisation and reintegration of persons who are radicalised to terrorism or violence;
- Established **cooperation at regional and international levels**<sup>8</sup>;
- Our society fosters the fundamental value of its **multicultural, multi-ethnic and multireligious character**. Determination to foster this character is reaffirmed in the vision of the 2020-2022 National Strategy for One Society for All and Interculturalism "For us, **one society for all** means: recognising all diversities, guaranteeing and ensuring equality, social justice, fairness, equal opportunities for women and men, citizen inclusion and participation in decision-making and achieving social cohesion"; and
- **Family is still the basic unit** of society that significantly impacts the shaping of values in the community.

## 6.2 Impacts and environment

Corruption, as the main driver of organised and serious crime, poses a threat to people's security and undermines the trust in institutions, the rule of law and the development of democratic capacities in the state. Even though the statement that "North Macedonia has reached a certain

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<sup>8</sup> Including with OSCE, UNOCT, IOM and others

stage of preparedness/is moderately prepared with regard to **prevention and fight against corruption**"<sup>9</sup> can be a source of encouragement.

According to the Assessment of organised and serious crime threats of 2021, “systemic linkage between organised crime as a source of direct financing of terroristic and violent extremist activities has not yet been established” even though “links with violent extremist groups have been identified in three groups, i.e., in some of their members”.

Given its specific geopolitical and geostrategic position, the Republic of North Macedonia is a transit country for migrants. The Republic of North Macedonia is at the crossroads of migration routes from Asia and Africa to Central and Western Europe.

The standard of living of the population and the management of the economic and energy crisis have a significant impact on criminality and the likelihood for e categories of citizens in a socially vulnerable situation to be easily influenced.

Demands for digitalisation, especially in respect of inter-agency action, also significantly impact the monitoring of the rehabilitation, resocialisation and reintegration program implementation.

Young people remain the focus of primary prevention. It is necessary to ensure that young people are involved in the decision-making processes in the country, given that social integration and inclusion are indispensable minimal requirements and a precondition without which integral development of every young person cannot be pursued.

Radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence in prisons is still a matter of concern, and an increased number of activities are required.

### ***6.3 Challenges and opportunities***

Taking note of the strengths and impacts, the challenges we must confront during the period covered by the Strategy are also relevant for preparing the Strategy.

In respect of countering radicalisation that lead to terrorism and violent extremism, the new Strategy is based on the following general challenges:

➤ ***Internet and social media as a virtual arena for radicalisation that lead to violence and spreading hate speech***

Individuals promoting online violent extremist views can easily mobilise support for their opinions and attitudes, given the speed at which messages containing hate speech and inciting violence are spread. It is a serious challenge to detect hidden online profiles spreading such

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<sup>9</sup> 2022 North Macedonia Report, Commission staff working document, Brussels 12.10.2022, SWD (2022) 337 last version

messages; therefore, individuals can easily take the path to radicalisation that lead to violence without the source being detected. This type of communication (audio or video) with like-minded people may be the gate to radicalisation that lead to violence. On the other hand, online activities and impacts may also intensify the previously initiated process of radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence.

➤ **Circumstances at the international level have a substantial impact on the risks of radicalisation that lead to violence**

Circumstances at the international level and external conflicts significantly impact the overall situation. Given the lessons learnt from our citizens who joined the foreign armed group ISIS, one cannot exclude the possibility that certain individuals will be motivated to be directly involved in military action in the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

➤ **Risk of increased polarisation among diverse groups**

Community polarisation is a serious challenge, conducive to the establishment of closed groups that may easily promote violence as means to achieve certain objectives. Polarisation across ethnic and religious lines is still dominant in our context. However, as of recently, one cannot exclude the polarisation within the same ethnic communities. In this way, society becomes increasingly less cohesive and different groups are easily susceptible to negative influences.

➤ **Inclusion of FTFs and members of their families in the process of rehabilitation, resocialisation and reintegration**

Persons who travelled to areas of conflict as members of foreign armed groups or as members of their families have acquired experience that allows them to plan and commit terrorist acts. A strong response from society will be required for disengagement and their return to the communities.

Even though the legal system of the Republic of North Macedonia incriminates and sanctions the participation in foreign armed group/s, police, paramilitary and parapolice formations, this phenomenon further poses a security risk. A more comprehensive institutional response will be necessary in order to cease or prevent current or future developments leading to terrorist radicalisation and violent extremism.

The Government-led efforts for the repatriation of citizens who travelled to Syria and Iraq started in 2018 when seven citizens were repatriated, followed by the repatriation of three women in 2019 and five women, 14 children and four men in 2021. The process of rehabilitation, resocialisation and reintegration (RRR) is carried out according to Standard Operating Procedures for the treatment of FTFs and members of their families. In the overall process, the Government of North Macedonia takes a holistic approach regarding the RRR of women and children returnees, striving to integrate them into the local communities through individual and tailor-made interventions for each family.

**In view of the impacts and challenges faced, possibilities for intervention have been defined, that is:**

- ⇒ **Human and material capacities** in handling processes of radicalisation that lead to terrorism and violent extremism **need to be strengthened**;
- ⇒ Given their vulnerability, **young people are the focus** of the planned strategic objectives of the 2023-2027 Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism;
- ⇒ **Public awareness raising** and launching campaigns with **positive/alternative narratives** for persons/communities in socially vulnerable situations;
- ⇒ **Raising the level of media** and information **literacy** for all people;
- ⇒ **Launching educational initiatives** that promote peace, diversity and tolerance;
- ⇒ **Promotion of reintegration program** for FTFs and members of their families;
- ⇒ **Application of pre-release procedures** and post-prison assistance for convicted violent extremist offenders; and
- ⇒ **Establishment of a system for monitoring, coordination and record keeping** of assistance and support provided to persons radicalized to violence who participate in the reintegration program through rehabilitation and resocialisation, including FTFs and their family members (within the social protection system).

## **7. PUSH AND PULL FACTORS FOR CVE AND CT**

The aetiology (root causes) of violent extremism leading to terrorism can be recognised in both societal and personal drivers that contribute to the terrorist radicalisation of certain persons or groups in the community.

The phenomenology is variable, and violent extremist groups find new ways to commit attacks, spread propaganda, finance activities and recruit people in their circles.

**Push and pull factors** which are recognised are the following:

- **Returning "Foreign terrorist fighters"** and members of their families <sup>10</sup>;

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<sup>10</sup> Resolution 2396 (2017) calls upon member-states to strengthen their efforts in eradicating the threats from return and displacement of FTFs and members of their families, including women and children, through measures of border control, criminal justice and exchange of information among member-states and relevant organizations, such as INTERPOL, in detecting FTFs.



- **Violent extremist narratives** based on religion or extreme right-wing or ethno-nationalist movements;
- **Discrimination** impacts the increased isolation and marginalisation of members of smaller communities or religious groups;
- **Frozen "chronic" conflicts in the region** impact the engagement in the process of radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence;
- **Organised crime and corruption** create distrust in institutions; and
- **Economic factors** (low standard of living, financial and energy crisis worldwide).

## 8. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The starting point for this Strategy is to draw on lessons learnt from the previous strategy, also being aware of the need to increasingly focus on sustainability, building relations, sharing knowledge and promoting values.

The Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism leading to terrorism is based on **PREVENTION**. The concept of prevention essentially entails a broad perspective, such as providing adequate conditions for the development, upbringing and education of young people, fighting against poverty to ensure that everyone in the society, regardless of origin or status, is protected from discrimination, raising of public awareness as well as building institutional capacities to provide an adequate response, given that general preventive efforts also imply deterrence from using violent means for ideological or religious goals.

Speaking of prevention, it also implies taking an intervention with adequate means and methods.

The Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism includes strategic objectives and measures to achieve primary, secondary and tertiary prevention goals.

**Primary prevention:** Activities for primary prevention target a broad group of citizens and refer to awareness raising, development of intercultural abilities and trainings for professionals as well as for various target groups in the community.

**Secondary prevention:** Targets a smaller group of individuals at risk of radicalisation that lead to terrorism or committing extremist violence. Secondary prevention measures include trainings on resilience for different target groups in the community, measures to lower the polarisation and fieldwork with potentially identified persons or groups at risk.

**Tertiary prevention** is aimed at preventing recidivism; therefore, measures are targeted at individuals radicalised to terrorism or those that already committed extremist violence. Tertiary prevention is also aimed at individuals who incite violence but do not participate in violent acts themselves and at violent extremist convicts serving prison sentences.

The threat of violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism is not only a security problem (risk of terrorism, etc.). Still, it has broader implications for well-being from the aspect of social cohesion and welfare in society.

The Republic of North Macedonia aligned the following four (4) joint **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES** of the two National Strategies and Action Plans on Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism:

1. **PREVENTION** - from radicalisation and violent extremism that lead to terrorism through early identification of persons radicalised to terrorism or violence and detection of radicalisation causes and factors in the community that lead to recruitment of citizens to join foreign terrorist groups.
2. **PROTECTION** - of human life and property, as well as fundamental human rights and dignity of all persons in NM, securing the external borders, improved transportation safety, protection of safety in transport and at public events and reducing the vulnerability of critical infrastructure.
3. **ENFORCEMENT** - improved cooperation and information exchange among institutions in order to counter the radicalisation and violent extremism that may lead to terrorism.
4. **RESPONSE** - taking active and transparent action in ways that minimise the consequences of radicalisation and violent extremism that lead to terrorism through improved institutional capacities for active involvement of persons radicalised to terrorism or violence in the reintegration process and by responding to the needs of survivors.

## 9. STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND MEASURES

Strategic objectives and measures serve to accomplish the strategic priorities.

### 1. PREVENTION

***Building trust is crucial for prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration programs.***

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***Speaking of prevention, it also implies taking an intervention with adequate means and methods.***

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.1 Strengthened institutional capacities**

*The competencies of professionals dealing with countering violent extremism, especially the competencies of first-line responders, need to be continuously developed. This includes general knowledge about radicalisation that lead to terrorism and violent extremism in the national context, as well as at the international level, push/pull factors, and knowledge about effective preventive measures.*

### **Measures to pursue the strategic objective**

- Development of competencies in professionals (designed programs and conducted trainings for police officers, teaching staff, social workers, medical workers, staff working in penal-penitentiary institutions, correctional facilities and probation offices to recognise signs indicative of radicalisation, as well as to prevent further radicalisation of persons participating in the reintegration program, in full compliance with human rights and applying a gender- and age-sensitive approach);
- Strengthening the capacities for prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism through community policing and intelligence led policing, as well as affirmation of helpful tools for cooperation with the community;
- Strengthening the competencies of personnel working in security agencies through specialised trainings on monitoring of trends, risks and threats, as well as trainings on appropriate handling of evidence (material and digital);
- Strengthening the capacities of the personnel and members of the NCCVECT through continuous professional development, participation in national and international conferences, monitoring of new trends in the prevention of violent extremism, and exchange of experiences for effective measures to prevent radicalisation that lead to terrorism and violent extremism;
- Assessment of needs regarding factors leading to radicalisation that lead to terrorism and violent extremist behaviour (in the national context and regional and international impacts) as well as gender- and age-sensitive assessment of needs of FTFs and members of their families in the reintegration process; and
- Annual national conferences to deliberate on topical issues related to radicalisation and violent extremism that lead to terrorism, including matters related to ethno-national and religious violent extremism and the reintegration process of FTFs and their family members.

## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.2 Raising public awareness**

*Understanding, knowledge and awareness about radicalisation that lead to terrorism and violent extremism may extend the degree of preventive action in the communities. Designing educational and informative materials may be necessary for raising public awareness. It is also relevant to anticipate the target group for action in order to ensure an impact on groups at risk*

*(young people, persons at social and economic risk, marginalised groups, etc.). Such materials are part of certain campaigns, public discussions and debates.*

*There is a need for counter-narratives, i.e., positive narratives for inclusive national identity that divert the attention from the "us and them" narrative, advocating for "us" in shaping the identity and strengthening the feeling of belonging among marginalised communities.*

### **Measures to pursue the strategic objective**

- Preparation of a national campaign on the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism that lead to terrorism;
- Promotion of the application "RED BUTTON", especially for reporting violence and hate speech and hate crime;
- Possibility for introducing a free helpline for providing the institutions with information that is helpful in the prevention of radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence;
- Development of a model for referral of individuals radicalised to terrorism which is known to/accessible for professionals and families;
- Public discussions and debates on multiculturalism and promotion of multireligious and multicultural dialogue through activities that promote positive values and attitudes about diversities of different cultural groups and communities;
- Media campaign on social cohesion and countering violent extremism; and
- Training for journalists and media workers on media and information literacy, developing positive narratives when they report on topics of violent extremism and on promoting the reintegration and rehabilitation of returnees – FTFs and their families.

### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.3 Strengthened and resilient communities**

*Prevention is viable only in communities resilient to terrorist radicalisation. All entities in the community which can be active in the field of prevention are relevant. Violent extremist groups take advantage of divided communities due to religious, national, social or other types of intolerance. Cohesive and inclusive communities are more resilient to violent extremist propaganda, unlike dysfunctional communities.*

*Young people and marginalised communities are target groups that require intensive work in order to prevent possibilities for their indoctrination or radicalisation that lead to terrorism by violent extremist groups*

### **Measures to pursue the strategic objective**

- Development of dialogue for building trust among representatives of local self-government, police, social workers, education, religious communities, citizen associations

and other relevant stakeholders for the prevention of VE. Local prevention councils are an adequate tool to promote dialogue;

- Strengthening the capacities of the Community Action Teams (CATs) and development of local action plans;
- Establishment of new Community Action Teams;
- Dialogue with young people through established forms of taking action – youth offices and youth centres;
- Strengthening the capacities of parents in the process of preventing radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence;
- Work with young people through formal and non-formal education<sup>11</sup>; and
- Culture and sport may further contribute to cohesion and the prevention of radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence in the country.

#### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.4 Countering online radicalisation that lead to terrorism**

*The Internet can serve as an arena for promoting extremist ideologies and hate speech and for radicalisation and recruitment of people in extremist groups. Strengthening the capacities for countering online radicalisation and recruitment is therefore needed. In addition, the Internet can be used as a tool for preventing radicalisation.*

##### **Measures to pursue the strategic objective**

- Prevention of online hate speech;
- Campaign for social cohesion and countering violent extremism through social media;
- Policymaking based on research, risk mapping and analysis of possibilities for online radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence; and
- Surveys on media literacy of young people.

## **2. PROTECTION**

#### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.1 Proactive institutions for the protection of fundamental values, human rights and freedoms and increased citizen trust in institutions**

<sup>11</sup> Measures related to work with youth comply with the measures of the 2016-2025 National Youth Strategy

*Strengthening the response against terrorism must include preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. In this regard, rights related to the integrity of personality: the right to life, liberty and security are fundamental rights that the state must ensure for everyone under its jurisdiction<sup>12</sup>. The state is obliged to respect, protect and fulfil/ensure the rights of an individual. Ensuring public order and peace and protecting people's and their fundamental rights and freedoms are strongly interrelated.*

### Measures to pursue the strategic objective

- Protecting people in public places, especially with regard to protecting their life, human rights, fundamental freedoms and property. It is crucial to engage in public-private partnerships with the business community -- including private security agencies, especially agencies delivering security services at public places and civil society to enhance the protection of places where a significant number of people may be present (malls, transportation centres, schools or accommodation facilities);
- Strengthening the capacities of local multidisciplinary teams for work with radicalised persons, FTFs and their families;
- Work with categories of citizens in socially vulnerable situations by ensuring protection and assistance measures; and
- Increased visibility of the NCCVECT in order to promote the concepts of prevention and protection from radicalisation and violent extremism that lead to terrorism.

## 3. ENFORCEMENT

### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.1 Border protection measures**

*Proactive institutions, joint institutional action and networking are a substantial warranty for establishing a functional system. Monitoring and analysis of the criminality related to arms, ammunition and explosives<sup>13</sup>, and monitoring of internal and external migration flows is based on evidence-based policies and appropriate risk assessment.*

### Measures to pursue the strategic objective:

- Establishment of an efficient system for registration of the abode of foreign nationals in the Republic of North Macedonia; and

<sup>12</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, UN General Assembly, 10 December 1948

<sup>13</sup> In connection with the Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024

- Analysis of migration flows and impacts on the emergence of extremist movements and radicalization that lead to terrorism.

## 4. RESPONSE

### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.1 Disengagement/Deradicalisation**

*Disengagement/deradicalisation programs are essential in the process of tertiary prevention. Reintegration of violent extremists, terrorists, and FTFs may be seen as a process aimed at alleviating their reintegration into the society that will reduce the possibility of their continued violent acts.*

*The disengagement/deradicalisation of persons radicalized to terrorism is a process that requires an individual, **gender-/age-sensitive** approach and is based on respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms as guaranteed in the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia and international human right law.*

#### **Measures to pursue the strategic objective:**

- Inclusion of persons radicalised to terrorism/violence in penal-penitentiary institutions in reintegration programs through rehabilitation, work with those released from prison and families of FTFs;
- Analysis of possibilities to involve religious communities in the rehabilitation and reintegration process of convicts;
- Inclusion of women and children related to FTFs in reintegration programs through rehabilitation;
- Improving the capacities of penal-penitentiary institutions, to reduce risks/factors conducive to radicalization to terrorism or violence in prisons, improve detention conditions and ensuring human rights-compliance in managing violent extremist prisoners, including by increased prison oversight and independent detention monitoring; and
- Treatment of family members requires using a gender- and age-sensitive approach and an approach based on the child's best interest.

### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.2 Reintegration through resocialisation and rehabilitation**

*Reintegration is instrumental in the process of countering violent extremism. The reintegration process of persons in the community, who are radicalized to terrorism or violence, is facilitated*

*through adequate resocialisation and rehabilitation programs. To that end, a holistic approach is needed based on the individual needs of the person/s participating in the program. It is important to be aware of the approach applied to women and children returnees in the reintegration process, as they can have both a status of perpetrators and victims. Therefore, skills for trauma-informed practice are instrumental and need to be developed in individuals working with children returnees.*

#### **Measures to pursue the strategic objective**

- Work with women and children returnees through gender- and age-sensitive programs that take account of the best interest of the child;
- Development and implementation of programs for working with children in correctional facilities;
- Development and implementation of programs for working with convicts at penal-penitentiary institutions;
- Ensuring human rights compliant detention conditions as well as unimpeded access to relevant programmes as pre-requisite for successful reintegration, resocialization and rehabilitation;
- Implementation of established proceedings and procedures, both in the SOP for treatment of FTFs and members of their families and in the SOP for pre-release treatment and post-penal assistance for convicted persons radicalised to terrorism or violence; and
- Implementation of programs for (non)formal education and vocational training for convicted persons remains an important measure for reducing the extent of radicalisation that lead to terrorism in persons voluntarily participating in vocational training programs.

#### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.3 Strengthened coordination and promotion of cooperation**

*The process of rehabilitation, resocialisation and reintegration of persons radicalised to terrorism/violence and "deterring" them from further actions is based on a coordinated multi-stakeholder response.*

*The cooperation is based on lessons learnt and best practice-led action, as well as joint programs for taking action at the national and regional levels.*

#### **Measures to pursue the strategic objective**

- Strengthening the inter-institutional cooperation, cooperation with civil society/civic associations as partners in pursuing strategic objectives and with international organisations and partners from countries in the region; and



- Full implementation of the Joint Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkan and further integration of the region in the activities of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) is essential.

## 10. PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The priorities for implementation are determined in compliance with the Action Plan for the implementation of the 2023-2027 Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism.

In this context, the **following activities are set as a priority**:

1. Developing human resources capacities through various forms of training (activity on a continuous basis).
2. Introducing a learning assignment in the curriculum for basic training of police cadets.
3. Promoting the concept of Local Prevention Councils and ensuring continuity and support for drafting local strategies for preventing violent extremism and radicalisation.
4. Mapping and performing analysis of the phenomena of radicalization that lead to terrorism or violence and violent extremism in the online space in the Republic of North Macedonia.
5. Supporting activities related to working with families in socially vulnerable situations.
6. Designing an instrument for assessing the radicalisation of children to terrorism or violence in correctional facilities.
7. Designing a program for rehabilitation, resocialisation and reintegration of returnees from foreign armies and members of their families, women and children within the social protection and security system.
8. Establishing a system for monitoring, coordination and record keeping of assistance and support provided to persons radicalised to terrorism or violence who participate in the reintegration program through rehabilitation and resocialisation, including for FTFs and members of their families.
9. Developing tools for monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism.
10. Activities for target groups of young people to develop their critical thinking.
11. Activities for target groups of women and their active involvement in preventive activities for countering violent extremism.

## 11. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Strategy and its Action plan are carried out by the NCCVECT in cooperation with competent state authorities. Relevant civil society associations and international organisations are partners in implementing the activities stipulated in the Action plan on the implementation of the 2023 – 2027 National Strategy on

Countering Violent Extremism as well as partners in monitoring, including potential human rights impacts, in its implementation.

The realisation of the objectives of the Strategy will be financially supported by the budgets of the respective state institutions. State entities are urged to establish cooperation in order to utilise additional financial, expert and institutional support from EU funds, OSCE, UN and other international organisations.

NCCVECT coordinates the process of pursuing the strategic objectives of the Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism and the alignment of the activities with other strategic documents. In addition, NCCVECT monitors the implementation of the Action Plan to the Strategy and makes recommendations to the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia on undertaking appropriate measures in the event of non-implementation or difficulties in implementation.

Monitoring of the Strategy entails collecting data on the degree of activity implementation and identifying possible risks deriving from unimplemented activities or unaccomplished outcomes. The impact of certain measures and activities on changing the situation is also measured in certain instances (by means of an adequate and objective presentation of performance indicators).

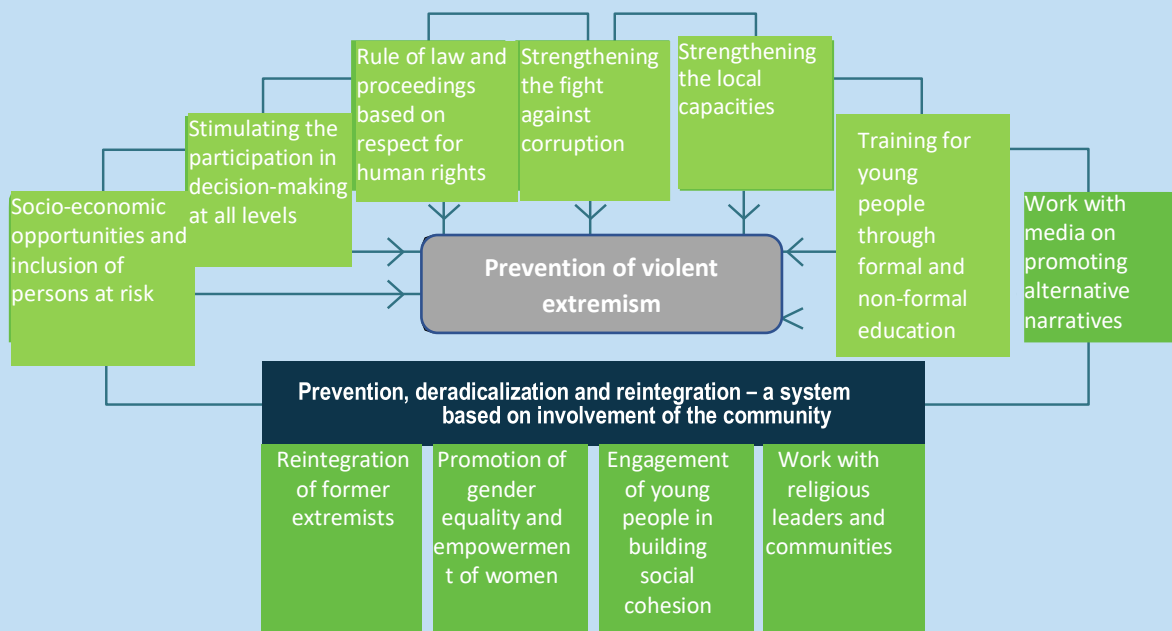
The following principles will be considered in reporting: concise and clear writing, relevance, objectiveness, and presentation of quantitative and qualitative information.

The Coordination body will present the annual report on the degree of realisation, performance indicators and obstacles for pursuing the strategic objectives at a session of the NCCVECT.

Independent experts will bi-annually analyse the progress in implementing the strategic objectives and submit their reports to the NCCVECT.

## National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism

Countering violent extremism through inclusive development, promotion of tolerance and respect for diversities



## LIST OF ACRONYMS

(Used in the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism and the Action Plan for implementation of the Strategy)

AAAVMS – Agency for audio and audio-visual media services  
ANS – Agency for national security  
CAT – Community Action Teams  
BPS – Bureau for Public Security  
CT – Counterterrorism  
CF – Correctional facility  
EU – European Union  
ZELS – Association of the units of local-self government  
AJM – Association of Journalists of Macedonia  
PPI – Penal-penitentiary institution  
CRRCRG – Committee for Relations with Religious Communities and Religious Groups  
LMT – Local multidisciplinary teams  
LPC – Local prevention councils  
MOI – Ministry of Interior  
MoD – Ministry of Defence  
MoES – Ministry of Education and Science  
MLSP – Ministry of Labour and Social Policy  
VE – Violent extremism  
NCCVECT – National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism  
OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe  
UN – United Nations  
CME – Council for Media Ethics  
CVE – Countering violent extremism  
FTFs – Foreign terrorist fighters  
CoE – Council of Europe  
RNM – Republic of North Macedonia  
RRR – Rehabilitation, resocialisation and reintegration  
SOP – Standard Operating Procedure  
CSW – Centre for Social Work