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Understanding the Factors Contributing to Radicalisation Among Central Asian Labour Migrants in Russia

Mohammed S Elshimi with Raffaello Pantucci, Sarah Lain and
Nadine L Salman

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Preface

THIS PROJECT TOOK seven months to complete. The first phase involved the formulation of the research design in a three-day workshop in Moscow at the end of May 2017 that was led by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) and hosted by the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Russian Academy of Science (RAS), which also provided key substantive input into the initial project development and implementation process. The research team comprised researchers from various countries and the three project stakeholders: Search for Common Ground (SFCG), RAS and RUSI. The team met to standardise key terms, concepts and the methodology, including training in research ethics. The second phase of the project included fieldwork and data collection in Russia. This was undertaken by Central Asian researchers identified by SFCG (from the three target Central Asian communities, on the assumption that common linguistic and cultural background would facilitate access) and RAS researchers, who had ensured appropriate permissions from Russian authorities and played a critical role in facilitating the interviews. Fieldwork took place between 1 and 28 June 2017 across thirteen cities in Russia, in seven geographical regions. The following sites were included in the research design because they are the key locations for the migration and settlement of Central Asian migrant workers:

- Far East: Khabarovsk.
- Siberia: Krasnoyarsk, Irkutsk, Novosibirsk.
- Ural: Yekaterinburg.
- Volga: Samara, Saratov.
- South: Astrakhan, Krasnodar, Sochi.
- Central: Moscow and Moscow region.
- North-West: St Petersburg.

The third phase of the project involved transcription of interviews and their translation into English. The fourth phase saw the research teams analyse the data. Given the volume of data, these two stages overlapped. Mid-way through the analysis cycle, RAS, SFCG and RUSI convened a three-day workshop in Almaty, Kazakhstan, to discuss preliminary findings, conceptual issues and drafting. The final stage was drafting the reports. There are five reports, each for a different audience: first, a report in English principally drafted by RUSI analysts; a report in Russian principally authored by RAS; and one report each on Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Each offers policy recommendations for the Russian Federation and Central Asian governments. They are all analysing the same data, but, given the different audiences and lead authors, offer slightly different recommendations and conclusions.

Executive Summary

THIS OCCASIONAL PAPER examines the factors contributing to radicalisation and violent extremism among labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Russia. The researchers conducted 218 interviews (67 Uzbeks, 83 Kyrgyz and 68 Tajiks) with migrant labour workers, experts and local officials in thirteen cities across seven areas in Russia.

This investigation looks through the lens of radicalisation and violent extremism rather than the economics of migration or the sociological experience of being a labour migrant. The aim of this research is to understand the broader political, economic, social, institutional and cultural conditions that might under certain circumstances generate violent extremism or leave individuals vulnerable to extremist messaging.

This report frames the research findings in terms of perceptions of the factors contributing to violent extremism rather than the causal factors leading to violent extremism. From a methodological perspective, an ideal research project would have had access to violent extremists themselves, but for various practical and ethical reasons this was not possible. Consequently, the research is about the milieu in which radicalisation takes place. Many respondents spoken to in this study had never encountered anyone who had been radicalised or recruited to violent extremism. However, some interviewees did know someone directly who had been radicalised or recruited to violent extremism. Data derived from the interviews with individuals who knew somebody closely who was radicalised is more reliable than others in the sample. This report draws more heavily on their accounts.

The baseline for violent extremism and terrorism among Central Asians working in Russia is low: there is a low incidence of violent extremism in terms of terrorist attacks, plots and supply of foreign fighters among Central Asian labour migrants in Russia. Even considering the upper estimates for numbers of Central Asian individuals who have gone to fight in Syria and Iraq, these are at most a few thousand. Of these, only some are identifiable as having worked in Russia, out of a community of labour migrants in Russia that numbers 2 million (in low estimates – some unofficially place the number as more than double that). It is ultimately only a tiny minority of migrants that become involved in violent extremist activity.

Perceptions of structural motivations: there is no clear evidence of a direct link between the marginalisation of labour migrants and the ‘push’ factors that might drive individuals towards violent extremism. However, notwithstanding the different migration experience among individuals from different Central Asian countries, there is some evidence of structural factors within the process of labour migration leading to marginalisation, exclusion and alienation across all three groups (Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek) that are the focus of this study. These findings corroborate the wider discourse and limited literature that exists about life as a labour migrant in Russia. The data shows three potential structural motivations. First, the challenges migrants

experience with the administrative, legal and financial process of registering forces some migrants to avoid registering legally and instead work in Russia on an illegal basis. Illegal migrants are then exposed to wider vulnerabilities. Second, the economic exploitation by some actors of migrants, concomitant with the financial hardship and poverty migrants must endure, compels a minority to pursue other means of surviving. Last, the stigmatisation and securitisation of labour migrants in general can lead to their social marginalisation, as well as foster grievances. All of these factors can impact the process of radicalisation, but at the same time, are not necessarily determinants of it taking place.

Perceptions of enabling factors in violent extremism: there is some fragmented but limited evidence that violent extremists are deliberately recruiting Central Asian labour migrants in Russia. While the data conveyed who the recruiters were believed to be and what techniques they use to lure recruits in, overall there remains a lacuna in our understanding of these groups/organisations/networks in Russia and the broader region. A considerable number of interviewees spoke about the role of social media in the radicalisation and recruitment process. It was seen as important in providing access to watch violent extremism videos, as well as receiving content through communications applications. This greater exposure to violent-extremist content was also seen to be more prevalent in Russia than in Central Asian countries because smartphones are more affordable and access to the internet is better.

There was also a perception that Russia is a more conducive environment for the adoption of violent extremist ideas than Central Asian countries. Interviewees perceived Russia as having a more tolerant recent record of accommodating religion than governments in Central Asia.

Finally, some culturally displaced migrants living in Russia who find themselves unable to adapt to their environment in some cases adopt a more categorical form of identity, such as a global Islamic identity, which potentially makes them more susceptible to mobilising for international causes. Violent extremists have exploited this enabling environment.

Perceptions of individual incentives for engaging in violent extremism: there is no conclusive evidence for why labour migrants from Central Asia working in Russia would go to fight in a third country.

However, most interviewees believed that a monetary incentive ('greed') was the primary motive for joining violent-extremist groups. The second-most-cited incentive for migrants engaged in violent extremism was religion. This finding is striking because in most literature on radicalisation, the 'greed' (money) narrative is less salient than the 'creed' (religion/ideology) narrative. While some respondents did mention that a few individuals were motivated by more emotional reasons, such as a duty to defend Muslims in Syria against perceived oppression, or by idealistic motives of contributing to the building of a new utopian society, many interviewees were in fact cynical about the role of religion in violent extremism. Many interviewees viewed religion to be a ruse used by recruiters to fulfil their objectives. There was also a notable lack of knowledge on ideology among interviewees, both in terms of its doctrinal features and the role it plays in violent extremism.

However, dominant perception among participants must be contrasted with respondents who actually knew someone who had been recruited and radicalised to violent extremism, who stressed that money was not the motivation. Instead, they stressed spiritual, religious and ideological motivations.

Perceptions of who is most at-risk and vulnerable to violent extremism: there is no typical profile of a violent extremist or a pre-existing vulnerability to radicalisation of labour migrants. There is also little or no clear and conclusive evidence about what makes Central Asian Labour migrants in Russia vulnerable to violent extremism. This fact is complicated further by the cultural, ethnic and historical differences between the three different groups of labour migrants examined (those from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). However, the data identifies four types of people that participants believed to be more vulnerable and at-risk to violent extremism: (1) youth; (2) illegal migrants; (3) uneducated migrants; and (4) lonely individuals.

Perceptions of existing sources of resilience: radicalisation and recruitment to violent extremism remains a marginal issue among labour migrants in Russia. Explanations for this low rate of violent extremism offered by interviewees focus on contextual rather than personal factors, which include: the sometimes-positive role of the Russian authorities at a local level; the role of community leaders, such as diaspora leaders, leaders of civil society organisations, consular and diplomatic officials, entrepreneurs, foremen and union leaders in the workplace, and religious leaders; community and social support; employment; the role of the family, including the guidance of family elders or foremen in the workplace; the positive influence of religion; and a level of education. Each explanation is plausible but not sufficient to comprehensively explain resilience. It is likely that these factors acting in concert have restrained violent extremism among labour migrants.

Recommendations

Greater regional cooperation to address violent extremism: the governments of Russia and Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan need to strengthen existing regional counterterrorism and countering violent extremism initiatives. There are already several regional institutions that look at these problems and seek to address issues through the lens of violent extremism. For example, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation's (CSTO) Anti-Terrorist Centre is engaged with this issue directly and it has a southern branch in Bishkek. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation focuses on it as well. There is a safety on the internet initiative between Russia and the CSTO under cyber security which deals with violent extremism. The effectiveness of these initiatives, however, is currently unclear.

Continue engagement by Russian authorities with diaspora communities: law enforcement and security agencies in some cases already have a productive relationship with Central Asian communities on security issues, and a positive engagement based on trust should continue. Additionally, greater support for leaders of the Central Asian diaspora communities should be encouraged, as they are already doing great unpublicised work in protecting their communities against violent extremism.

Develop a strategy to address the return of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) to Russia and Central Asian countries: the report does not examine what is to be done about the return of violent extremists (or FTFs) to Russia or their home country in Central Asia because the question fell outside the scope of the investigation. During the research, this reverse flow became increasingly prominent in the discussion around the topic of radicalisation. Stories have already emerged of people returning from the battlefield. Identifying how to manage this flow back to Russia and Central Asia requires a careful effort. Some countries, like Kyrgyzstan, have already adopted legislation to prevent such individuals from returning, and have arrested a number of reported returnees.

Further research to fill identified knowledge gaps: priorities for further research should be: (1) in-depth investigation into the role of extremist organisations and international networks operating in Russia (and their potential links to the North Caucasus – a detail repeatedly referenced by interview subjects); (2) understanding the vulnerability of illegal labour migrants in Russia and their relationship, if any, to violent extremism. The data shows that immigration is a tough experience – this is the case everywhere else and not only in Russia, but how exactly it affects the propensity to become radicalised requires more research, including interviews with different types of respondents; and (3) better understanding of how to address the return of FTFs to the Russian Federation and the broader Russian-speaking world from conflict zones in the Middle East.

Introduction

Raffaello Pantucci and Mohammed S Elshimi

RADICALISATION IN CENTRAL Asia (defined as the five countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) has been a longstanding concern both in the region and internationally.¹ Yet violence emanating from the region and these communities has historically been rare. The civil war in Tajikistan in the 1990s and the conflict in Afghanistan (both before and after the Soviet withdrawal) drew in some Central Asians and helped foster networks of Central Asian jihadists, but attacks in the region or further afield involving Central Asians during this period were rare. More recently, however, there have been several incidents across the globe involving individuals of Central Asian origin conducting terrorist attacks to further Daesh (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, ISIS) goals. Most recently, in 2017, attacks in New York, Stockholm, St Petersburg and Istanbul were all linked to Central Asians. And in August 2016, an attack against the Chinese Embassy in Bishkek, possibly linked to the conflict in Syria, highlighted how the threat could materialise back home.²

In addition, Central Asians have also been identified as having gone to fight in Syria and Iraq – though whether they have all come from Russia, Central Asia or elsewhere and where they were radicalised is not always clear.³ In nearby Afghanistan and Pakistan, Central Asians have appeared in the conflicts for some time, though numbers are disputed.⁴ It is clear that it is a minority of Central Asians who become involved in terrorist activity or go to jihadist battlefields, but understanding exactly what drives those that do is an important gap that needs to be filled in the current research around radicalisation to violence.

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1. For example, see Ahmed Rashid, *Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia* (Penguin, 2003). The concerns were much exacerbated in the wake of the 9/11 attacks on the US, but were already present in the background from the fall of the Soviet Union.
 2. *Radio Free Europe*, 'Kyrgyzstan Sentences Three Over Chinese Embassy Attack', 28 June 2017.
 3. Estimates of numbers, however, vary substantially. A report by the Soufan Group in December 2015 identified just over a thousand or so from Central Asia, while a report by the International Crisis Group in January 2015 identified between 2,000 and 4,000. See Soufan Group, 'Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq', December 2015; International Crisis Group, 'Syria Calling: Radicalisation in Central Asia', Europe and Central Asia Briefing No. 72, January 2015.
 4. For a history of the degree to which Central Asian fighters have been involved in Afghanistan, see Christian Bleuer and Said Reza Kazemi, 'Between Co-operation and Insulation: Afghanistan's Relations with the Central Asian Republics', report, Afghan Analysts Network, June 2014. For a more recent example in Pakistan, see the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan attack on Karachi airport in June 2014, or recent Afghan government statements about foreign fighters in Afghanistan.

Migration, and in particular economic migration, has recently been measured as a factor associated with an increased susceptibility of Central Asian individuals to radicalisation and recruitment into extremist groups.⁵ While there has yet to be detailed data collection on how and why Central Asians are recruited, sources including martyrdom statements and arrest reports show that a high number of individuals who end up fighting in Syria and Iraq started their journeys to Syria and Iraq from outside Central Asia, with many coming from Russia.⁶ Whilst it is unlikely that this provides an explanation for all Central Asians who have joined extremist groups (there is evidence of Central Asians going to Syria and Iraq directly from their home countries⁷), several of those who have ended up on the battlefield in Iraq and Syria have shared economic migration as a background factor.

Experts in countering violent extremism (CVE) and the region have stated that isolation, discrimination, stigmatisation and resentment may play a greater role in radicalisation among labour migrants in Russia than extreme religious beliefs.⁸ Central Asian labour migrants face xenophobia and discrimination after moving to Russia. Many seek protection and belonging among fellow nationals or other minority groups by joining local mosques and prayer rooms, even though they may not have actively practised Islam in their home countries. Research has shown that Tajiks in Russia in particular have been exposed to recruitment in gyms, suggesting that it is more about community than religion.⁹

The existing literature on this topic is limited. Noah Tucker focuses on the alleged motivations of Central Asians who have gone to fight in Syria and Iraq. He identifies economic motives among those outside Central Asia as the major identifiable driver of radicalisation, and shows that a great deal of recruitment and messaging takes place online. He points to three principal motivations to fight in Syria and Iraq: the perception of a 'just war' in Syria to protect Muslims who are suffering there; Daesh's manipulation of the feeling of marginalisation by offering an attractive 'Muslim utopia' in their caliphate; and a narrative that suggests that there is a Muslim 'state' that needs to develop to counter the West.¹⁰

Edward Lemon instead focuses on Tajiks, exploring the degree to which radicalisation happens at home and within Russia, and the Tajik government's response.¹¹ The International Crisis Group focuses on the phenomenon of fighters going to Syria from the region, highlighting the important role of online communications in their mobilisation, and the role of local drivers.¹² Others, like John

5. Noah Tucker, 'Central Asian Involvement in the Conflict in Syria and Iraq: Drivers and Responses', USAID, 4 May 2015.

6. *Ibid.*; Edward Lemon, 'Daesh and Tajikistan: The Regime's (In)Security Policy', *RUSI Journal* (Vol. 160, No. 5, October/November 2015).

7. Uran Botobekov, 'ISIS Uses Central Asians for Suicide Missions', *The Diplomat*, 1 December 2016.

8. Tucker, 'Central Asian Involvement in the Conflict in Syria and Iraq'; Marlene Laruelle, 'The Paradox of Uzbek Terror: Peace at Home, Violence Abroad', *Foreign Affairs*, 1 November 2017.

9. Lemon, 'Daesh and Tajikistan'.

10. Tucker, 'Central Asian Involvement in the Conflict in Syria and Iraq'.

11. Lemon, 'Daesh and Tajikistan'.

12. International Crisis Group, 'Syria Calling'.

Heathershaw and David Montgomery, focus on the ‘myth’ of radicalisation in the region.¹³ Writing about this topic in 2013, Eric McGlinchey considers labour migration as a potential preventive factor for radicalisation among Central Asians.¹⁴ There are other reports that have been written on these topics, but few appear based on primary data.

The most substantial empirical work looking at questions complementary to this Occasional Paper was undertaken by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) with the support of the Kazakh government and USAID, focusing on migrants who had been deported from or returned from working abroad, principally in Russia. It focused on migrant vulnerabilities and on the fact that:

[W]hile it has not been shown that migration is in itself sufficient to account for cases of radicalisation of migrants, the study points to the impact of the economic downturn, the presence of radical messages in religious communities in both the country of destination and origin and the sense of social injustice and desperation, felt by certain migrants when faced with the loss of legal status and an uncertain economic future.¹⁵

Migrants in this situation may ‘become more receptive to ideological messages that are actively disseminated by extremist organizations and preachers when they display a combination of economic and social vulnerabilities’.¹⁶ While the IOM report does not make a direct causal link given the difficulty to ascribe general reasons to an individual’s radicalisation, it highlights how negative aspects of the migration experience, exclusion and an inability to make money as a labour migrant can leave people prone to becoming involved in extremist activity. Remittances sent back by labour migrants working in Russia continue to be a major source of income for Central Asian economies – something that leaves them dependent on the Russian government’s attitude towards Central Asian migrant workers.

This brief literature review does not include Russian-language publications, though Russian partners in this project did not identify any major reports on the subject. Nevertheless, the review did bring to light two issues that have been reported as playing a significant role in the recruitment of labour migrants in Russia. First, as Russia has made its migration laws increasingly strict, many Central Asian migrant labourers face pressure to legalise their status after arriving; failure to do so can leave them vulnerable to radicalisation. Second, online influence is playing a role in the recruitment of labour migrants. This online influence can take many forms, both impersonal, with online propaganda, and personal, with social media communications.

13. John Heathershaw and David Montgomery, ‘The Myth of Post-Soviet Muslim Radicalization in the Central Asian Republics’, research paper, Chatham House, November 2014.

14. Eric McGlinchey, ‘Violent Extremism and Insurgency in Central Asia: A Risk Assessment’, USAID, September 2013.

15. International Organization for Migration (IOM), ‘Migrant Vulnerabilities and Integration Needs in Central Asia: Root Causes, Social and Economic Impact of Return Migration’, regional field assessment, 2016, p. 9.

16. *Ibid.*

It is important to reiterate that only a small fraction of Central Asian labour migrants have become drawn to extremist ideas. Exact numbers are impossible to know. But even if one takes the upper estimates of how many Central Asians are believed to have gone to Syria and Iraq (for example, a report from the International Crisis Group in January 2015 identified between 2,000 and 4,000, while a report from the Soufan Group in December 2015 identified just over 2,000 foreign fighters from Central Asia¹⁷), this is a fraction of the overall numbers of Central Asian labour migrants that are reported to be in Russia (which Russian sources place at between 2.7 million and 4.2 million¹⁸), and of course it is not clear that all of the Central Asians in Syria and Iraq started as labour migrants. Nevertheless, given the frequency of stories and narratives of Central Asians in Syria coming from Russia, it is clearly a topic that requires greater research.

This Occasional Paper approaches the topic using an innovative research methodology focused on the milieu in which radicalisation takes place, and draws on interview data with labour migrants and those living in the communities around them in Russia. It offers recommendations for the government of the Russian Federation, the governments of Central Asia, and outside powers to help address this specific aspect of radicalisation to violent extremism.

Methodology

This report seeks to answer the question: what are the factors contributing to radicalisation and violent extremism among labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Russia? The aim of this research project is to enhance the understanding of radicalisation and violent extremism among labour migrants in Russia from the three countries investigated. It develops the evidence base on factors that contribute to radicalisation and violent extremism among labour migrants in Russia to improve policy on preventing violent extremism. This study has two objectives:

1. To establish the context in which radicalisation takes place.
2. To understand, as far as possible, the possible range of contributing motivational factors (structural, enabling and micro) to radicalisation and violent extremism among labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Russia.

Qualitative interviews were used to gather the data. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, in which a set of fixed and open-ended questions were put to subjects, which the research teams, RUSI and RAS developed together in Moscow. The benefit of using semi-structured interviews was that it enabled consistent themes to be generated among the respondents, while also providing the researchers the flexibility to probe beyond the standard questions to elicit greater variations in the response of interviewees.

The sampling of respondents was determined by the interviewers on the ground, who either would go to areas where labour migrants were known to gather or reach out through networks to identify

17. International Crisis Group, 'Syria Calling'; The Soufan Group, 'Foreign Fighters', p. 15.

18. Sergey Ryazantsev, 'Labour Migration from Central Asia to Russia in the Context of the Economic Crisis', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 31 August 2016.

labour migrants. In addition to these direct interviews with labour migrants, several interviews with elites – including local officials, experts and others – were conducted. Thus, the sample for each of three ethnic-national groups includes participants from other ethnic-national backgrounds, who are considered as ‘elites’ in this report. While efforts were made to ensure a balance of subjects by gender, age, experience and so on, given the topicality and sometimes difficult nature of the locations in which interviews took place, this was difficult to maintain. In the end, a total of 218 people were interviewed.

To ensure that the data was analysed systematically and rigorously, three approaches were adopted. First, an integrated approach to coding was applied, using a system developed by RUSI which drew on terms and subjects that consistently emerged from the data, alongside a few key terms linked to the subject matter at the heart of the research. Second, a conceptual framework was developed to help shape the formulation of the questions, but also to organise the large data-set in a coherent and accessible way (details are given in the next section, Analytical Framework). Third, various sources of knowledge were triangulated as much as possible from across the data and other sources of information.

Researchers were neither able nor expected to interview actual violent extremists. This created a clear difficulty in trying to reach the goal of understanding violent extremism. A way around this problem was to apply an innovative milieu-based qualitative methodology. The approach uses a pyramid model of radicalisation, which posits that violent extremists emerge from broader communities of support known as the ‘radical milieu’.¹⁹ Together, these communities comprise the physical or social setting in which radicalisation occurs. Although no interviews were ultimately conducted with those who have been recruited or radicalised, some interviewees had information based on actual (primarily second-hand but also anecdotal) knowledge of radicalisation processes. The research is therefore based on the understanding that the information received was not simply assumptions among migrant workers about potential grievances or incentives driving radicalisation, but in some cases, was based on knowledge of radicalisation – on their lived experiences of friends, colleagues and family members. The responses of participants are divided into the following four classifications, which form a hierarchy of evidence:

1. Direct experience (that is to say, have been approached) of radicalisation/recruitment.
2. Know someone who has been radicalised/recruited.
3. Heard of someone (second-hand source or informed opinion, for instance, expert opinion) being radicalised/recruited.
4. No personal knowledge (that is to say, knowledge obtained from the media, word of mouth or hearsay) of radicalisation/recruitment.

Most respondents interviewed in the fieldwork fall under classification 4. This explains why this report frames the research findings as ‘perceptions’ of radicalisation to violent extremism, instead of causal factors. However, there are a number of interviewees who either had a direct connection to

19. Stefan Malthaner and Peter Waldmann, ‘The Radical Milieu: Conceptualizing the Supportive Social Environment of Terrorist Groups’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (Vol. 37, No. 12, 2014).

recruitment to violent extremism or had an informed knowledge of radicalisation and recruitment. This project therefore prioritised classifications 2 and 3 in the data (classification 1 is beyond the scope of this study), focusing on the case studies of individuals who knew someone who was radicalised and recruited. This allows the report to build a profile of the violent extremists who went to fight in Syria or Iraq, as well as those who committed acts of terrorism.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework used in this research was developed by RUSI in response to one of the biggest challenges of conducting research on radicalisation to violent extremism – how to interview radical individuals without easy access to a community radicalised to violence. It addresses the pertinent methodological question: in the absence of a radicalised cohort, how does one research radicalisation? In response, RUSI researchers have formulated an analytical framework that aims to analyse the drivers of radicalisation that takes into consideration the importance of context, and encompasses the widest possible range of interconnected factors. The framework is also used to systematise analysis and reduce bias. The framework is captured in Box 1.²⁰

20. The first three elements of the framework – structural motivation, individual incentive and enabling factors – were developed by James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen, 'Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation', *RUSI Whitehall Report*, 2-16 (June 2016).

Box 1: A Typology of Factors of Radicalisation

Structural motivators: Commonly known as ‘push factors’, these include factors such as: repression; corruption; unemployment; inequality; discrimination; a history of hostility between identity groups; and intervention by other states.

Individual incentives: Commonly understood in terms of ‘pull factors’, including: a sense of purpose (generated through acting in accordance with perceived ideological tenets); adventure; belonging; acceptance; identity; status; material enticements; coercion; and expected rewards in the afterlife.

Enabling factors: Not associated with individual motivations but with the presence of people, ideas, resources and spaces that encourage the development of radicalisation to occur, including: the presence of ‘radical’ mentors (including religious leaders, individuals from social networks, and so on); access to ‘radical’ online communities; social networks with violent-extremist associations; access to weaponry or other relevant items; a comparative lack of state influence; the presence of narratives; identity politics; an absence of familial support; the presence of vulnerable people (such as youth or criminals).

Resilience: Refers to the capability of individuals and communities to overcome adversity. At an individual level these include: personal experience, beliefs and values; family and friends; access to resources; personal attributes such as confidence and self-esteem; job; religion; and education. At a community (social level) these include: bonds between families and friends; and ‘trust’. At a political level (structural), these can include: the rule of law; state welfare provisions; and just law enforcement agencies.

Radicalisation is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon, emerging from the interaction of micro-individual, enabling environment (socio-cultural) and macro-structural factors: it cannot be predicted by one variable alone. This report examines the findings gleaned from the data in relation to the inter-connected relationship between these dimensions. For violent extremist movements to develop, and for individuals to join them, requires an alignment of situational, social/cultural and individual factors. Using this framework, the research teams were able to use an analytical structure which helped understand the interaction between enabling factors, individual incentives and structural causes among the community of Central Asian labour migrants, as well as explore what effective resilience factors might already exist to help shape recommendations.

Definitions and Concepts

Research on radicalisation to violent extremism is beset by definitional and conceptual challenges. Other than the term ‘migrant’, this report adopts the definitions and concepts from RUSI’s Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Training Curriculum for the European Commission,²¹ to address key terms:

Migrant: IOM defines a migrant as ‘any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from his/her habitual place of residence, regardless of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is’.²²

Violent extremism is the use of and support for violence in pursuit of ideological, religious or political goals.²³ Extremist violence is differentiated from other forms of violence by its motivation, it seeks to achieve ideological, religious or political goals. violent extremism therefore includes terrorism, other forms of politically motivated violence, and some forms of communal violence.²⁴

Violent extremism is not, however, a simple or uncontroversial concept. Of course, ‘extreme’ is a relative concept that can only be understood in relation to the ‘norm’, and as such it is unavoidably subjective. A difficulty arises from the relationship between violent manifestations of extremism and non-violent ones. The UN secretary-general has acknowledged this difficulty in the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. This expressly avoids defining violent

21. RUSI, ‘Countering Violent Extremism, Regional Training Curriculum,’ European Commission 2018.

22. IOM, ‘Who is a Migrant?’, <<https://www.iom.int/who-is-a-migrant>>, accessed 26 March 2018.

23. See Minerva Nasser-Eddine et al., ‘Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Literature Review’, Counter Terrorism and Security Technology Centre, Defense Science and Technology Organisation, Australian Department of Defence, 2011, p. 9; James Khalil, ‘Know Your Enemy: On the Futility of Distinguishing Between Terrorists and Insurgents’, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (Vol. 36, No. 5, 2013), pp. 419–30.

24. UN, ‘Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism’, Report of the Secretary-General, 24 December 2015, p. 1.

extremism, and acknowledges at the outset that ‘violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon, without clear definition’.²⁵

Radicalisation is commonly understood as the social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to extremist ideologies.²⁶ Radicalisation describes a process where an individual’s beliefs move from being relatively mainstream to seeking a drastic change in society. Radicalisation does not necessarily mean that those who experience it will become violent. However, once an individual decides that terror and violence are justified to achieve ideological, political or social change, that individual has become a violent extremist. Since radicalisation is a process, the term reflects a certain complexity as to how persons come to accept and support the use of terrorist means to achieve political objectives.

Radicalisation is a complex and potentially problematic concept and there are three issues that need to be understood:

- a. Some authorities take the concept to imply that the end point of radicalisation is violence, whereas others take it to mean that the end point may be merely ‘extreme’ views (that is to say, without necessarily advocating/being involved in violence);
- b. Radicalisation tends to imply unwarranted degrees of consistency and linearity in the trajectory from ‘non-radical’ to ‘radical’ (downplaying the extent to which everyone has their own path);
- c. Radicalisation implies that a change in behaviour is the result of a change in belief. Mainstream psychology however shows that the relationship between beliefs and behaviours is surprisingly weak, and research into terrorism has shown that it is possible to hold extreme beliefs and to be non-violent, while some very violent extremists have not been influenced strongly by ideology.²⁷

When trying to analyse the process of radicalisation to violence, extremism or somewhere in between, it is never a direct causal chain. Reflecting the complicated nature of human behaviour, it tends to be highly personal and individualised. There is no single clear path to radicalisation.

Recruitment is often used in conjunction with ‘radicalisation’. However, the terms are not interchangeable. Recruitment implies that there is some external agent or influence that draws persons into engaging in terrorism, which is essentially a top-down process. Involvement in

25. *Ibid.*, p. 1.

26. Definition adapted from European Commission, *STRIVE for Development: Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism*, revised edition (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016).

27. Psychologists such as Randy Borum and John Horgan have been particularly critical of what they see as the received wisdom that extreme violence is caused by radical views. See John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, 2nd edition (Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2014); Randy Borum, ‘Understanding Terrorist Psychology’, Mental Health Law & Policy Faculty Publications, Paper 576, January 2010.

violent extremism, however, is not merely the result of recruiters looking out for potential recruits. In reality individuals are often proactive about becoming involved, and as such the process is commonly more bottom-up than is implied by the term 'recruitment'.

Resilience refers to the capability of individuals and communities to overcome adversity. The EU defines resilience to violent extremism as the capability of people, groups and communities to rebut and reject proponents of terrorism and the ideology they promote.²⁸ Despite the lack of agreed definitions of resilience in CVE policy and practice, it could nevertheless be regarded as a broad concept that captures a wide range of factors – ideas, institutions, issues, trends or values – that enable individuals and communities to resist or prevent violence, as well as recover or 'bounce back' from violent extremism. In this respect, resilience can be helpfully separated into protective factors (considered as a more passive type of logic, such as being able to 'absorb' an attack or threat) and responsive factors (a more proactive logic, for instance moving forward with life in a new and enhanced direction).

Vulnerability is defined as the condition of being capable of being injured; difficult to defend; open to moral or ideological attack. Within CVE, the word describes factors and characteristics associated with being susceptible to radicalisation.²⁹

'At-Risk' refers to the criteria used to distinguish potential beneficiaries of targeted interventions at key 'at-risk' demographics. 'At-risk' individuals and communities have been identified through a needs assessment to be vulnerable to radicalisation and recruitment by violent extremists. Both ideas implicitly refer to individuals and groups of people who could potentially and are in fact exposed to the possibility of being radicalised or recruited. But a second dimension to the concept of both 'vulnerability' and 'at-risk' is the idea that a person is in need of special care, support, or protection because of the threat of violent extremism.

Limitations of the Research

This research captures the potential range of factors that contribute to the broader context within which cases of violent extremism emerge among Central Asian labour migrants in Russia. But the evidence base necessary for a detailed, comprehensive and methodologically rigorous assessment of violent extremism among Central Asian labour migrants in Russia is limited. The low volume of incidents and the relatively small number of individuals implicated in violent extremism mean that an empirical and causal explanation for the radicalisation of a minority of Central Asian migrants in Russia cannot be asserted. In addition, the psychological and sociological diversity of violent-extremist militants, coupled with the individualised, context-specific nature of pathways towards violence, makes it difficult to definitively answer the questions of how and why a minority of Central Asian labour migrants went to fight in a third country. This challenge is made particularly acute without a sample of violent extremists to interview, and without longitudinal studies and ethnographic fieldwork.

28. European Commission, *STRIVE for Development*, p. 55

29. *Ibid.*

The research design reflects some limitations. First, there is the issue of access to violent extremists – though this is mitigated through the milieu approach. Second, it is possible that the sample size does not necessarily reflect the community of radicalised individuals or labour migrants more broadly. Third, it is impossible to guarantee that interview subjects will honestly respond to questions on a sensitive topic such as extremism to someone they do not know. In addition, there is a huge diversity among Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz communities and the cities and contexts in which the subjects live. All these factors make sweeping comparisons or comprehensive policy recommendations a challenge. A final point to highlight is that a number of the interviews were incomplete or included subjects not relevant to the research. This was a result of the difficult circumstances under which the interview teams operated.

I. Labour Migrants from Uzbekistan

Mohammed S Elshimi

THIS SECTION IS divided into five sub-sections that follow the analytical framework used to analyse the data. This includes: perceptions of structural motivation; perceptions of enabling factors; perceptions of individual incentives; perceptions of vulnerable and at-risk populations; and perceptions of resilience. This framework aims to analyse the drivers of radicalisation that takes into consideration the importance of context, as well as encompass the widest possible range of interconnected factors.

Perceptions of Structural Motivation

Migration Experience

According to eleven respondents (21%), there was a correlation between the adverse effects of migration to Russia in some instances – working illegally and ending up in severe financial debt – and being at more risk and vulnerable to violent extremism. Indeed, nine interviewees (17%) held the perception that the administrative and legal complexity of working in Russia discouraged labour migrants from seeking legal status, forcing many to live outside the law. In fact, 20 participants (38%), as well as all three in the focus group, highlighted the complexity and difficulties of the current administrative and legal procedure for registration as a major issue. According to interviewees, the process of registering legally for work in Russia entails registering for a visa and work patents (documents naturalising the status of migrants); the cost of completing the necessary paperwork; Russian language and history exams for migrants; and the short time-frame by which to do all of this.

One recurring complaint among respondents was about the complexity and difficulties of the registration process. A construction worker from Novosibirsk claimed, ‘If we didn’t have these problems with work and papers, then we would be able to solve our problems’ (Novo 15).¹ The leader of the Uzbek diaspora and now-Russian citizen in Astrakhan said of the difficulty of the language and history tests: ‘Also, Russian literature and history exams for migrants are unrealistic, even Russian state officials can’t pass them’ (Astr 12). Four respondents also emphasised that the long and demanding process was not helped by the short window provided to complete all the paperwork and tests: the entire process has to be completed within one month or applicants are fined. As a medium-sized business owner in Ekaterinburg remarked, ‘7 days for a permit and

1. This quote is followed by a code in brackets that identifies the city and interviewee number, so that ‘Novo’ is short for Novosibirsk, and the number 15 denotes the fact that this interviewee is the 15th participant to be interviewed. This convention is used throughout the report.

30 days to process documents is not enough' (Ekat 9). Moreover, interviewees shared the view that the process had become much more expensive. By the estimates of a business owner from Novosibirsk (Novo 16), it costs 40,000 roubles for a migrant to get all the necessary paperwork. A Russian professor in St Petersburg explained the consequences of an expensive administrative process: 'this [the expense] leads to the fact that many migrants from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan do not get patents because of their cost. I think it's almost half' (StPb 4).

Exploitation and Financial Hardship

Fifteen interviewees made a link between the precarious financial situation in which many labour migrants find themselves (especially illegal migrants) and an increased vulnerability to being targeted by violent extremist recruiters. A prevalent perception among 20 respondents (38%) was that economic vulnerability could be attributed to exploitation by various organisations and actors. For example, both legal and illegal migrants were being said to be exploited by intermediary organisations, employers, landlords, insurance companies, criminal networks and violent extremists, among others. A manager of a transportation company in Khabarovsk described this as 'Migrants are the "milking cow" for everyone: both countries, the different agencies, and now with terrorism as well ... corruption is booming on the backs of migrants' (Krsk 11). Indeed, a major consequence of the complex and costly administrative process for registration has been the emergence of companies and organisations that act as intermediaries who offer to help migrants with the registration process – for a fee. This is explained below by an Uzbek who created a cultural and adaptation centre in Samara:

The first problem is that the FMS [Federal Migration Service] does not cope with such a flow of migrants, especially during the season of work. Therefore, there are huge queues, so there are all sorts of intermediaries, including black [market] mediators. And that's why many migrants simply do not register and do not get patents, trying to stay here as long as possible, to earn as much as possible and go home knowing that at the border he will get a stamp with refusal of entry for a year. In a year, everything repeats itself again. But they are the first to be at risk, especially if they meet a recruiter. (Sama 10)

The problem with intermediaries is that they exploit migrants and either charge a lot of money for their services or end up defrauding their clients. For example, a Tatar assistant at a mosque in Samara highlighted the fact that 'Some come to the mosque, it turns out that they do not have any money, sometimes they were deceived by the mediators' (Sama 22). An employee at a centre that helps migrant workers in Krasnodar spoke about a case of embezzlement involving fifteen Uzbeks and an intermediary organisation: 'At the moment 15 people from Uzbekistan were scammed out of almost 3.5m [roubles] and these cases often happen' (Kdar 7). Another reason some of the migrants are exploited is due to their legal status. Many interviewees argued that illegal migrants were particularly at risk due to their precarious position and poor working conditions. As the businessman from Novosibirsk put it, 'they don't have to pay an illegal much and they can be fired whenever' (Novo 16). The fact that illegal migrants do not enjoy any protection legally means that they are exploited by some employers, who are believed to offer work to illegal migrants through verbal agreement instead of work contracts, and who then

subsequently benefit from their free labour before renegeing on their verbal agreements. Illegal labour migrants are unlikely to complain about unpaid wages for fear that their employers would report them to the authorities. In addition, nine interviewees (17%) revealed that other actors also exploit the migration situation, like public officials and the insurance industry. The word used by one anonymous interviewee in Samara was 'corruption':

[It is] difficult for them to legalise, that is, to obtain documents permitting work, there is almost no social support, difficulties with residence and housing, and so on. Migrants are surrounded by corruption, starting with the employees of the Federal Migration Service and ending with medical personnel ... it turns out that they do not have any money, sometimes they were deceived by the mediators. (Sama 22)

A sense for the cumulative effects of these costs was highlighted by a female Uzbek factory cleaner in Samara:

The patent is expensive; to get it is a whole story, a lot of expenses, including various black [market] intermediaries. The apartment also takes a lot of money, about 10 thousand roubles. Registration is also a difficult matter. In order to have at least something to send home you need to work for 16–17 hours. It's hard. (Sama 7)

One Uzbek male respondent working in construction in Novosibirsk highlighted the significance of these payments for an ordinary migrant: 'We only work 7 or 8 months of [the] year but we must spend almost 2 months' salary getting these (work) papers'. (Novo 15)

In effect, whether the migrant is legal or illegal, they begin life in Russia in considerable debt and having to endure considerable hardships.

Stigma and Securitisation

Almost half of the respondents complained about labour migrants facing discrimination from the authorities, the media and wider society. For some interviewees, there was growing stigma attached to being a labour migrant in Russia. Whilst only two (Mosc 3 and Kdar 7) linked this directly with radicalisation and recruitment, other participants highlighted the alienation and marginalisation resulting from the stigmatisation of labour migrants. One interviewee, a male in Krasnodar who works in a centre assisting migrant workers, said that 'People treat them [migrants] badly; even if they are Russians who were born in Uzbekistan and then came to Russia. It is very hard to earn money' (Kdar 7). According to the leader of a diaspora organisation in Astrakhan: 'In the media, they're artificially making the migrants the scapegoats, blaming them for all problems. People don't get to hear what benefits they are bringing for Russia, for the economy here, for development' (Astr 12).

There is a wider contextual reality of growing xenophobia being expressed in the press. This was explained by a Russian university professor in St Petersburg:

Moscow has traditionally been wary of those who arrived. Previously, the word ‘overrun’ was attached to the temporary resident workers, to the Caucasians ... In just 2012–14, there has been an increase in labour migration ... Previously, the context of the discussion was different. For example, ‘compatriots abroad’ help them and so on. And ‘compatriots’ was sometimes understood in the sense of fellow citizens of the former USSR. As for labour migration, they started talking actively about it in the media since the 2000s, more and more. (StPb 4)

Moreover, in Russia there is an increasingly securitised migration rhetoric that frames migrants as a threat. Several interviewees stated that police attention had increased since the St Petersburg bombing of April 2017. A male Uzbek from Ekaterinburg said ‘because of these explosions, the attitude of the population and even the police has become worse’ (Ekat 6). Others worried about police raids and, according to one Uzbek respondent from Ekaterinburg, ‘people don’t like to gather in flats, especially of late’, also complaining that migrants were being treated ‘as if we are all guilty’ (Ekat 8). The mistreatment of labour migrants, where they are ‘treated like cattle’ and in which some policeman might abuse their powers by extracting payment (‘a bottle’), was described by a market trader in Samara:

Then, under round-ups, people are treated like cattle, as enemies. But we are not enemies; we respect their President, Putin ... Then after the round-up everything ends with additional fees, [if] you cannot pay them, they will kick you back to your homeland. Because of high fees, many simply do not get patents and work illegally, but leave far away to the fields. There everything is decided with the policeman for a bottle. (Sama 6)

One of the interviewees, a teacher living in Ekaterinburg, described police arresting migrants ‘to fill their quota of criminal arrests’ (Ekat 7). A foreman from Moscow explained how the police sometimes raid mosques and temporarily detain them. Because of such raids, ‘young people stop coming to the mosque and create their own *jamaats* [groups]’ (Mosc 3). He also said that migrants should ‘not be humiliated by raids or put like prisoners into concentration camps’ because this only prevents assimilation and creates hatred (Mosc 3). On migrants, he says, ‘Their tolerance is strong but should not be tested all the time’ (Mosc 3). Similarly, a worker at a migration adaptation centre in Krasnodar describes how an otherwise normal migrant might become adversely impacted: ‘the raids on migrants begin. And if at such a moment, a good and unspoiled person let’s say, doesn’t have any documents, he starts hiding somewhere and gradually changes and begins to become different’ (Kdar 7).

When asked about who in the community can prevent radicalisation, a foreman in Astrakhan was sceptical:

and who said that we are reading to become Wahhabis, or how you say, radicals? Why do we have to ‘work’ with us? I often hear these words on the television, ‘radical-shmadikal’, ‘extremists-pextremists’ ... I even asked them ‘there’ [points up indicating law enforcement] what is this ‘radicalism-padicalism’. Even they ‘there’ do not know. Everyone simply says that everyone in a mosque – is almost a radical. (Astr 11)

His comments challenged the idea that there was a problem of migrant radicalisation to begin with. This wider discursive framing of migration in conjunction with the everyday experience of stigma makes some migrants conscious of their ethnic difference and low social status in Russian society.

Perceptions of the Enabling Factors

Recruitment to Violent Extremism

Of the 52 interviewees, two respondents (4%) had direct knowledge of recruitment and radicalisation – in other words, they knew someone who has been radicalised – while another three (6%) had an informed knowledge of radicalisation, in that they have either have conducted research on the issue or have seen court transcripts. More than a quarter of respondents mentioned that Caucasians (Dagestanis, Chechens, Azerbaijanis and Avars) were primarily responsible for recruitment, especially Chechens. The comment in Box 2 is from an Uzbek female respondent who sheds light on the recruitment process in more detail.

Box 2: Informed Knowledge of Recruitment

In this case, the interviewee explains instances of recruitment based on court transcripts they have claimed to have seen (emphasis added):

Recruitment is primarily done by **those from the Caucasus**, everyone knows that. They do it through **other recruits from Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz communities**. As our guys will be more open to speak and can only listen to their own. This is particularly important **for Uzbeks – to have contact with their own**. Then they transfer to the hands of the Caucasians and other people in a big circle. Begin to visit their lessons, read their literature. **From court material I know, this is done in places far away, for example, in a forest in an abandoned children's camp**. I know of a case where an Uzbek from the Bukinsky district [located in Uzbekistan] was involved in a *jamaat* He was involved in repairing the school. The Foreman was Tajik, who went to the Historical Mosque of Samara. He said find a couple of other guys. During his work he played films. For example, 'we shot down a plane', which was taken, as you know, after ISIS shot down a plane. He played it loud, not hiding from anyone. Then every evening this Tajik guy conducted conversations and working these guys. **Then they were caught, likely reported by people from other brigades**. [He] was later acquitted, as he cooperated with the investigation. They arrested the others ... **That was around February 2016** ... there are more such examples. (Sama 8)

Whilst the main recruiters at the top of the network are Caucasians, direct recruitment at the point of contact is done through the same ethnic group as those being recruited. The reliability of these comments regarding knowledge of recruitment can be questioned if taken on its own. However, the interviewee, who leads an organisation addressing migrant issues, bases her comments on 'court material'. In addition, a similar assertion was made by two other

respondents, who suggested that Uzbek recruiters take their orders and are paid by Caucasian recruiters. There is also another possibility in the data that extremism is being transmitted into Russia from Central Asian countries. This would posit that governments in Central Asian countries expel religious extremists, who then make their way to Russia where they find a more hospitable environment within which to operate and recruit. For example, an Uzbek diaspora leader in Novosibirsk believed extremists were largely from certain areas and cities in Uzbekistan, 'those from Fergana valley – Jalalabat and Osh Uzbeks' and those from 'the Namangan, Jalal-Abad and Andijan regions' (Novo 17). The businessman from Novosibirsk reiterated this view, saying that some Central Asians in Russia were 'already infected with extremism and they mix with Caucasians, Azeris and Tajiks who are Wahhabis like them, especially Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan' (Novo 16).

Surprisingly, fifteen respondents (28%) spoke at length about methods of recruitment. According to these interviewees, recruiters use a variety of methods to recruit people. By far the most common method of recruitment is a monetary incentive. A female Uzbek court translator from Samara said that 'People were helped financially, giving small bonuses. And then, in their spare time, they were taught how to read the Qur'an, then they explained what "right Islam" is, what jihad is and so on' (Sama 8).

This use of deception as a tactic – dangling monetary incentives to lure recruits – was also highlighted by an Uzbek diaspora leader in Astrakhan. He reports that he has heard from 'a reliable person' that young recruits are given money and told they will work in construction. But when they get there 'they put a machine gun in their hands ... by then it is too late' (Astr 8). While the veracity of these comments is unreliable, his account nevertheless echoes comments made by another interviewee whose nephew was at the receiving end of violent extremist recruitment (see Box 3). As an Uzbek businessman living in Moscow said: 'They snare them with beautiful words, money and lies' (Mosc 1). Another tactic deployed by recruiters was forging friendships with their target. An Uzbek labourer in Novosibirsk (see Box 3) described first-hand how his nephew was almost recruited in Kazan. Moreover, the same interviewee thought that recruiters seek those with military training (like his nephew), an assertion repeated by the businessman from Novosibirsk, who knew of attempts at recruitment in Uzbekistan. According to him, 'They choose guys who have served in the army or are physically strong ... They are also psychologists, they study whether someone could be used a suicide bomber' (Novo 16).

Box 3: Direct Knowledge of Recruitment

In this case, a construction worker in Novosibirsk explained how his nephew was almost recruited in Kazan (emphasis added):

Those who are deceived are mostly young people who don't have money or believe the lies of the recruiters. **That's how they tried to lure in my nephew. It's good that I was with him in Kazan.** What would have happened otherwise? He'd be toast. He's only 23 years old. But he served in the army. He wanted to stay in the army but they wouldn't let him.

People say that at first an Uzbek guy started hanging around him and then a Tajik and some Tatars. But a guy from my hometown warned me that my nephew was in contact with bad people. I immediately started to question him about it. I even beat him several times. But he wouldn't say anything. Then I took him here to Novosibirsk. But he wouldn't even do his work properly. But the boss understood and let him go. Now my nephew doesn't come to Russia any more, they found him work back home.

They promised him a good job in Turkey and said that sometimes he would have to travel to other countries. These recruiters know already that even though they are inexperienced, young people have heard about Syria and Iraq and would be afraid, refusing to go there. And everyone thinks that Turkey is paradise. Although I haven't heard how my nephew is getting on and what's happened to him. **They also lure people in with promises of work in other Arabic countries.**

But when these ... tried to fill his head with nonsense in Kazan, he changed a lot. It was like he was on drugs. (Novo 15)

Box 4: Direct Knowledge of Recruitment

In this case, a former Islamist explains how his employee's brother was recruited (emphasis added):

My employee ... younger brother was swindled by them. He understood when he stopped answering calls. When ... asked me to visit his brother, I sensed something was wrong with him and we went together to his place of work in Domodedovo. There we found his foreman. This guy was a fool and an alcoholic. We have a saying, the bad shepherd the sheep will die.

In one word, we began to ask the guys in the brigade what and how. It turned out that he often went on his phone, downloaded all sorts of videos. Then he changed completely and did not go to work. Then a Tajik came with him, redeemed his documents and they disappeared. Unfortunately, we did not find a guy... And before that, he began to stare at his phone which ... himself gave him as a present. That's what you need to take away from such young fool.

The young guy got caught by their tricks. I feel sorry for his family: the woman was left alone. Well, he died, probably. They do not live there for long.

They reach youth either through *da'wat* [to proselytise], or via the Internet ... I think there are many reasons and they all work together. For example, if we say that it's only about money, then we can say that, yes, the guys really are short on money. But in this case, too, he was brainwashed. And then, for sure, **he is still being told that he will go to protect the Muslim brothers.** There are a lot of reasons, I think, and that's how you should investigate this.

I think that the ways are different and *da'watchi* usually studies their victims ... But I would, of course, start by processing the possible victim. I would ask any usual, but very uncomfortable questions. For example, **he would ask: 'Do you love your Koran? Do you love your belief/religion? Do you love your Prophet?'**... Then he would ask ... **'Why then do not you defend your religion, your Qu'ran, or your Prophet?'** These are the questions they ask, these servant of Satan. (Mosc 1)

In addition, this method of using entrapment was echoed by a market trader in Samara (Sama 6) who shared the story of how the son of a person he knew from his village in Uzbekistan was lured to Turkey by recruiters with the promise of a better job than the one he had in Russia. Another tactic is to appeal to people's emotions and generate emotional guilt. This is done through a narrative that espouses the notion that Muslims are being attacked and are suffering in different places, and the solution to this tragedy is to leave one's country and travel to Syria to defend Muslims against tyranny and injustice. A foreman in Astrakhan shed more light on this approach to recruitment: 'They approached a few of the guys on the sly – started to ask about their life, family. Then they tried to teach how to pray properly and spoke about Syria. They say, Muslims are killed there, but we are sitting quietly here, as if nothing is happening' (Astr 11).

In terms of places of recruitment, most participants mentioned the mosque as the main site of recruitment, especially non-mainstream mosques, which were referred to as 'Wahhabi' by several respondents. A foreman from Astrakhan mentioned the 'red mosque':

Here there is a mosque – ‘Red mosque’. When the Imam was Tatar, everything was fine. Then there was someone from Dagestan and they say the mosque became Wahhabi. I told the guys not to go there. We heard that they recruited 2–3 people there. It was shown on local TV. (Astr 11)

With respect to getting to Syria, eleven respondents (21%) said Russia to Turkey was the main route of travel. An interviewee from Krasnodar (Kadr 7) claimed that two ferries from Russia sailed to Turkey when relations were good between the two countries. Many travelled, he claimed, through the Caucasus too.

Box 5: Informed Knowledge of Recruitment

In this case, a Russian professor in Astrakhan reflects on whether there have been instances of recruitment of migrants in Astrakhan, including women (emphasis added):

[Going] there it’s mostly Caucasians ... including long-time residents of Astrakhan. There have been cases amongst Tajiks and Uzbeks. True, I cannot speak of statistics. But there have been cases in the last 2–3 years, including those that were not announced in the media widely, but in private seminars or meetings. In the press, it sometimes slips out. Including the cases among migrants. Of course, most of these attempts were stopped by the law-enforcement agencies before they were sent on literally their ‘last journey’. But, as for migrants, I would say that this is not a mass issue. **According to my calculations, at first about one hundred people left the Astrakhan region for ISIS ... in 2013–14 and part of 2015.** Although the numbers were defined in different ways – from 70 to 90–100. **This group comprised of Avars, local Kazakhs [from Astrakhan], those of Kazakh and Avar mixed heritage, but there were Uzbeks with Tajiks.** The bulk of them were local citizens. I did not hear about women. Now, as I heard in these forums, it has really subsided. Many were killed there and many people here know about it ... I do not know whether this is due to enlightenment or resources have dried up, generally a clear decline. (Astr 10)

Box 6: Informed Knowledge of Recruitment

In response to the statement, ‘Uzbeks are getting “wahhabised” or are inclined to gather in *jamaats*’, a professor of sociology responded (emphasis added):

56 people were detained in the prayer house ... In one of our new neighbourhoods almost beyond the city, on the outskirts beyond the city, on the outskirts. At first I thought it was an exaggeration. **But then they say weapons were found.** Here you cannot escape. (Sama 11)

The Internet

In Russia, the internet can be regarded as more of an enabling factor in processes of violent extremism than in Central Asian countries. This is primarily because Uzbeks in Russia have more and cheaper access to the internet than in Uzbekistan. Three interviewees (6%) specifically mentioned smartphones and seven (13%) spoke about the internet as a major information source. More importantly, nearly half of interviewees mentioned online recruitment and the availability of extremist material online. Eleven respondents (21%) mentioned videos with extremist content. An Uzbek in Moscow stated that ‘the internet is and will remain a method of recruitment for these *jamaats*’ (Mosc 3) and a business owner in Ekaterinburg said he guarded against this because ‘It’s true that the young guys watch other stuff on the internet. Us older guys warn them about this all the time. We understand that is how they get recruited’ (Ekat 9).

In terms of radicalisation and recruitment, two interviewees (4%) said that the more radical form of social media content is delivered in stages and further up the recruitment process (Sama 7 and Astr 7). At first individuals receive innocuous messages on messaging apps such as WhatsApp or Telegram. Videos are shared too. Then content of a more religious nature is shared with them, which subsequently progresses to more serious material about jihad. A female factory worker in Samara explained:

On WhatsApp once came some stories about our Oisha-mother. I used to hear it from my grandmother. So I read what came to me on the phone. It was interesting. So I added the sender to my ‘friends’ list. Then other stories began to come, about our Prophet, about other saints. Then some more stories about jihad and other such ... My friend showed it to me, I immediately said that it was necessary to lock these messages down, expel from friends and erase. (Sama 7)

Some respondents described how recruiters would initially send their targets innocent videos about reading the Qu’ran before progressing to more violent content. This was explained by a construction worker in Astrakhan:

Here, on the internet, wherever you want you can freely climb. Right. There everything is simple and [you] come across all sorts of videos, as they told me, first simple stories, or there are lessons on the correct reading of the Qu’ran and others like that. And then they also send other things that attract young people and all that. That is, they lure gradually. See for yourself on the internet. As soon as you climb into such a place, you will be lured, sent something. This was told to us. Therefore, I have a simple phone only for communication. And the young, we banned other phones. Only under our control. (Astr 7)

A More Permissive Environment for Exposure to Alternative Ideas and People

An important finding from the data is that Russia potentially presents a more conducive environment for the exposure to alternative forms of religion and lifestyle than Central Asian countries. This is due to a combination of complex and interrelated factors.

First, governments in Central Asian countries are perceived to have a less tolerant record of accommodating religion than Russia in recent history. Two of the interviewees said that there is more religious freedom in Russia than at home, as expressed by this respondent in Samara: 'They enjoy freedom of religion, sometimes more than at home' (Sama 22). This idea was echoed by an Uzbek diaspora leader in Khabarovsk: 'In Russia, Muslims normally feel themselves religiously, they are not forbidden to read *namaz* [prayer] the mosque is officially registered' (Khab 25). Some respondents suggested that some Islamists from Central Asian countries who have been proscribed and exiled from their home countries exploit the more permissive spaces found in Russia.

Second, there is an increased possibility for some migrant workers to come into greater contact with either more puritanical readings of Islam or more radical versions of Islam (the two are not the same, nor are they necessarily linked), as well as a more diverse group of people in Russia than back in their home countries. For a third of interviewees, this greater exposure to more 'extreme' or radical interpretations of Islam was blamed on either the 'Wahhabis', recruiters from the Caucasus, and/or the internet. The frequency with which the term 'Wahhabi' was used among interviewees was particularly salient. The term was used pejoratively and was associated with 'extremism', often being blamed as the root cause behind a number of problems. The term was associated with many things, including: the conflict in Syria; the growing Islamisation of Central Asians; Chechen recruiters; and the threat to the moderation embodied in the traditional school of jurisprudence (*hanafi*) that most Central Asians follow.² For example, one interviewee blamed the US and Wahhabis for the conflict in Syria, stating that they were 'guilty of everything. Together they are destroying Muslims', while Russia was applauded for 'helping good Muslims fight against Wahhabism' (Novo 14). When another interviewee, a foreman in Astrakhan, was asked to define 'Wahhabi', he defined it as 'those who go into politics and forget about real faith ... they call for taking up arms' (Astr 11). He also went on to blame 'Wahhabis' for the civil war in Tajikistan.

Third, the cultural displacement that can be associated with migrating to Russia means a greater appeal to migrants of a global Islamic identity that transcends ethnic and national origins. For some individuals, the adoption of religion in a new and strange environment can be strategic; though it can also be emotional, intellectual and psychological, among other reasons. It can help the migrant to cooperate and establish a connection with other migrants, as well as to solicit support from a wider network of people. This group bonding often occurs through common rituals, something a professed attachment to a religious identity can facilitate. Outward expressions of religion can also be used to preserve identity and to prove to families back home that they have not entirely assimilated and forgotten their origins. The sociological process of this experience was highlighted by the Russian professor in St Petersburg:

2. The Hanafi School is one of the four religious Sunni Islamic schools of jurisprudence (*fiqh*). It is named after the scholar Abu Hanifa An-Nu'man ibn Thabit (d. 767), It has the largest number of followers among Sunni Muslims and dominates in the countries that were once part of the Ottoman Empire.

When migrants come here, they try to build their relations. For example, in a hostel. What is the closest way to them? Of course, this is through Islamic ethics. At least outwardly, as observance of some elementary norms, including ritual ones. Therefore, for them, religiosity becomes more important for them than at home, since social ties must be built on some kind of ethics. It is the closest and most understandable. Therefore, Islam becomes an instrument for building internal relations; it is understandable, comfortable, and so on ... But sometimes you need to prove to your parents and relatives that you are not spoiled and that you have not become an alcoholic and that's why they keep their external Islamic ethics in their behaviour. (StPb 4)

However, while some individuals adopt 'external Islamic ethics', according to three respondents most Uzbek migrant workers were non-observant and did not practise Islamic religious rituals. For example, the leader of a diaspora organisation in Astrakhan said this about religious observance:

Since most are not completely religious, that is, they all consider themselves, of course, Muslims, but they do not adhere to religious rituals so much; especially those who are from Kashkadarya, Surkhandarya, Khorezm. And about 65% of Uzbek migrants come from Khorezm, since here they are geographically close. (Astr 12)

Perceptions of Individual Incentives

Money/Economic Incentives

According to 23 interviewees (44%), money was perceived as an incentive for joining violent extremist organisations. The standard narrative in these interviews was that the desire for money drives people towards violent extremism because many labour migrants are in severe debt. Their grave financial position is compounded for illegal migrants, as they have fewer opportunities available and less recourse to mainstream channels of support. In this vulnerable financial, social and psychological state they become prey for criminal gangs and, in some cases, violent-extremist recruiters. For fifteen interviewees (29%), it is at this point that violent extremist groups enter the picture: they promise to alleviate the financial woes of migrants and provide them with support. Once trust is earned, recruiters begin to deploy religious discourse and narratives to proselytise and persuade such individuals to fight in the Middle East. Migrants are also promised the prospect of new jobs and a regular salary as part of a package of taking part in the building of a new state – an Islamic State. This prevailing narrative was expressed by both a construction worker and a director of a company in Novosibirsk:

I heard about one guy from my hometown who disappeared in Moscow. He was young and unexperienced in life. He had no money as his boss wouldn't pay him. And he was robbed on the metro of everything he had left. Someone helped him then and convinced him to leave for Turkey. All because he had contact with some Wahhabis. (Novo 14)

As I said, if a cell is set up then they will try first of all to recruit those guys who have problems. Primarily money problems. When they have neither food nor money. I've heard of cases where a guy is promised 5,000 dollars to send to his family and he agrees to the deal, seeing it as the answer to all

his problems. He doesn't think about the consequences and about how he just sold his life for those 5,000 dollars. (Novo 16)

However, four interviewees (8%) offered a different view on the primacy of monetary incentives. An Uzbek diaspora leader in Astrakhan, for example, noted that 'hundreds and thousands of migrants fall into hopeless situations. But they don't all run to pick up a rifle or get on a plane to Syria' (Astr 8). A couple of the participants mentioned that in fact some of the recruits had jobs and money and were not financially vulnerable. An Uzbek male from Ekaterinburg said that some of the recruits had 'a business, a job and rich parents' (Ekat 7), while an Uzbek male interviewee who ran a business in Novosibirsk described how 'a couple of young guys from Namangan were recruited' (Novo 16), even though they had good jobs and legal status.

Religion

Twelve interviewees (23%) mentioned religion as an incentive for becoming engaged with violent extremism. The data reveals two main perceptions on the role of religion in violent extremism. The first presents a picture of a particular version of Islam ('Wahhabis') as corrupting mainstream orthodoxy (the *madhabs*³) among Central Asians which leads to violence. The 'Wahhabis' were also notably blamed, along with the US, for the war in Syria by many of the participants. According to this view, labour migrants are deceived by a misunderstanding of Islam. It is a view that downplays the agency of radicalised labour migrants and depicts them as being manipulated and duped by 'Wahhabis'. An example of this understanding was articulated by the Russian professor in Astrakhan:

The scheme is simple. They approach a guy from Central Asia [in the bazaar] and ask: 'Are you a Muslim? If so, why do not you pray', and so on. They lead them to the mosque, where the bulk of them are Caucasians. So [the Central Asian] finds himself in the very environment that suppresses him and prepares him for manipulation. Therefore, the 'Islamization' of Muslims from Uzbekistan, for example, is reinforced here, but not in Uzbekistan. (Astr 10)

In contrast, the second view presents religion as a source of identity and acts as a moral standard which individuals feel obliged to take seriously. Rather than cause the problem of violent extremism *per se*, this view of the role of religion provides radicalised individuals with a sense of purpose and mission, either to defend Muslims against oppression – by the Assad government in Syria – or to help Muslims to create an Islamic State. In this view of religion, labour migrants are more empowered. An Uzbek leader in Astrakhan linked radicalisation to grievance: 'When a person sees constant violations of fairness and norms, he becomes something of a revolutionary, even extremist' (Astr 8). This idea was echoed by a director of a company in Novosibirsk, who remarked that some young people think that 'the war over there [Syria] is a war for justice, Islam, and Allah' (Novo 16).

3. The four main Islamic schools of jurisprudence in Sunni Islam.

Adventure

The third and least-referenced individual factor mentioned was the idea of seeking ‘adventure’: the notion some young people either seek to become ‘heroes’, or are bored with their lives and thus seek a sense of adventure. It is essentially about the hope for a different life. An Uzbek diaspora leader in Novosibirsk said that there were many newly religious recruits, mostly ‘those who don’t work and don’t play sport, they have more free time’ (Novo 17). On the whole, this desire was framed as something negative and foolish – the result of impulsive and impetuous youngsters. A religious leader in Samara acknowledged that, for some young people, the war in Syria is a ‘jihad’ and they are drawn to the adventure associated with it: ‘It is very easy for them to believe that the war in Syria is a jihad. That is, they are also looking for some kind of adventure or even to be glorified as heroes. That is, completely without realizing what is happening’ (Sama 22).

Perceptions of Vulnerable and At-Risk Populations

Interviewees identified the following categories of people as ‘vulnerable’ to violent extremism, presented here in order of the frequency with which each term was used:

1. Youth.
2. Illegal migrants.
3. Uneducated migrants: particularly an inability to speak Russian.
4. Loners: individuals disconnected from family and kinship groups.

More than half the respondents cited youth as a factor in recruitment. A construction worker from Novosibirsk described recruits as ‘young, stupid, and inexperienced’ (Novo 15), arguing that older men would be held back by thoughts of their family. This was supported by the former Islamist in Moscow, who said an older man would not join because ‘he has responsibility, children and a family’ (Mosc 1). An Uzbek leader in Astrakhan reinforced this view, claiming that ‘Some team leaders only take unmarried guys. A married man has responsibilities and looks at the world differently’ (Astr 8).

The second type of person identified as vulnerable to recruitment and radicalisation was illegal migrants. The distinction between legal and illegal has profound consequences for migrant workers. Legal migrant workers earn more, enjoy greater security and are less vulnerable to exploitation. The perception was that it was illegal migrant workers, rather than legal ones, who were preyed on by both violent-extremist recruiters and criminal networks because of financial difficulty and the absence of legal protections. According to a male in Ekaterinburg, ‘Money comes above all else ... An illegal immigrant is easy to recruit if he is left without money’ (Ekat 6).

Third, uneducated migrants were cited as vulnerable to recruitment. A female interviewee in Samara explained:

Most of them [Uzbeks] do not know Russian well, many who [have recently] come from *kishlaks* [rural settlements of semi-nomadic people], without [a profession], come on their own, without being called here by acquaintances and relatives. Of course, for adaptation such people are the most problematic,

and it is they who become victims of fraudsters from intermediaries or even get involved in sects who are eagerly looking for just such ... many are very poorly literate. I'm not talking about religious, but about secular reading and writing. They do not know and do not understand local laws, customs or culture. This is also important for adaptation. (Sama 8)

Moreover, seven respondents (13%) mentioned the lack of language skills as a major source of vulnerability for migrant workers. The inability of many migrants to speak Russian hampered their ability to compete in the job market and made adaptation to social and cultural life in Russia a challenge. With respect to recruitment, this would suggest that contact with Caucasian violent extremists would be minimal, and would thus mean that the main agents of radicalisation are other Uzbeks. However, the data is silent on the link between the inability of some migrants to speak Russian and how it plays into violent extremists' recruitment methods. A man working in the migration adaptation centre in Krasnodar said those migrants unable to adapt risked becoming slaves: 'Out of 100 maybe only 5 have knowledge of Russian. They are the only ones with a chance to adapt properly. 50% of those coming were born in villages. They come here on the bus without any money and then end up on the streets. These are "prepared slaves"' (Kdar 7).

The last group vulnerable to violent extremism was lonely individuals or those migrants disconnected from family and ties of kinship. The absence of family in a foreign country and a lack of connection with other members of their own ethnic groups were cited as a form of vulnerability. One of the men from Ekaterinburg said those who came 'without relatives, neighbours or friends who know the situation and can find them work were vulnerable' (Ekat 7). The idea is that the lack of usual social or ethical standards provided by a group makes individuals more conducive and vulnerable to new ideas, practices and lifestyles. The effect of this isolation was described by a Russian professor as a form of 'psychological trauma':

Most have learned to adapt, create alternative networks. But some fall out of these networks. And for some of them it becomes some kind of psychological trauma. Therefore, it is necessary to look at specific cases separately. And such a suspended state, as you said, is the cause of the psychological weak spot that recruiters use. (StPb 4)

Perceptions of Resilience

Employment

Employment was seen by 21 respondents (40%) and all three in the focus group as the pre-eminent source of resilience. Labour migrants are in Russia to work and make money; many have responsibilities back in their home countries, with many participants in the study having families to support. Also, for six of the interviewees (12%), there were few or no employment opportunities in Uzbekistan. These factors provided strong incentives for labour migrants to focus their efforts on work. In fact, based on the response to a question regarding leisure and social life, for the majority of labour migrants in the study work consumed their life. This was explained by a Russian academic in St Petersburg: 'the working migrant is working intensely here, getting tired, he already by and large has no time for abstract activities and therefore nothing of this kind is going on with him' (StPb 4). An Uzbek businessman

in Astrakhan reiterated this point: ‘No one will run off to a *jamaat*, they are busy only with their work and with providing for their family’ (Astr 8). A male interviewee from Krasnodar described how providing for one’s family could provide greater motivation than religion: ‘I have other goals [aside from religion] – I have children and they need to stand on their own feet, so they can study somewhere good and then find their own life’ (Kras 6).

Community Hierarchy and Leadership

Over half of respondents stressed the role of leadership and forms of communal hierarchy as a reliable source of resilience. Whether it is the figure of the foreman, the wise religious elder, or the community representative, the common idea that unites each is the notion of leadership and hierarchy. Interviewees conveyed a clear sense that among Uzbeks there is an established culture built around hierarchy, and that those in leadership positions are older and more experienced than younger labour migrants.

Another critical source of resilience is the role of the foreman in the workplace. The foreman is responsible for the direction and supervision of a group of workers, but also seems to have an active role in providing pastoral care to his ‘brigade’, such as by mentoring. This relationship between foreman and his team of workers, particularly in relation to violent extremism, is highlighted by one foreman in the construction industry who lives in Astrakhan: ‘They [recruiters] are cunning, but we already understand everything. Now we don’t have naifs and fools. We began to understand everything. All foremen speak with their people. And here at the construction sites and bazaars’ (Astr 11).

An Uzbek leader of the diaspora in Astrakhan explained the role of the foreman in detail:

Of course the community is very hierarchical. The most senior of his group is the Senior Foreman. He is responsible for everything, even of the behaviour of his subordinates. At the second level [are the] foreman’s assistants. In the community of countrymen, there are also the main foremen, but there are also authorities which know religious ethics, that is who can correctly direct religious ritual.

[On youth and where they chat:] mainly at work ... sometimes they sit in a café, but most often in our Uzbek *chaikhanas* [tea houses] – there are already many in Astrakhan. Young people particularly prefer these places ... but everything only with the permission of the foreman.

In several cases, if the foreman does not respond to certain requirements, people will leave his group and join another brigade. Therefore, foremen are forced to adhere to elementary rules ... we, that is our office and service – we are also for them an authority. (Astr 12)

The idea of a role model is a permanent feature of labour migrant lives. Respect for elders or the pious and wise older person is evident from the data. As one of the interviewees in Ekaterinburg put it, ‘There are the elders and among us there are good experts in Islam. They also constantly warn us and especially our young people’ (Ekat 6). A diaspora leader of Novosibirsk described how youngsters rely on the older men and ‘ask them for advice when necessary’ (Novo 17). Similarly, a labourer in Astrakhan said ‘Us older guys in the team keep a close eye on the young ones’, and

also ‘Here we are like soldiers. We must respect our commanders ... They are good people ... who will keep us from wrong’ (Astr 11). It is important to stress that this relationship between older and younger generation and social arrangements configured along hierarchical lines can act as a strong source of resilience.

Positive Role of the Authorities

Another form of resilience is the positive role of the Russian authorities and their relationship to diaspora communities. Several interviewees stressed that diaspora communities have links to the Russian security services and they cooperate to remove recruiters. As one man from Ekaterinburg said, ‘If we find them out, we will get them deported’ (Ekat 8). Similarly, the diaspora leader in Krasnoyarsk claimed ‘Our diaspora is in frequent contact with the security services’ (Krsk 10), while a business owner in Ekaterinburg said ‘We diaspora heads co-operate much with each other and the local security services’ (Ekat 9). This relationship between the local authorities and the diaspora was explained by a representative of an Uzbek diaspora organisation in Khabarovsk:

We have not had such cases in Khabarovsk, everything is in sight in our community and if conversations about recruitment happen somewhere, it becomes immediately known. In addition, local authorities constantly warn us and we are working with the population to work – explaining to them that if they meet such people, then do not give in to their agitation. (Khab 25)

Community Support

Community support has been identified as a source of resilience to violent extremism. The data indicates that Uzbek labour migrants have established community networks in Russia, albeit rudimentarily in some cities. Parts of these new structures are connected to the close-knit configurations of families and friends that constitute local diaspora populations. An Uzbek construction worker in Novosibirsk explained the importance of having friends when arriving in Russia: ‘When people from back home come here they don’t understand that they need reliable friends. You can’t live here without a reliable job and reliable friends’ (Novo 14). Labour migrants are likely to travel to areas and cities where a family or friend is already living there. A leader of the Uzbek diaspora in Irkutsk explained:

Uzbeks are organised into groups by place/city of origin, or even smaller, and each has a senior person, *starshiy* [senior supervisor⁴] who is respected and serves as the focal point for local administration, the diaspora organisations, to reach the migrants, and who are the most trusted leaders for the migrants, who know all about every person in their circle. (Irku 16)

It is important not only to know about the availability of work in a particular industry (which can partly explain why certain industries and sectors of work become dominated by a particular ethnic group), but also to know about accommodation and general support. According to the data, the major figureheads of these community networks are diaspora leaders, mosque leaders, foremen,

4. A Russian word referring to seniority of age or rank. In this context, it means senior supervisor.

the consulate, and cultural centres. Each of these roles and spheres represent different practical and symbolic functions. For example, the diaspora leader does not have an official obligation to help those who come to him requesting help, but they do so out of goodwill and social commitment. The data shows that some of the support that leaders provide ranges from helping migrants to fill in documents and forms, to providing them with national newspapers, helping with funeral arrangements, and general information and advice. This was explained by a male construction worker in Novosibirsk: '[Migrants have] no networks or communication outside their own group. But with some issues, they turn to diaspora leader —, he is very helpful and respected. Helps with getting patents, etc. Rarely, they also turn to the Consul' (Novo 19). The mosque plays a more pastoral role, emphasising a more spiritual, educational and moral source of support to migrant workers. According to two of the interviewees working in mosques (Sama 9 and 22), the mosque also acts as a place of refuge for vulnerable labour migrants.

Education

The importance of being 'educated' as a source of resilience to violent extremism was referred to by seventeen interviewees (33%), albeit it meant different things to different people. Depending on the context, education could refer to secular, moral, religious, or cultural education. For example, an Uzbek market trader in Samara highlighted a particular form of education that helped him when migrating to Russia and which acted as a form of protection against radicalisation:

because I'm a normal person, because I got proper education at home. I was accompanied by the whole *mahalla* [community] when I left for the first time. The old men said different things, but warned – 'do not go along the crooked road.' All parents whose children leave the house, whether for work or study, let them also gather the elderly and let their child listen to the *aksakals* [elders]. This is important. I will say so – children will be like their parents. (Sama 6)

From his comments, education is seen in terms of moral and social upbringing. Education, then, is perceived to act as a form of resilience in several ways. First, education provides labour migrants with the ability to challenge extremist interpretations of religion with greater confidence. Second, it equips labour migrants for life in Russia. Several interviewees spoke about the importance of speaking Russian. Third, education provides them with the skills to compete in the marketplace. Fourth, a good education increases the options and opportunities available to labour migrants seeking to integrate into Russian life, thereby mitigating the risk of being drawn into vulnerable situations.

Religion

For a third of respondents, a better understanding of Islam was seen as a form of resilience. Even a basic understanding of Islam allows labour migrants to challenge and evaluate violent-extremist ideology. An Uzbek teacher in Ekaterinburg explained that: 'A person will refuse a recruiter because he understands what Islam is and has listened to the imam' (Ekat 7). This knowledge does not have to be deep or extensive. Even a basic understanding of Islam can empower an individual to assertively challenge violent-extremist ideology, as illustrated in the following story from an Uzbek

male construction foreman in Astrakhan recounting an incident in which one of his colleagues was told by a stranger in a mosque that he should go and fight in Syria:

One of my guys is not bad on religion. But he answered beautifully – ‘go – fight there yourself, if you are so worried about these Wahhabis.’ He stood up to fight – there the other guys stopped ... And I always tell guys that if they try to entice you somewhere, answer the same – let them go [to Syria]. [The extremists] themselves will not go, but they will count the dollars for each deceived, and put them in their pocket. (Astr 11)

However, 20 respondents (38%) identified with their mainstream religious traditions and cited *jamaats* and Salafist and Wahhabist deviations from recognised, established religious authorities as a form of vulnerability. The former Islamist, for example, stressed the necessity of staying ‘with the Hanafi school of Islam, our trusted and correct path’ (Mosc 1). Whilst remaining impartial on the issue of distinctions between the various internal dynamics of Islam, the perception of most of the Uzbek respondents are judged to be accurate: that the prevalence of a mainstream and recognised tradition of Islam can and does act as a form of resilience.

Perceptions of Violence and Politics

Four of the respondents expressed a lack of interest in politics. Their apolitical position was due to their very busy lifestyles as migrant workers. In other words, most migrant workers do not have time for leisure, let alone engaging with politics. This does not mean political views were not conveyed. Where political views were articulated, they seemed to mirror mainstream Russian narratives, particularly in relation to the conflict in Syria.

However, nine respondents (17%) condemned the use of violence to achieve political ends. This is articulated by a female factory worker in Samara:

To use violence, especially on behalf of Islam or another religion – this is not politics anymore, it’s a psychological problem of these guys. They think – well, you stabbed a man and put this video on the Internet, and you’re a hero. He’s just an idiot and sick. But the worst thing is that after watching this information people in the world start to think that all Muslims and Muslim women are like that.

In particular, many felt that the conflict in Syria, particularly the existence and behaviour of Daesh, or what was often and misleadingly referred to as ‘Wahhabi’, had tarnished the image of Islam. Some participants suggested that one factor of resilience among migrant workers is that, on the whole, they are disengaged from politics compared to the wider population.

II. Labour Migrants from Kyrgyzstan

Sarah Lain

THIS SECTION IS divided into five sub-sections that follow the analytical framework used to analyse the data. This includes: perceptions of structural motivation; perceptions of enabling factors; perceptions of individual incentives; perceptions of vulnerable and at-risk populations; and perceptions of resilience. This framework aims to analyse the drivers of radicalisation that takes into consideration the importance of context, as well as encompass the widest possible range of interconnected factors.

Perceptions of Structural Motivation

General Discrimination

Although discrimination was not necessarily explicitly linked to radicalisation by interviewees, it was mentioned as a common challenge and could be considered a structural motivation. Eleven individuals (13%) mentioned discrimination to varying degrees. Three (4%) referenced the use of the derogatory term *churka* (literally, 'block of wood') for Central Asians (Mosv 31, Ekst 14, and Khab 3). An Uzbek male from Osh, living in Moscow and working on a construction site, felt that Russians regard Central Asians as 'second-class citizens' (Mosc 23). Another male respondent living in Moscow working as a doctor felt that racism affected the progression of professionals in his field. He said that in his clinic, 'people with less experience are getting promoted to leadership positions. That's because the latter are Slavic by ethnicity' (Mosc 27). However, discrimination was by no means a universal feeling or experience. At least three people (Othe 5, Krsk 15, and Sama 18) specifically said they had never had issues with discrimination or that where there were initial suspicions, they faded away with time. For example, an Uzbek male interviewee from Osh who lives in Moscow working as a manager at a microcredit organisation (Othe 5) did not feel there was any discrimination, and did not feel that his nationality or ethnicity had ever held him back.

Six people (7%) did make specific references to how assumptions, not just discrimination, can be linked to perceptions of Islam and terrorism (Sama 12, Othe 3, Mosc 24, Mosc 26, Mosc 28, and Kdar 15). One nineteen-year-old ethnic Uzbek student living in Samara said, 'I know people, Muslims, who have grown beards, and these are normal people. But here they think that if someone has a beard – he's an ISIL supporter' (Sama 12). Another ethnic Uzbek man who previously worked as a construction worker in Russia but now resides in Kyrgyzstan echoed this, saying that in Russia, 'peaceful Muslims are being kept in contempt. They are being blamed for terrorist acts. We are peaceful people. Discrimination of people is also leading to radicalization' (Othe 3).

Four individuals (Mosc 28, Mosc 24, Kdar 15, and Mosc 25) mentioned how they felt that some suspicions are directed at Central Asians in part due to Russian societal perceptions of their association with terrorism. Three mentioned the St Petersburg Metro bombing, carried out by a young ethnic Uzbek male from Kyrgyzstan in April 2017 (relatively recently to when the interviews took place). One ethnic Uzbek male interviewee working in construction in Moscow said that:

the events of recent times, such as the explosions in the metro, all that is presented in such a way that migrants are potential terrorists. Locals don't like when migrants gather in large numbers [for example, for prayers] and cause traffic jams, they don't like how migrants behave, and even how they dress. All that irritates the local population of Moscow. (Mosc 24)

Two other individuals – one ethnic Kyrgyz female living in Moscow (Mosc 28) and a Kyrgyz male living in Krasnodar (Kdar 15) – noted how monitoring and checks from Russian authorities had increased following the attack.

Discrimination by Authorities

Fifteen respondents (18%) mentioned that they had experienced discrimination by Russian authorities in some form. Most of the complaints related to abuse of position, with some respondents mentioning the practical need to pay bribes as well as a more general sense of injustice in the system. For example, one ethnic Uzbek male residing in Krasnodar, who runs a private company assisting migrants with documentation, said:

[T]here are many cases when the police stop the migrants without any reason, make arrests, and extort money ... The pretext – the lack of proper documents. There were cases when police slipped counterfeit bills to the migrants and accused them of wrongdoing and extorted money. How can migrants protect themselves in such cases? (Kdar 2)

On the other hand, two respondents – an ethnic Uzbek male working in construction in St Petersburg (StPb 11) and an ethnic Kyrgyz male who works among the diaspora in St Petersburg (StPb 9) – said they had not had issues with authorities and suggested that, if migrants kept their documents in order, there should be no problem. In their view, therefore, issues with the authorities are usually the fault of the migrant workers themselves. In particular, the ethnic Kyrgyz male said '[other migrants] complain that they are stopped and arrested by militia [police in Russia]. I explain that I have not been stopped or detained for 30 years ... if you behave yourself, nobody will touch you' (StPb 9).

One respondent believed that discrimination from the authorities could be a driver of radicalisation. This respondent was an ethnic Azerbaijani from Osh. He resides in Moscow, but had previously served time in prison in Kyrgyzstan for being part of the banned organisation, Hizb-ut-Tahrir.¹ He said, 'they join [ISIS], because they were persecuted, and they wish revenge

1. Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation) is an international pan-Islamist political organisation. It was founded in 1953 as a Sunni Muslim organisation in Jerusalem by Taqiuddin Al-Nabhani. Since then,

... I know so many people who dream of revenge against [law enforcement agencies]' (Mosc 25). However, because of his past, his views might not necessarily be mainstream, and it is also important to note that his views are likely to have been negatively affected by his experience in prison.

Yet some support for this view also came from an ethnic Uzbek male living in St Petersburg, who provided insight as to why his brother left for Syria by reflecting on the negative role of law enforcement in Kyrgyzstan as a factor in his radicalisation process:

My brother went to Syria [from southern Kyrgyzstan]. Before he went there, he was given a very difficult time [by the law-enforcement agencies], was summoned to interrogations, put in jail, extorted money from, and finally he was pushed to go to Syria where he died [while fighting]. If I had the possibility and was given an automatic rifle, I would have killed every one of the offenders [from the authorities] of my brother, I would shoot each of them. (StPb 10)

Challenges Relating to Employment

Despite many Kyrgyz respondents repeatedly highlighting that since their country joined the Eurasian Economic Union in 2015, the process to start working in Russia has become easier, they still faced some challenges. Four interviewees (5%) mentioned issues around employers. Two (Kdar 3 and Irku 22) said some migrant workers struggle because they fail to secure formal contracts with employers. A female Kyrgyz diaspora leader blamed this on employers, saying 'Russian employers do not want to pay taxes and therefore our people are hired without paperwork' (Kdar 03). An ethnic Kyrgyz male who represents the diaspora in Irkutsk instead blamed the migrant workers themselves, saying 'newly arrived migrants do not try to secure written agreement ... it happens due to lack of education. They don't know laws' (Irku 22).

Two others (Ekat 14 and Sama 13) complained of employers not paying wages on time, or at all. A male Kyrgyz seasonal migrant worker living in Ekaterinburg referred to his experience: '[the employer] fired us for no reason, but we worked without a contract – she did not give us a salary. We call, but she does not pick up. We can only blame ourselves, since we worked without an employment contract' (Ekat 14). Four people (Khab 4, Irku 13, Irku 14, and Kdar 9) mentioned the issue of intermediaries scamming migrant workers. For example, a Kyrgyz male who works for local government said, 'there are a lot of intermediaries. They find job offers/vacancies here and then invite their own people [to Russia]. They take their passports, allegedly for registration purposes, and then in such a way the exploitation begins' (Irku 13). A Kyrgyz male working as a doctor noted, 'yes, there are a lot of scammers among our fellow countrymen' (Irku 14).

Hizb ut-Tahrir has spread to more than 50 countries. It aims to re-establish 'the Islamic Khilafah (Caliphate)' or Islamic State. The new caliphate would unify the Muslim community (*Ummah*) in a unitary superstate of unified Muslim-majority countries. The proposed state would enforce Islamic Sharia law. Although it is a non-violent organisation, Hizb ut-Tahrir is banned in many countries.

Restrictions at Home

Four respondents (Irku 14, Othe 5, Mosc 25 and Mosc 24) felt that issues with radicalisation have their origins at home, particularly due to the control exercised by governments there, though most were quick to differentiate Kyrgyzstan as more open than Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. One Kyrgyz male who works as a doctor in Irkutsk specifically mentioned religious persecution in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan:

In the other republics other than Kyrgyzstan, Muslims are subjected to persecution, for example, in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, repressions against those who wear scarves or beards. There is freedom in Russia; they can do what they are prohibited from doing in these countries ... When something is banned or people are limited, it leads to more interest and craving for all these forbidden things. (Irku 14)

Another ethnic Uzbek from Kyrgyzstan echoed this, saying, 'I, for example, am acquainted with the imam from Uzbekistan. According to him, the fact that the Uzbek authorities strongly control mosques and religious education promotes the growth of radical ideologies' (Othe 5).

Grievances at home were also specifically perceived as a driver of why people go to Syria. One ethnic Uzbek male interviewee who lives in Moscow said: 'we must understand that the preconditions for radicalizations happen in Central Asian countries. Some believers get pressured and pushed around by official religious bodies, they get abused by repressive activities of law enforcement agencies, too' (Mosc 24).

This rationale was also supported by another ethnic Uzbek who had previously worked in Novosibirsk and Khabarovsk, who said:

[M]oney and unemployment are not involved. Most of them had everything. Probably, some people were motivated by the repressive policies of the government, and the fact that they could not pray freely [in Kyrgyzstan] ... Initially, not understanding the situation, I, too, was supporting the war in Syria. But later, with God's help, I understood things better and saw everything in a different light. (Othe 3)

On the other hand, some Kyrgyz participants associated the relative freedom of Russia with a permissive environment in which radicalisation could take place. This somewhat paradoxical set of conclusions about the role of societal openness in the process of radicalisation – with, on the one hand, some believing that the relatively closed nature of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan drives radicalisation, while on the other, others believing that the relative openness of Russia and Kyrgyzstan can both drive radicalisation (in Russia) and act as a protective factor against radicalisation (in Kyrgyzstan) – highlights the degree to which it is not clear that freedom of expression is necessarily linked to the process of radicalisation. Whilst this is possibly a valid conclusion, the discussion could also more simply reflect ethnic bias, in that the Kyrgyz interview subjects are highlighting how their country is better than the other Central Asian countries.

Perceptions of the Enabling Factors

Mosques and Religious Leaders

Five respondents (6%) felt that mosques and imams could be involved in radicalisation. One male Kyrgyz business-owner from Jalalabad residing in Astrakhan described how recruitment took place at the 'Red Mosque' in Astrakhan. He noted that:

there, Kavkazi [people from the Caucasus] or Tajiks, or Uzbeks, approach young and inexperienced guys and offer them not-bad money for alleged work. But of course this is deception. At first, they give for a 'warm-up' USD 2–3,000 and then say that 'there' you will get more and persuade them to go. Few take the offer, but there were cases, when young guys fall for such tricks. (Astr 9)

One specifically mentioned a religious leader that was suspected of being radical (interestingly, he used 'Wahhabi' in this context synonymously with 'radical'): 'there was a Kyrgyz guy here. He was deputy imam. He was also a radical. Then he disappeared god knows where. The authorities put out a wanted notice for him ... It seems that he was pushing Wahhabi ideas' (Irku 11).

However, eight respondents (10%) were adamant that radicalisation did not take place in mosques. There was clearly respect for the mosque and religious leaders among these respondents, with two believing in particular that the role of imams was to 'keep order' (Othe 5) and that radicalisation could not take place as 'there is control there by imams' (Sama 24). Mosques and the role of religious leaders were identified by these respondents as a source of resilience.

Recruitment

No interviewees had direct experience of recruiters. Nine offered their own perceptions of who the recruiters were likely to be – mostly Central Asians or people from the Caucasus, such as Dagestanis or Chechens. Four (Ekat 12, Kdar 14, Irku 11, and Astr 14) explicitly referred to Caucasians. For example, an individual from Ekaterinburg noted, 'I do not know about recruiters, but they talked about it on television. I heard that they are Caucasians who are offended by Russia and are now fighting in Syria. I heard that they seem to get more money for each recruit' (Ekat 12). Another deduced that 'maybe [recruiters] are Caucasus people. Because many Dagestanis have been arrested' (Kdar 14). Three individuals (Ekat 10, Mosc 32, and Khab 3) specifically mentioned their opinion that Uzbeks are working to recruit people in Russia.

Locations of Radicalisation and Recruitment

Ninety per cent of the 83 interviewees and the focus groups mentioned people leaving for Syria. The detail and proximity of the respondents to the subject of the stories varied. For example, a Kyrgyz male living in Moscow offered little detail beyond saying that 'there was one *mol*

in Kara-Suu who was jailed for disseminating propaganda about the Syria war' (Mosc 32).² But one ethnic Uzbek male living in St Petersburg (StPb 10) offered the most detail in a story regarding his brother who had left for Syria. Seven people (8%) commented on their own perceptions as to radicalisation taking place in Kyrgyzstan rather than by giving examples that they had specifically heard about. For example, a Kyrgyz male living in Irkutsk said 'from Russia mostly people from the Caucasus go to Syria. Central Asians ... mostly from Central Asia directly; not those who are in Russia' (Irku 21).

Eleven individuals (13%) and one focus group mentioned specific examples of and references to radicalisation in Russia. The majority of these stories pertained to people going to Syria. Some of the more concrete stories were echoed by two respondents in the same city. A Kyrgyz male residing in Irkutsk said, 'yes, a married woman from Osh, an Uzbek left [for Syria] with her children. The husband stayed. He didn't know that she had gone ... this was the first instance when a native from Kyrgyzstan went there' (Irku 11). Another man from Irkutsk who works at a migrant-aid organisation also highlighted seemingly the same story: 'the wife of a guy from Osh [an Uzbek] went there ... with two kids ... she went back to Osh to the wedding of her brother with kids, and then took the kids, left a note for her husband, and left' (Irku 23). This individual believed that the woman had been radicalised in Osh, but this was speculation. He noted, 'They say the woman's relatives had gone there [to Syria] before ... I think they invited her' (Irku 23).

However, radicalisation also took place at home: two respondents from Samara both had knowledge of a case in their city. A female Kyrgyz with Russian citizenship said that there were three young Uzbeks from Osh who left for Syria from Samara:

[The young Uzbeks] all died. I don't know how, but their parents found out and each at a different time held a memorial for their son ... Everyone asked each other how it happened, but no one knew exactly how ... [The parents] did not talk about it, but they did not grieve and did not curse the war in Syria. Now they trade at the bazaar, like always. (Sama 15)

The respondent was not aware of how these individuals were recruited or how they went to Syria, particularly as they were 'quiet guys, who helped their parents' (Sama 15). A Kyrgyz male also working in the bazaar in Samara referred to this story, saying that:

[I] personally saw these people in our bazaar, Osh Uzbeks, 18, 19, 20 years old who went to fight in Syria. We only found out about it when their parents started to organise memorial services for them. They are ordinary guys, didn't seem different from others at all ... And they disappeared somehow, quietly, unnoticed, about half a year apart ... all thought that they left for family business. (Sama 17)

Two individuals referred to stories where suspected militants had either been detained or had attacked people. For example, a Kyrgyz female working as a diplomat in Ekaterinburg said that seven individuals suspected of being part of Daesh had been detained by the Federal Security Service (FSB) in Ekaterinburg in February 2016. She noted that they were 'Kyrgyz citizens of

2. Moldo in Kyrgyz translates as 'mullah'.

Uzbek ethnicity from the Osh region' (Ekat 10). A Kyrgyz male working as a trader in Astrakhan commented on perceptions of radical activity by non-Kyrgyz nationals after the St Petersburg Metro bombing. He said that 'immediately after the Uzbek from Osh blew himself up in the metro in St Petersburg, here in Astrakhan there was excitement. Four militants killed two RPS [Road Patrol Service] workers and wanted to arrange a terrorist attack ... they were Kazakhs and Caucasians, all Wahhabis' (Astr 14). Again, a specific definition of Wahhabi was not given. Six other respondents (7%) mentioned knowledge of people who had gone to Syria or who had encouraged others to go, but it was unclear from the transcripts from where they knew these examples – either at home in Kyrgyzstan or Russia.

Social Networks

Though recruiters were not specifically identified, social networks were said to be important. One Kyrgyz male living in Samara spoke of three classmates that he knew from Malovodnoye in Kyrgyzstan who had gone to fight in Syria. He said this 'took place under the influence of a classmate from Karachay' (Sama 20). Another Kyrgyz male spoke of an entire family he had heard about who had gone to Syria from Issyk-Kul (a widely reported case): 'twenty people! They took all their relatives and small children there. There, when they cross the border with Turkey, they take away all their documents and their families are taken hostage and men are told to go to fight; everything ends there' (Irku 14). One individual from the focus group in St Petersburg (StPb FG3) commented on how it was mainly Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan going to fight.

Tools of Radicalisation: The Internet

Most respondents believed the internet was a key enabling factor in radicalisation. Eight people (10%) and one focus group mentioned this. For example, one Kyrgyz female living in Ekaterinburg said that she 'heard they communicate on the internet. [Recruiters] gather, maybe hypnotise them' (Ekat 12). Three individuals spoke of concrete cases. One ethnic Uzbek male studying in Samara said that 'in my city [Moscow] there was a case, I even saw it on the news. The girl somehow on the internet got acquainted with an ISIS supporter, and tried to leave for Syria, but she was detained at the airport' (Sama 12). An ethnic Uzbek male from St Petersburg whose brother had gone to Syria said 'my brother was receiving information via the Internet through his acquaintances [in Turkey and Syria] and went there with their help' (StPb 10). A third individual, an imam living in Irkutsk, described how the Kyrgyz wife of one migrant went to Turkey without telling anyone, although he has some doubts as to her real whereabouts. He said that 'on social media, Instagram, she later sent a message saying "I'm in Turkey". But where she really is, in Turkey or elsewhere – remains unknown'. He said 'she was not [as far as he knows] meeting anyone, or joining any group. She learned how to pray and other things about religion via Internet' (Irku 22).

Perceptions of Individual Incentives

Money

Twenty individuals (24%) and three focus groups suggested that money is a motivation for migrant workers to go to Syria and fight with extremist organisations. It is important to note that this seemed based more on the personal opinion of interviewees rather than their own experience or first-hand knowledge. Of these, two respondents (Irku 14 and Sama 18) saw it almost as a business venture for those going to Syria. The latter noted that 'mostly, it is considered as business and if it pays well there then they go to fight for money. If they are not paid, they do not go', with the latter seeing it as a way to 'make big money quickly' (Sama 18).

Four other respondents (StPb 9, Mosc 31, Sama 13, and Khab 3) and two focus groups (StPb FG2 and Krsk FG1) believed people were deceived into leaving due to the deceptive lure or promise of money. For example, one respondent noted the perception that:

they are lured with money, saying that you will receive 10 thousand dollars a month, and the promise of three to four wives ... then he goes there, crosses the border and he disappears. They receive nothing. (StPb 9)

A Kyrgyz female interviewee working in a bazaar in Samara singled out Uzbeks, speculating that a key motivation was 'maybe money, big money. It is no secret that our Uzbeks love money more than anything else. Even more for bazaar Uzbeks, who never have enough money for turning over goods' (Sama 15). This comment might reveal common prejudices (that is, Uzbek stereotypes) by some of those within Kyrgyz society.

Eleven respondents (13%) were more specific and viewed the problem through the prism of a person falling on hard times or being affected by broader socioeconomic hardship. For example, an individual from St Petersburg noted that, 'Having arrived here without finding a job, they begin to suffer. And they begin to look for an easy way to earn money' (StPb 9). In a more vivid view, a respondent from Irkutsk stated:

because he has a desperate situation: problems with documents, problems with work, and problems with housing. At first, he takes the money to get out of this situation. Then they say to him: there is a way to work off this money. Then they begin: look, you have persecution here, they don't allow beards or headscarves. It is as if they need to take revenge or there is a way for you to get out of debt and return true Islam to your homeland. And they say, you have to go and work somehow. The person has already been caught now and goes, but naturally they do not say that he is going there to fight. (Irku 14)

Five of these respondents commented on the broader socioeconomic issues back home, citing the economy of Kyrgyzstan 'and the consequent lack of money' (Kdar 15), with another saying 'at the state level, the government must reduce the number of migrants, increasing the workplaces in our own country. Economic problems play a big role in radicalisation' (Sama 21).

However, not all interviewees agreed. Three respondents (4%) said that money was unlikely to be the driver. One (Mosc 5) gave no further detail as to their reasoning. Another offered an argument: ‘I don’t know about money. If he is to die there, why would he want money. If he cannot use that money, it does not make sense. I don’t think it’s about money’ (Irku 23). One ethnic Uzbek male referred to someone they knew who had gone to Syria from his village, saying ‘what’s interesting is that people do not leave because of money. I have one more friend. Before leaving for Syria, he was a successful businessman in the village’ (Othe 5).

Religious Belief

When asked why Central Asian migrant workers might leave Russia to go to Syria, the largest number of interviewees – 20, or about a quarter of the total – and respondents from two focus groups believed an influencing factor was the misinterpretation or misunderstanding of religion, with some citing poor religious teaching or a poor understanding of Islam as leaving people open to misinterpretations advanced by those participating in the conflict in Syria and Iraq. An alternative interpretation was given by five individuals (6%) and one focus group, who believed that some people went due to genuine religious conviction and faith. Speaking bluntly, a Kyrgyz male working at the bazaar in Samara made a direct link between religion and radicalisation, saying ‘Uzbeks and Tajiks are more strictly Muslims, compared to the Kyrgyz, and more inclined to radicalisation, maybe according to their religion’ (Sama 16).

Two respondents referred to misinterpretation of the Qu’ran. For example, one participant in Ekaterinburg said ‘probably they misinterpret Islam. The Qur’an says that you cannot kill people or cause violence’ (Ekat 12). Another in Irkutsk said ‘many people are misled by partial, selective quotes from Quran, that suggest violence, and rewards for it’ (Irku 12). Two respondents (StPb 2 and Sama 15) specifically cited a misinterpretation of jihad among those who have gone to Syria. Five respondents (Mosc 25, Kdar 9, Othe 5, Mosc 26, and Irku 14) cited people’s own religious illiteracy due to limited knowledge of Islam or poor religious education. Three respondents (Irku 23, Mosc 27 and Irku 21) believed it is the fault of the religious leaders, particularly at home in Kyrgyzstan. Three respondents (Novo 11, StPb 9 and Irku 14) blamed the recruiters’ deception and manipulation of religion.

Six respondents felt that there was an element of brainwashing during radicalisation and that certain conditions left people vulnerable to charismatic individuals. Two interviewees (Mosc 30 and Othe 5) felt that those who had economic problems were most vulnerable to this. One respondent (Mosc 26) felt that migrants were particularly vulnerable to fanatical ideas when they feel isolated or alone, which they felt could easily happen when migrants were away from home. One ethnic Kyrgyz male working for the local authorities in Krasnodar made an interesting observation about the submissiveness of migrants and their willingness to obey orders, based on his own experience managing migrant workers from Central Asia:

For example, I have 700 migrants every day answerable to me. Wherever I lead, they follow. Wherever I tell them to stand, they’ll stand, whatever I say, they’ll do. They won’t argue. Now imagine there was

a psychologist or a good orator in their midst, that person would get into their souls, they would go [to Syria, and so on] under hypnosis. (Kdar 14)

Two respondents (StPb 13 and Astr 14) determined that the problem is ‘Wahhabism’ – without actually defining what they meant by this. Explicit mention of ‘fanaticism’ was also made by two interviewees (Irku 23 and Krsk 16) and one focus group (Krsk FG1): they saw people that go to Syria as those who had let religion go ‘too far’.

Sense of Belonging and Solidarity

Four interviewees (5%) believed that individuals going to Syria had a sense of purpose and belonging, with two interviewees (Sama 14 and Mosc 29) citing the possibility that individuals with difficult childhoods or family situations might be more inclined to go. Two others suggested that people might also go to Syria in solidarity for what is happening there. For example, an interviewee from Moscow said, ‘Well they have the strong conviction – that in Syria there is a mass murder of Muslims, and that it is necessary to stop this bloodshed and to rescue brothers of Muslims’ (Mosc 5). Another in Moscow noted that:

when I first heard that the faithful Muslims are subjected to oppression and deprivation, I thought of abandoning everything and going there to help my brothers and my sisters of faith ... [but his nephew] told me that in Syria a fratricidal war is taking place – where one Muslim fights with another Muslim, and it is not a righteous war. (Mosc 12)

Perceptions of Vulnerable and At-Risk Populations

Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan

A large population of ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan, particularly in the south, creates an important dynamic that was observable in the transcripts (and is in fact observable in the broader public discourse around radicalisation of Central Asians). In particular, Kyrgyz interviewees commented how this caused divisions within migrant communities within Russia. Some respondents believed that Uzbeks (either from Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan) behaved differently to ethnic Kyrgyz, and it was implied that these differences manifested in vulnerabilities to radicalisation and recruitment. When they mentioned ‘Uzbeks’, it was not always clear whether respondents were referring to ethnic Uzbeks from Uzbekistan or ethnic Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan when it was not specifically stated.

Four Kyrgyz interviewees (Khab 3, Ekst 10, Novo 6, and Kdar 2) specifically expressed a view that ethnic Uzbeks from Osh were more isolated and restricted than Kyrgyz. For example, an interviewee from Khabarovsk said ‘[Osh Uzbeks] would like to be with us but they can’t. And the Uzbeks from Uzbekistan don’t accept them. They are on their own’ (Khab 3). Another respondent, a Kyrgyz male working with the diaspora in St Petersburg, said that he had given an interview to the Bishkek radio station ‘Azatyk’ after the St Petersburg bombing. ‘I said that we

did not know [the terrorist] because he is Uzbek, and Uzbeks are not included in our diaspora. It's always been this way' (StPb 9).

When discussing radicalisation, six interviewees gave the opinion that Uzbeks were more likely to go to fight in Syria than the Kyrgyz. For example, an unemployed Kyrgyz male said he had 'heard that Uzbeks and Tajiks are recruiting and recruited. I did not hear about the Kyrgyz' (Ekat 11). Seven individuals said Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan, including specifically from Osh, were likely to go to fight. Sometimes this highlighted conflicts between the Kyrgyz and Uzbek community. Four respondents (5%) mentioned the inter-ethnic clashes in Kyrgyzstan of 2010 and how they had caused friction between the migrant communities in Russia. One Kyrgyz male who works seasonally in Ekaterinburg offered his own conclusions about how such tensions might relate to radicalisation: 'Uzbeks of Kyrgyzstan probably get recruited because of 2010 conflict, because they feel angry, want to [get revenge] even here, doing bad things while carrying Kyrgyz passports' (Ekat 15). There were also concerns that there was a risk of blowback for all Kyrgyz when an ethnic Uzbek from Kyrgyzstan is involved in trouble. For example, a Kyrgyz female said:

there were no cases among the Kyrgyz. I heard a conversation at a meal, one of my acquaintances said that we were disgraced by Osh Uzbeks, who are the ones persuaded to go to war or blow themselves up in Russia, and their passports are Kyrgyz, so they started not liking us Kyrgyz people in Russia. (Ekat 12)

There was clearly the perception among some interviewees that Kyrgyz were almost immune to such issues, embodying a sense of superiority towards other Central Asians. Some respondents (Sama 17, Mosc 32, Ekat 11, and Sama 16) expressed the perception that the Kyrgyz were more independent and self-reliant, and therefore were less easily deceived. For example, one Kyrgyz male who works in Samara bazaar said that 'the majority of Kyrgyz have an immunity to "fairytales" no matter who tells them' (Sama 17). Again, showing the perceived contrast between Kyrgyz and Uzbek, a Kyrgyz male living in Moscow said 'only Uzbeks go to Syria or Iraq. Kyrgyz have no business being there ... Kyrgyz don't respect them [those who go to fight], but among young Uzbeks they are some kind of hero' (Mosc 32). Again, this is perhaps more a reflection of ethnic bias as opposed to anything else.

Seven respondents (8%) saw the Kyrgyz as far less religious than Tajiks or Uzbeks. Again, it is not clear here whether the respondents were considering ethnic Uzbek citizens of Kyrgyzstan as 'Uzbek' or 'Kyrgyz'. There was certainly the perception that religion played a role in a person's vulnerability to radicalisation. This was highlighted by a Kyrgyz male residing in St Petersburg, who, when asked why more migrant workers are not going to Syria, said 'the Kyrgyz are not religious fanatics, if they were, they would all leave' (StPb 13).

Lack of Education and the Russian Language

Ten individuals (12%) mentioned that poor education and/or a poor understanding of the Russian language increased the challenges for migrant workers. For example, one nineteen-year-old ethnic Uzbek Kyrgyz male who is studying in Samara said that, 'when people come [to Russia], they find it difficult to get a job; if a person does not know the language, then it is twice

as hard' (Sama 13). Another ethnic Uzbek Kyrgyz residing in Samara who translates documents for a living said:

honestly, for those that don't have connections and money coming here is difficult. It is especially hard for those who don't know Russian. They become victims of police checks, their intermediaries often double cross them. They are the most defenceless and disenfranchised. (Sama 24)

Although it was not necessarily a universal assumption among all interviewees, there was clearly a logical link made among some between a lack of education and vulnerability. One Kyrgyz female diaspora leader in Krasnodar said that 'Uneducated people quickly succumb to deception. When you are in darkness and see light, you head towards it' (Kdar 3). A male Kyrgyz working in Novosibirsk echoed this by saying 'it seems to me that educated people will not go there [to Syria], there are so many opportunities to work, to self-actualise themselves. There is simply no time and no interest' (Novo 11).

Youth

A less prevalent theory on why people go to fight in Syria relates to youth and inexperience. Five people (6%) and one focus group commented on this. Interestingly, it was not only older interviewees that commented: the respondents were a 21-year-old Kyrgyz female (Novo 7), a 21-year-old Uzbek female (Sama 21), a 35-year-old Kyrgyz male (Khab 4), a 46-year-old Kyrgyz male (StPb 13), a 47-year-old Uzbek male (Sama 14), and a focus group of 19–30-year-old Kyrgyz males (StPb FG3). These respondents mainly identified young people as more vulnerable, citing issues such as manipulation over social media, financial persuasion, or simply not having their own skills to know who and what to trust. One respondent spoke of a 'new tendency among youth to grow a beard and turn to Islam', giving his own perception that 'everyone with a beard belongs in a sect, Wahhabi Muslims' (StPb 13). As before, the definition of 'Wahhabi' was not given.

Perceptions of Resilience

Community Relations

Many migrant workers felt that aspects of their community helped build resilience against radicalisation or people sowing discord in their community. Within this group, three respondents (Novo 11, Astr 17 and Sama 24) mentioned places or collective organisations where diaspora can gather to discuss issues. For example, a respondent in Novosibirsk (Novo 11) mentioned the House of Friendship in Novosibirsk; another interviewee in Astrakhan (Astr 17) mentioned the Congress of Uzbeks in Astrakhan, Russia. An ethnic Uzbek female in Samara (Sama 24) mentioned that her husband was planning to open an affiliate office of the All-Russian Union of Uzbeks and Uzbekistanis in Samara.

Two respondents (Ekat 10 and Khab 27) mentioned diaspora leaders as respected figures who could help build cohesion and a sense of belonging within communities. The latter gave an example of her community: 'the head of the diaspora is a smart young man. We can be proud

of him, he can build a relationship with locals, he works for the people and himself. He is not conceited, he is always approachable' (Khab 27).

Three respondents (Mosc 29, Sama 20, and Ekate 11) mentioned how respected foremen or bosses were at work. One of the respondents said that:

at work we respect the foreman. He treats everyone equally and justly, and organises the work according to our strengths. He constantly teaches new things and how to do things better ... If conflict situations come up, in the majority of working moments, then the foreman immediately solves everything. (Sama 20)

Four respondents (Khab 03, Kdar 15, Othe 5, and Sama 25) and one focus group (StPb FG2) noted how the diaspora community often comes together to provide a support group, even if it is simply for social activity. For example, focus group participants noted that 'every two months we Kyrgyz gather to play football and make pilaf' (StPb FG2). The respondent from Khabarovsk noted how the community can monitor and discipline as a group; he said that there are no cases of recruitment because 'we keep tight control of the situation In 2010, we told everyone that if there were any problems, then we would kick out the troublemaker in three days ... we would have invited the FSB in' (Khab 3). In contrast, three respondents (Kyrgyz female Astr 14; Kyrgyz male Astr 15 and Kyrgyz male Sama 20) seemed to highlight the independence of Kyrgyz migrant workers, stating that most people fend for themselves. However, they did also admit that the diaspora community can come together as a support group if necessary.

Religion

Eleven respondents (13%) and two focus groups mentioned the role that Islam could play in building up resilience against radicalisation. Seven of these mentioned either the fact that they had heard in mosques that imams are speaking out against radicalisation, or that they think it is a good idea for mosques to help combat radicalisation. For example, an interviewee in St Petersburg noted that:

a lot depends on the imams, an imam should be very well educated ... I went to the mosque [in Irkutsk, built by the Kyrgyz] – the imam there is a young man, without a beard. But very educated ... He gives correct advice and guidance, in my view. (StPb 13)

A respondent from Irkutsk was more direct about making the link and the role mosques should play, saying that 'awareness-raising work needs to be done in the mosque' (Irku 22). In the focus group, one participant gave the opinion that '[recruiters] look for ones who are dead-beats, or the ones that do not go to the mosque. They go to such people. And they cannot come to those who pray, read and constantly go to the mosque' (StPb FG2).

Three respondents (Ekate 10, Irku 14 and Novo 9) noted specific visits from high-profile religious leaders and religious scholars. For example, a respondent from Irkutsk (Irku 14) reported that a former mufti (and Islamic legal expert) and rector of an Islamic university came to give seminars

on the specifics of Kyrgyz and broader Central Asian Islam. One respondent (Ekat 11) and two focus groups (StPb FG2 and StPb FG3) commented on the importance of religious literature in keeping people on the right track. For example, a respondent from St Petersburg noted:

You need to read proper books, which are published strictly by the mufti. Several receive this knowledge, pass it on to those they meet, they read, and then think that Islam is such ... and thoughts turn to the other side. (Respondent in StPb FG3)

Authorities

Eleven respondents (13%) cited the Russian authorities as a reason more Central Asian migrants did not turn to radical Islam. The authorities were not always seen in a positive light, but nevertheless were still seen as a deterrent factor. For example, four respondents (Astr 13, Astr 15, Astr 14, and Ekat 13) all mentioned FSB surveillance. A participant in Astrakhan explained 'we do not watch [videos about the conflict]. The FSB works here clearly, but we do not need to watch such videos' (Astr 14). The remaining seven interviewees of the eleven noted their interaction with local police and the control that they can exert over migrants to deter them from radical activity. One respondent, a Kyrgyz doctor, had a rather positive attitude towards engagement with the authorities, saying:

we are invited to all the meetings concerning migrants that take place with law-enforcement bodies, and the local administration. There, they immediately voice all the problems that exist. Sometimes we are asked to control or influence in some way, and we tell them the problems our migrants are facing; what assistance is needed from the local administration. (Irku 14)

One other respondent did not mind when Russian law enforcement – in his view – overstepped their legal remit: an ethnic Uzbek male working in construction remarked that: '[Russian law enforcement] act tough and resolutely, often without any due process. Their goal – to cut the phenomenon at its roots ... I guess to some extent I even agree with such an approach' (Mosc 24). An ethnic Uzbek female document translator noted an interplay of various state actors, saying that 'most migrants in Samara are very far from radical ideas ... there is also adequate control over migrants here – FSB, prosecutor's office, FMS ... in order to prevent negative developments' (Sama 24). Generally, therefore, the work of the authorities was seen as a way of keeping in check those who might be tempted by radical behaviour.

Economic Factors

Eight respondents (10%) were explicit that positive economic factors – finding work and earning money – worked against radicalisation. (However, given the number that cited 'money' as a driving force for those going to Syria, it is likely that more respondents may have supported this view on the impact of positive economic factors had they been asked directly.) This answer was mainly given in response to the question of why more Central Asian migrants did not go to fight in Syria. For example, a respondent from Astrakhan said, 'decent people have nothing to do

there. They can find money, but you can earn money here. We work hard and earn. We bought a house and a car. Our children are kept. You can work' (Astr 15).

Family

Despite the fact that some Central Asians who have gone to fight in Syria travelled as families, the family was seen as a major point of resilience for migrants. Four respondents (Ekat 15, Ekat 13, Sama 17, and Mosc 26) saw having a family as a deterrent: this was a reason to stay and earn money in Russia. For example, an interviewee from Ekaterinburg explained: 'why should I go there? I have a wife, children – everything is fine. You can earn money here and not risk your life' (Ekat 13) – the quote interestingly also highlights once again the perceived importance of money for those who go to Syria and Iraq. One young ethnic Uzbek female gave a specific example of someone who they knew was sympathetic to the extremist cause in Syria, but had benefited from family guidance:

[her friend] always talked about the conflict in Syria, and justified those that went to make war there ... we often had arguments ... Now she is different. She tells me that she was mistaken in her view of war in Syria ... she changed her mind due to circumstances in her family. She had an uncle who told her and her sister those [women] who go to Syria – they become suicide bombers. (Sama 21)

Seven respondents (8%) and one focus group (Krsk FG1) mentioned the value of elders, at times referring to *aksakaly* – people the community or individuals respect. Most indicated also that the elders are those that either provide support or are obeyed. A 45-year-old ethnic Uzbek from Osh raised this in particular:

yes, there are older people who prevent young children. I myself, for example, also work in this direction. When I hear the opinion that it is necessary to go to Syria to support the Muslims, I'm going to besiege such people, convincing them that no one will benefit from this war, and that there will be a fratricidal war. (Mosc 12)

III. Labour Migrants from Tajikistan

Nadine L Salman

THIS SECTION IS divided into five sub-sections that follow the analytical framework used to analyse the data. This includes: perceptions of structural motivation; perceptions of enabling factors; perceptions of individual incentives; perceptions of vulnerable and at-risk populations; and perceptions of resilience. This framework aims to analyse the drivers of radicalisation that takes into consideration the importance of context, as well as encompass the widest possible range of interconnected factors.

Perceptions of Structural Motivation

Migration Experience and Legal Issues

When discussing factors that can make some migrants more vulnerable to radicalisation, many Tajik interviewees highlighted difficulties with the migration process and economic hardship. These factors may contribute to vulnerability and feelings of desperation among migrants. Specifically, twelve interviewees (18%) mentioned difficulties registering documents and the cost of the work patent as important issues affecting Central Asian migrants in Russia. Of these, four specifically connected such difficulties to vulnerability, desperation and targeting by extremist recruiters. For example, a businessman and diaspora leader living in Novosibirsk, speaking from his experience of two cases within his community, said that ‘Mostly, recruiters target those who upon arrival in Russia experience difficulties finding work, getting registered, and having material and moral difficulties’ (Novo 12).

As further noted by five interviewees (8%), migrants also face persecution from the authorities over their legal status and documentation, which, despite not being explicitly linked to radicalisation, may contribute to the grievances and context in which radicalisation can occur. For example, an undocumented male Kyrgyz builder from Tajikistan, currently living in Krasnodar, warned:

If you don't have documents, the police will catch you and they will collect money. If you don't speak Russian, then they may even take your documents away ... if all the documents are in order, then here it is good. And if you don't have documents then you will be constantly running from the police. (Kdar 12)

Indeed, eleven interviewees (17%) mentioned discrimination, both from the authorities and the wider community. A Tajik female working in a Russian-language assessment centre in Krasnodar highlighted that: ‘In Russia, if you are a Muslim, then you are seen as a potential threat’ (Kdar 10). Again, while not explicitly linked to radicalisation, these structural issues may further alienate and increase the vulnerability of migrants.

Economic Factors

As well as the difficulties with the registration process, the high costs of the process can leave migrants in considerable debt. Eight interviewees (12%) posited a link between desperation due to mounting debt, poverty and economic difficulties, and joining extremist groups. As theorised by a male administrative assistant living in Samara, 'Imagine a young migrant who came to work and couldn't find a job, he does not have any money, but has to pay for a patent, accommodation, food, etc. They offer him a lot of money to go to Syria or Iraq. He is forced out of desperation to agree to these conditions' (Sama 1).

Echoing this, a male undocumented porter living in Samara speculated that the cost of registration may be an important factor: 'I think some of our people can't cope with [the price] and are forced to agree to the proposals of [recruiters] who give them money and money for the journey' (Sama 2).

However, the cost of documents may only account for part of the economic struggles of migrants. According to five interviewees (8%), worsening economic conditions and sanctions have, according to a male head of a construction company in Astrakhan, 'severely affected the position of migrants' (Astr 3). As a result, a Tajik male shopkeeper in Astrakhan commented, 'In recent years in Astrakhan, for obvious reasons [referring to sanctions], there have been fewer work opportunities and more and more migrant workers coming' (Astr 1). This lack of jobs may further increase the desperation of migrants, which could exacerbate the presumed relationship between financial difficulties and extremist recruitment.

Perceptions of the Enabling Factors

The Internet

A third of the interviewees claimed that the internet is a key enabler of recruitment, and a common space for radicalisation to take place. The widespread use of internet-enabled devices and the ease of access may make it an easy tool for recruiters to use and for extremist messages to spread. In the words of a male working for the Representative Office of the Ministry of Migration in Irkutsk, 'The internet is everywhere. It is the source of whatever information you want' (Irku 1). The role of the internet in recruitment is starkly shown through one interviewee's description of his brother's experience in Box 7.

Box 7: Knowledge of Recruitment

A male bus driver living in Moscow described how his brother became radicalised online:

The internet is full of radical Islamic sermons and calls for jihad. I personally do not understand what interested my brother in this. He left for Syria in 2015 (at age of 23).

He sat at home on the internet all day, that's how he was sent to Syria. I think he was recruited over social networks ... He spent a lot of time on the internet on his phone. It turns out that he had joined an extremist group on the internet. I don't know what they said to him.

Now every week at work I look at my workers' phones and forbid them from going into town without a good reason. I invite people who give lectures on preventing radicalisation and the migrants' parents also welcome this initiative. (Mosc 7)

In addition, two interviewees also mentioned the perceived need to protect youth from watching online videos of violence uploaded by Daesh. A female translator living in Ekaterinburg said, 'I and my friends watch videos about these conflicts to understand what is happening there. But we prevent our children from watching them' (Ekat 1).

Community

However, many interviewees acknowledged that recruitment does not solely take place online. Thirteen interviewees (20%) suggested that radicalisation and recruitment take place within their communities – including in markets, workplaces and the homes of migrants. This is highlighted in two cases reported by one of the interviewees in Box 8.

Box 8: Knowledge of Recruitment

A male businessman and informal leader of the Isfara community in Novosibirsk describes two cases of recruitment within his community:

Three years ago, our co-villager who worked here secretly went to Syria with his family. But seeing the terrible truth there, by some great fortune managed to escape to Afghanistan. From Afghanistan, returned home ... Our co-villager must have been recruited at the bazaar where he worked. But he doesn't like to speak about it ... [He] said from Russia he went to Turkey, and from there to Syria.

A month ago, a man came back from Moscow to Novosibirsk, where he worked before going to Moscow ... The person who lived with him there attempted to recruit him to go to Syria. Seeing what was going on, he lied to the recruiter and fled back to Novosibirsk and reported to our consul here, asking for protection from the recruiter. He [the consul] immediately advised to change his SIM-card and not respond to phone calls. (Novo 12)

Mosques

To a lesser extent, seven interviewees (11%) speculated that radicalisation could take place at mosques. However, they asserted that such mosques are in a minority, and that they did not identify with them. For example, an Uzbek male from Tajikistan working as a leader of a migration centre in Astrakhan said, 'Some mosques are apparently run by such people, and can become a base for recruitment. But generally, not' (Astr 4).

Indeed, other interviewees were adamant that mosques are *not* places of recruitment, instead claiming that radicalisation takes place in external, informal prayer houses. This was highlighted by a Tajik male who works as a surgeon and is a community leader of Badakhshan migrants in Khabarovsk, who has some experience with radicalisation in his community: 'Official religious leaders and mosques have nothing to do with radicalism, but in informal prayer houses and markets, one can meet people who call for radicalism and intolerance' (Khab 5).

Salafis/Wahhabis

Ten interviewees (15%) specifically blamed 'Salafis' or 'Wahhabis' for extremist recruitment. A male human rights defender in Novosibirsk knew of a case of recruitment in his community: 'In principle, it [religion] shouldn't be [a factor]. But in reality, as we know, there are groups of Salafists and Hizb-ut-Tahriris.¹ It is their mosques and centres that spread extremist ideas' (Novo 5). However, despite these accusations, the interviewees did not seem to express an understanding of the relationship between Salafism, Wahhabism, groups such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir (a non-violent organisation and movement), and violent extremism, often using the terms interchangeably. Indeed, contrary to the suggestions of the interviewees, and public perceptions in general, there is no simple relationship between Salafism and violent extremism.²

Other Tajiks

Five interviewees who previously suggested that recruitment happens within their communities also specifically referred to the involvement of other Tajiks. One example of such a view was given by a male working for the Representative Office of the Ministry of Migration in Irkutsk: 'Salafi sermons incite groups against one another, and even Tajiks preach Salafism among the community' (Irku 1).

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1. Hizb ut-Tahrir (Party of Liberation) is an international pan-Islamist political organisation. It was founded in 1953 as a Sunni Muslim organisation in Jerusalem by Taqiuddin Al-Nabhani. Since then, Hizb ut-Tahrir has spread to more than 50 countries. It aims to re-establish 'the Islamic Khilafah (Caliphate)' or Islamic State. The new caliphate would unify the Muslim community (*Ummah*) in a unitary superstate of unified Muslim-majority countries. The proposed state would enforce Islamic Sharia law. Although it is a non-violent organisation, Hizb ut-Tahrir is banned in many countries.
 2. Quintan Wiktorowicz, 'Anatomy of the Salafist Movement', *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (Vol. 29, No. 3, 2006), pp. 207–39.

However, a male Tajik employed in the administration of a district of Astrakhan argued that this is mainly an issue among Uzbek and Kyrgyz communities: ‘We [Tajiks] haven’t had any incidents. But the Kyrgyz and Uzbek migrants have. That was two or three years ago ... [and anyway migrants] are not radicalised in Russia ... Uzbeks of Kyrgyzstan (especially Osh) and Tajiks from the Shartuz, Kabadiyan and Isfara regions of Tajikistan [are radicalised back home in Central Asia]’ (Astr 2). Again, however, this may be more reflective of an ethnic bias rather than the reality among migrants in Russia.

Caucasians

Four interviewees referred specifically to Caucasian recruiters, particularly Chechens and Dagestanis as being a particular source of concern. For example, a male head of a construction company in Astrakhan mentioned cases within his community: ‘There were two to three cases. Young people without money and without a job or the means to live fall under the influence of Dagestanis, Chechens or Salafis and go to Syria and Iraq ... They say that these recruiters are from the North Caucasus’ (Astr 3). However, the interviewees as a whole provided little detail on these recruiters; rather, the perceptions of the role of these recruiters appear to come from hearsay. This is something that is reflective of broader narratives around radicalisation within the Russian-speaking world in particular.

Perceptions of Individual Incentives

Money

Although the lack of work opportunities, mounting debt and poverty may lead some migrants to join extremist groups out of desperation, others who are in a better situation may also be drawn in by the promise of monetary reward. Indeed, the majority of those interviewed (over two-thirds), eight of whom had some direct knowledge of recruitment, believed that money is an important incentive for those joining extremist groups. Indeed, as an undocumented porter from Samara said, ‘They are attracted above all, by money. More than they have ever seen. All the other reasons stated are myths’ (Sama 2).

Moreover, seven interviewees (11%) suggested that people join extremist groups because they do not want to work, or want ‘easy’ money. A male trader living in Samara explained: ‘Everyone comes here to earn money. But some people want money, but don’t want to work hard. Those must be the ones agreeing to go after easy money’ (Sama 4). A third of those who highlighted money as an incentive speculated that money is particularly tempting to young and uneducated migrants.

Religion

Similarly, a third of interviewees, six of whom had some direct knowledge of recruitment, believed that religious fanaticism and a genuine belief in the ‘caliphate’ are important incentives for those who join extremist groups. This is highlighted by the statement of a prisoner convicted

for terrorism offences in Box 9. However, it is worth noting that while this interviewee may have been attempting to give a religious justification after the fact for joining Daesh, he may have been motivated at the time by other reasons.

Box 9: Knowledge of Recruitment

A male prisoner in Moscow convicted for terrorism, disseminating extremist propaganda and supporting ISIS:

I was accused of spreading extremist ideas over the internet. In Tajikistan, I received information and sermons and sometimes spread them over the internet. But these were the true words of the great Islamic scholars Ibn Taymiyyah¹ and Sheikh Al-Albani.² Here I also spread such material among Tajik migrants over the internet.

Many people say that migrants join ISIS for money. That's not correct. People travel there [to Syria] for their faith. Money is just a means used to achieve our goals.

In Iraq and Syria, there is a war for the creation of an Islamic Caliphate, as the prophet predicted. This is spiritual devotion to Islam. And the jihad will last to the day of judgement ... Those who are fighting in Syria today against the infidel state have already fulfilled their mission to God. They are already *shahids* [martyrs] and will go to paradise.

They don't yet understand that you have to fight for religion. If they don't want to, Allah will abandon them. Many haven't yet decided what they need in the future. But with the help of sermons we will bring the true religion to them.

Mosques and religious leaders are not resolute and they defend the interests of infidels. (Mosc 6)

¹ A medieval Sunni theologian (1263–1328) and a member of the Hanbali school of jurisprudence, Ibn Taymiyyah is a controversial scholar whose interpretations of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and his rejection of some aspects of classical Islamic tradition are believed to have had considerable influence on contemporary Wahhabism, Salafism and Jihadism.

² A leading Islamic Salafi scholar (1914–99), Albani was an Albanian who taught in Saudi Arabia but built his reputation in Syria and spent his later years in Jordan. Albani had controversial views on jurisprudence and Islamic issues.

Among those who emphasised the role of religious fanaticism, four (6% of the interview sample) said that those who join violent extremist groups believe they are ‘saving Islam’. This view was exemplified by a male working in Khabarovsk as a market vendor: ‘I think that guys fall into these circles for the promise of big money. But you can find guys who are fanatics and think that by their participation they save Islam’ (Khab 1).

This perspective was echoed to a degree by several interviewees. When asked for their perspective on the conflict in Syria and Iraq, twelve (18%) argued that those countries, and Muslims in those countries, are ‘victims’, particularly of foreign intervention. A respondent from St Petersburg noted: ‘On this we all agree, that it is a war against the Muslims. The US has its own interests, Saudis – their own, Iran – its own, Russia – its own, but the most difficult is the Syrians’ own lot’ (StPb 6). This sense of grievance can be exploited by recruiters and used as an incentive by those who go on to join extremist groups.

Thirteen interviewees (20%) argued, based on their own perceptions, that rather than being religious fanatics, violent extremists use religion as a cover; and that recruiters, as well as politicians, abuse it to justify violence. For example, a male market seller in Khabarovsk claimed that ‘ISIS covers up their inhumane actions with Islamic sermons, but what they do in Syria and Iraq is absolutely foreign to Islam’ (Khab 7).

In addition, a quarter of interviewees believed religion is not related to violent extremism at all, while two claimed that migrants from other Central Asian countries are more susceptible due to their poor understanding of religion. In the words of a male Kyrgyz builder from Tajikistan, currently living in Krasnodar:

The Uzbeks are not that religious. People that know religion and observe it, they would not go to fight ever, because they know that this is a sin before God. Those that fight are those that don’t understand and think that the whole world will convert to Islam. (Kdar 12)

Yet, another interviewee, a male Tajik entrepreneur living in Irkutsk, said that ‘It seems to me that this [recruitment on religious grounds] is truer for our compatriots from Kyrgyzstan, since in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan people are more literate in matters of religion’ (Irku 18).

These conflicting statements from interviewees of different ethnicities highlight the subjectivity and biases in migrant beliefs about violent extremism in their communities, as well as their prejudice against those from different groups.

A Sense of Meaning

The interviewee in Box 10 had direct knowledge of recruitment. He recounts the story of his son joining Daesh. Unlike the dominant explanation of money and religious beliefs highlighted above, this respondent argues that his son was in a good position financially and that he was also not interested in religious ideas. He explains his son’s motivation in terms of seeking ‘spiritual peace’. It is not clear what is meant by this term or how it differs to what other religious

adherents seek. However, the implicit suggestion here is that his son was looking for a sense of meaning through religious experience.

Box 10: Knowledge of Recruitment

A male private driver living in Moscow explains how his son joined ISIS after moving to Russia:

when he came here, he had no difficulties. He had a rented flat, had a job, went to the gym. There, he trained with Dagestanis and Chechens. From Central Asia, there were Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Kazakhs. I never noticed any change in him, it was all as usual, he never raised his voice. All relatives and community members respected him. Who and how recruited him I don't know. How he got there, I don't know. After five days, I learned that he left. I asked his friends, those who knew him, trained with him, but all of them said they knew nothing. When I went to the gym the second time, there was no one. Nobody wanted to tell anything.

About my son, if I said money was a factor, that would be untrue ... As for religious ideas, such things never really interested him. Those who are affected easiest by recruiters are those who are looking for some spiritual peace. (Mosc 8)

Perception of Vulnerable and At-Risk Populations

Education

A common factor increasing vulnerability given by interviewees was a lack of education – religious or otherwise. Almost a third of interviewees specifically highlighted religious ignorance or the general lack of education as an issue. A female street cleaner living in Khabarovsk exemplified this view: 'How can anyone believe someone you don't know? Because most are educated and understand these issues. Those who are uneducated fall prey to recruiters' (Khab 11). One male who works as a construction worker in Moscow argued that improving education could prevent violent extremism: 'We need to increase the knowledge of citizens, including migrant workers. An educated person will never ... join an extremist group' (Mosc 14) .

Youth

A third of the interviewees speculated that young people are the most likely group to become involved in extremism. However, not all interviewees agreed on the reasons behind this. Fifteen interviewees (23%) said that young people are more likely to be drawn in by monetary rewards – either because they suffer from financial difficulties, or because they are tempted by 'easy' money. Nine interviewees blamed specific characteristics associated with youth – namely, a lack of experience, naivete, and a disobedience to authority. According to a 47-year-old female NGO director living in Irkutsk, who had no direct experience of recruitment:

Young people are not experienced and are quick to believe when talking about religion. Under the pretext of religion, they become interested and are then persuaded by the promise of large amounts of money. The money is received by other people, but uneducated young guys die. (Irku 2)

Similarly, a 55-year-old male employed in the administration of a district of Astrakhan insisted that some young people join 'because they are trapped and have no way out and because of their ignorance and stupidity' (Astr 2). These characteristics are further highlighted by a case in Box 11.

Box 11: Knowledge of Recruitment

A male janitor foreman living in St Petersburg describes how a young employee became radicalised:

So this guy from Khatlon is our only instance. He was lazy. He did not work with conscience, called at girls in the yard, bullied them. Then he got in touch with someone from his fellow countrymen from Kurgantep. He missed days of work. Then suddenly changed and became silent. He started teaching us things, saying that even [a local religious leader] is praying wrong, that he is talking wrongly about Islam and history. Everything was wrong for him. These are the young fools who started the war. So he disappeared, did not even show up for his last pay check.

He was a decent guy; he accepted everything and did not argue. He then became like a mad or sick man ... We talked, but what's the use. Then, I had just become a foreman. He basically looked at us like he was looking at a wall. Then he collected his things in silence and left. But no one drove him out. We just warned him. And so he disappeared. Then, all these people came asking questions. I do not remember, [he was] 20-21. He was young, but he grew out his beard, like a Wahhabi. Well, what will become of him in the war? They killed him, probably. They show them on the TV – they are dying in batches.

It can be seen. It is said that it is easiest to entice young people and also those who are left without money and without relatives or friends. (StPb 5)

Social Isolation

Three interviewees with some experience of recruitment stated that people who are isolated are more vulnerable to recruitment (see Box 11). According to one, a male private driver living in Moscow whose son was recruited, 'When a person is recruited, he doesn't tell anyone about that. It is known that recruiters isolate [their recruits] from society. Precisely that barrier/isolation prevents the victims from seeking help with families and friends' (Mosc 8). A similar account is given in Box 12.

Box 12: Knowledge of Recruitment

A male head of a shopping centre department in Moscow describes how his brother-in-law left for Syria:

In 2012 I invited my wife's brother to work here, he was 22 then. Got him a job so he could support family. He left wife and a kid back home. In 2014, without saying a word to anyone, he went to Syria. There's war there, and they are victims of that war ... now I watch all news about Syria and Iraq ... Among those fighters, killing women and children, is the brother of my wife ... I never imagined a member of my family would go to the Syrian war. I probably didn't notice or missed something in the behaviour of the person ... We work from 6am till 11pm, where did he find time for that!

I suppose recruiters' job is not only to recruit a person, but if successful, also to organise their travel to Syria via Turkey. He wrote from Turkey to his cousin who worked with him that he was going to Syria, and asked not to search for him. When we informed police, they showed that a ticket was issued for him to Turkey.

The last time we heard from him was in August 2015. After that, twice, there were messages from others that he was doing alright ... The problem is that the recruits won't tell anyone about it. Maybe there is an agreement with recruiters that they must not tell anyone, or maybe they are threatened somehow if they tell. After getting recruited, they don't trust anyone except the recruiters.

I don't know when and how he got recruited ... [He] had no financial problems, had a normal job, enough for living. Young, just married ... I think he was recruited for religious reasons.

The mosque and traditional religious leaders are the only real power against radicalism ... But their power is also limited, some people join Salafists and other radical currents. Radicalism's parapet is the internet, and their space is very strong.

I think if a person got into the web of recruiters, he cannot freely walk out of it ... Recruiters isolate the person from others, and create a virtual world – which is very convenient for further recruitment ... The people who fall prey to recruiters must be those who couldn't find comfort in society, and were looking for a different world. (Mosc 11)

Perceptions of Resilience

Community Support

Alongside risk factors, most interviewees also mentioned ways in which members of their communities are resilient. Twelve interviewees (18%) discussed the role of diaspora leaders not just in terms of preventing radicalisation, but generally helping and solving problems within the community in which they are well respected. This was highlighted by a community leader living in Irkutsk: 'I help everyone who approaches me as they chose me as the leader of the community. I do not allow anyone to sow discord ... Community leaders, along with educated people, are fighting against radicalisation' (Irku 3).

As shown here, one of the ways in which diaspora leaders help to prevent radicalisation is by resolving disputes in the community. Other interviewees also mentioned the role of community leaders in holding seminars, educating the community and cooperating with the authorities.

Nearly a third of interviewees talked about how ordinary members of the community help each other overcome various problems, including radicalisation. Again, this often involves resolving disputes, educating other members of the community, and monitoring each other. For example, the surgeon and community leader in Khabarovsk believed that 'organised diasporas and communities can protect their own from such ailments ... educated young people among the migrants are actively working for the prevention of radicalism and extremism among the youth' (Khab 5).

A third of interviewees also mentioned the role of religious leaders (including mullahs and muftis – well educated and respected in religious matters) and mosques in actively preventing radicalisation, particularly through providing religious and moral guidance and education. For example, a male martial arts trainer living in Novosibirsk mentioned a case in which a mufti disrupted the recruitment of a community member: 'Our Mufti told us of a case when in 2016 one of the mosque attenders, an Uzbek, told him that his two sons wanted to go to Syria. And that he met those young men and in several conversations explained what was going on there. So the departure was aborted' (Novo 13).

Religion

In addition to the role of religious leaders and mosques in preventing radicalisation, a quarter of interviewees discussed how following religious teachings could be a protective factor by discouraging violence. For example, a female Russian examiner from Krasnodar stated, 'True faith and genuine belief in God – that's what helps me to reject violence' (Kdar 10). However, as previously noted, some interviewees speculated that a lack of understanding of religion could make some more susceptible to radicalisation, while still others speculate about the significance of religion at all.

Family

A quarter of interviewees also claimed that a sense of responsibility towards family is the primary reason why most migrants do not join violent extremist groups. This was characterised in either terms of financial responsibility, moral responsibility, or simply as a priority that took up most of their time. In the view of a female translator living in Ekaterinburg, migrants do not join violent extremist groups 'because they came to Russia to provide for their family. And for the sake of this, they are willing to endure the many difficulties which confront them at every step' (Ekat 1).

Economic Prospects

Thirteen interviewees also mentioned the positive aspects of migration to Russia – namely, more job opportunities, higher wages, and a better quality of life compared with Tajikistan. Not all of this, of course, was mentioned in the context of preventing radicalisation. Migrants who had this positive experience and stability may be less susceptible to recruitment, as suggested by the male assistant administrator at a bazaar in Samara: 'They want to find a good job and earn well. They have no use for going to Syria or Iraq' (Sama 3). Conversely, however, a lack of economic prospects, particularly due to difficulties with legalising their status, can make migrants more vulnerable. Similarly, an inability to provide economically for family members back home may also leave individuals vulnerable to extremist messaging.

The Positive Role of Authorities

Eleven interviewees mentioned the positive role that Tajik authorities can have, including in preventing radicalisation – although exactly how was not specified. Four specifically mentioned the role of the Tajik consulate, noted by a businessman in Novosibirsk: 'Diaspora leaders, authoritative individuals in the community and employees of the Tajik consulate in Novosibirsk [fight radicalisation]' (Novo 4). Furthermore, eight interviewees believed that the community should cooperate more with the authorities to fight violent extremism. A diaspora leader in Novosibirsk explained: 'Only through the joint efforts of diasporas, the government and state structures of the Russian Federation, can we resist violence and extremism' (Novo 3).

Education and Awareness

A quarter of interviewees pointed out that education and an awareness of the situation in Syria and Iraq makes migrants less likely to travel to these countries to fight for Daesh. For example, according to a male market seller in Irkutsk, the number of migrants going to fight in Syria or Iraq has been kept lower because of awareness of atrocities: 'At first, there was little information and people did not understand what was happening in Syria. As soon as videos or images of atrocities and mass executions of innocents began to appear on social networks or media, most people began to realise that this is the wrong way' (Irku 5).

Similarly, some of these interviewees pointed to the role of education and awareness initiatives. A community leader from Khabarovsk noted that 'Tajikistan and Russia have been carrying out extensive work to bring real information about ISIS and other extremist organisations to everyone' (Khab 5). Moreover, ten interviewees (15%) recommended that further improving education – particularly education on the realities of the actions of Daesh, as well as religious education – can help prevent extremism. For example, a male bus driver whose brother was recruited stated, 'The government needs to increase educational outreach and dialogue with young people in schools and universities' (Mosc 7).

IV. Analysis

Mohammed S Elshimi

IN TERMS OF structural motivations for engaging in violent extremism, this study shows that several ‘push’ factors were present that may have contributed to feelings of marginalisation, exclusion and alienation. First, the administrative and legal challenges of the migration process are such that some migrants end up with illegal status, and are therefore exposed to other vulnerabilities, including extremist recruiters. Second, the study identifies economic exploitation by various actors combined with financial hardship and poverty, which compels some down a path of criminality and, in a smaller number of cases, engagement with violent-extremist recruiters who offer monetary incentives. Third, the discrimination, stigmatisation and securitisation of labour migrants can lead to social marginalisation and foster grievances that can be exploited by violent-extremist entities.

A key finding in the data is the perceived relationship between economic exclusion and violent extremism. In fact, the dominant explanation offered by respondents of why migrants might have turned to violent extremism was financial. This perception is striking because the poverty argument is contradicted by the evidence of other studies. Many rich and educated people take part in violent extremism, and in fact tend to form the leadership cadre of terrorist organisations.¹ This explanation dominates among the respondents who did not have a direct experience of radicalised individuals. This is contrasted with respondents who actually knew someone who had been recruited and radicalised to violent extremism, who stressed that money was not the motivation. Recently, there has been a re-think among analysts on the role of poverty and economic factors, and the debate has moved beyond absolute poverty and instead onto relative poverty in relation to others in society.² In the context of Central Asian labour migrants in Russia, it may be that absolute and not relative poverty plays a greater role in processes of marginalisation and exclusion that could push individuals towards violent extremism. This hypothesis will need to be tested.

However, another key finding is the experience of social marginalisation that some labour migrants have to endure. This is due in large part to the growing securitisation of labour migration in Russia, a trend which according to interview subjects accelerated following the St Petersburg Metro attack of April 2017. According to the data generated for this report, since the attacks, migrants have been framed as potential terrorists in the press and law enforcement agencies have taken a firmer approach with migrants. The symbolic and operational message is that migrants have become a security concern. However, securitisation adversely impacts the

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1. Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog, *Engineers of Jihad: The Curious Connection Between Violent Extremism and Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017).
 2. Thomas Heghammer, ‘The Future of Jihadism in Europe: A Pessimistic View’, *Perspectives on Terrorism* (Vol. 10, No. 6, December 2016); European Institute of Peace, ‘Molenbeek and Violent Radicalization: “A Social Mapping”’, June 2017.

perception migrants have of their host society. It reinforces insider–outsider dynamics, leading many migrants to feel not only as outsiders in Russia, but also that their migrant identity is strengthened and reinforced. It also exacerbates grievances that feed into common narratives exploited by recruiters. At the same time, however, a great number of interview subjects expressed a view that there was positive cooperation with state structures and security authorities. They viewed these relationships as a factor of resilience rather than radicalisation. The point being that while it was clear that there was a sense of them being targeted and victimised more in the wake of the St Petersburg attack, there was also a realisation that this targeting was not universal.

The data indicates the existence of violent-extremist groups and networks operating on the ground in Russia. The names and details of those organisations were not disclosed, but a number of respondents highlighted the role of individuals from the Caucasus and others from Central Asia in recruitment processes. Assertions made by the bulk of interviewees about recruitment to violent extremism are based on perceptions and not verified facts. However, for cases where the interviewee had direct knowledge of someone who had been recruited or was in an otherwise informed position, the accounts are taken seriously. The perception of the sample group that some Caucasians are involved in violent extremism is compatible with what is known about the longer historical experience of violent extremism in the Caucasus.³ It also makes sense from an operational point of view: Caucasians understand the culture and terrain of Russia well and have greater operational, logistical and technical capacity than Central Asians in Russia – not to mention international connections with other Salafi-Jihadi movements in the Middle East and South Asia.

A number of respondents pointed out that the first level of recruitment is normally managed by someone of the same ethnic background, who is in turn connected to wider Caucasian networks. This fits with the conclusions of other research that indicates that effective recruitment takes place over a long period of time, in small circles, with a lot of attention and care invested in individuals.⁴ Recruitment is expedited in conditions of trust, companionship, and through shared acts and rituals, which strengthen the bonds between the recruiter and the recruited, between the individual and the group. This process is then more likely to take place between people who share a language and background – even if one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Salafi-Jihadi movement is its emphasis on globalised nodes of identification that are supposed to supersede conventional ethnic and national forms of identity. In this study, the data on recruitment focuses on the multiple tactics used to lure vulnerable people in – including money, religion and the internet.

Another important finding from the data is that Russia presents a more conducive environment for the promulgation and adoption of violent-extremist ideas than the Central Asian countries, due to a combination of complex factors. The authoritarian governments of Central Asia are less accommodating of religion in the public sphere than Russia. Migrant workers have a greater chance

3. John Russell, 'The Geopolitics of Terrorism: Russia's Conflict with Islamic Extremism', *Eurasian Geography and Economics* (Vol. 50, No. 2, 2013), pp. 184–96; Preeti Bhattacharji, 'Chechen Terrorism (Russia, Chechnya, Separatist)', Council on Foreign Relations, April 2010.

4. Scott Atran, 'The Devoted Actor: Unconditional Commitment and Intractable Conflict Across Cultures', *Current Anthropology* (Vol. 57, No. S13, June 2016).

to come into contact with more radical versions of Islam in Russia than back in their home countries, including because of the greater access to the internet. Being away from home in a foreign land can push some to adopt a more categorical form of identity, such as a global Islamic identity. Finally, labour migrants, particularly illegal migrants, experience a heightened sense of vulnerability given the nature and precariousness of migrant life in Russia.

Respondents highlighted the role of online radicalisation and recruitment in violent extremism. It allowed young people to watch violent-extremist videos, as well as receive communications over apps such as WhatsApp and Telegram. Exposure to violent-extremist content was more prevalent in Russia because of better access to and affordability of smartphones and the internet in Russia. This was corroborated by two interviewees who knew someone who had been recruited. It is not clear from the data, however, what the role of social media is in pathways towards radicalisation. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the wider literature shows that the internet and social media do not themselves cause radicalisation to violent extremism: they encourage and ignite violent extremism once individuals have made up their mind.⁵

What, then, are the factors contributing to radicalisation and violent extremism among Central Asian migrants in Russia? There is a lack of consensus about what motivates an individual to leave his or her country to join a terrorist organisation elsewhere. The most common motivations cited in popular discourse and by policymakers and violent extremist themselves since 2002 are ideology and religion. The wider literature cites other incentives including belonging, status, revenge, coercion, identity, money and a sense of adventure.⁶

The most striking finding in the research for this report is that the majority of respondents believed monetary incentives were the primary motive for individuals joining violent-extremist groups. The emphasis of 'greed' (money) over 'creed' (ideology) as an explanation is different to the dominant discourse in the West, which stresses the role of creed in violent extremism. In this study, interviewees showed a notable lack of knowledge about ideology, both in terms of its doctrinal features and the role it plays in violent extremism.

However, the authors of this report are cautious against putting too much trust into the respondents' views that economic hardship/poverty/material incentives drive radicalisation. Data derived from the interviews with individuals who knew somebody closely who was radicalised is more reliable than others in the sample. If looked at in this way, it is noticeable that money and material incentives were not offered as an explanation, and it was more ideational, ideological and spiritual factors that featured in their responses. The economic incentive is a widespread view in the data, but is not backed by evidence – such as concrete examples, life stories or profiles of the arrested.

There is an explanation of why people would think so. First, since interview subjects are for the most part economic labour migrants, monetary incentives are the primary driving motive for their

5. Tim Stevens and Peter R Neumann, 'Countering Online Radicalisation: A Strategy for Action', policy report, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2009.

6. Khalil and Zeuthen, 'Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction'.

existence. Hence, they would lock onto that idea as a priority. Second, historically, these were at root Marxist societies, where an influence of economic determinism dominated. Many participants found it hard to believe in the driving power of ideas, which given their status as migrants from former Marxist societies, appeared alien to them. This might explain why some look for explanations which fit into their mental frames. At the same time, it is also important to consider that anecdotal evidence beyond the report shows that money does seem to be one of the many factors contributing to violent extremism, supporting this perception among interview subjects.

The role of religion was articulated in different and often contradictory ways. One view common to many respondents was that some individuals drawn into violent extremism were duped into embracing an extremist interpretation of Islam. Many particularly lay the blame on what they referred to as 'Wahhabis'. In this view, Wahhabis are blamed for convincing gullible young migrants that it is their obligation to fight with Daesh. The wider literature confirms the idea that many who travelled to join Daesh were religious novices.⁷ Yet, another view is that some individuals become motivated by the desire to help Muslims to fight against perceived oppressive regimes, for example in Syria. According to this view, violent extremist actors do not seem themselves as 'vulnerable', nor do they lack agency, but rather they are perceived as empowered altruistic individuals who have taken the responsibility to protect Muslims under siege in Assad's Syria.

Importantly, the data shows that there is no typical profile of a violent extremist or an inherent 'vulnerability' to radicalisation of labour migrants. The low volume of incidents and the relatively small number of individuals implicated mean that a typical profile of a would-be terrorist cannot be inferred. However, among labour migrants in Russia from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, there are a minority of individuals who are vulnerable and at-risk of violent extremism.

The data shows that four types of person are perceived to be more vulnerable and at-risk to violent extremism: youth; illegal migrants; uneducated migrants; and lonely individuals. The perception that illegal migrants are at greater risk of being drawn into violent extremism needs to be investigated further. It is true that illegal migrants are exposed to a greater range of vulnerabilities than legal migrants, but the question is whether there is a greater relationship between illegal migrants and greater risk of being recruited. Here, caution must be exercised: the St Petersburg Metro suicide bomber, Akbarzhon Jalilov, had Russian citizenship.⁸

Moreover, the perception that a lack of education increased vulnerability to violent extremism is a salient finding. This is because educated and integrated people too can be radicalised. In fact, the wider literature holds that some of those who became violent extremists in Russia among Central Asian communities are better educated than typical migrants to Russia.⁹ Some scholars, such as Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog,¹⁰ state the controversial thesis that individuals with higher

7. United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism, 'Enhancing the Understanding of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters' Phenomenon in Syria', report, July 2017.

8. *BBC News*, 'St Petersburg Metro Bomber "from Kyrgyzstan"', 4 April 2017.

9. Lemon, 'Daesh and Tajikistan'.

10. Gambetta and Hertog, *Engineers of Jihad*.

levels of education, particularly in technical subjects, are more vulnerable to Islamist radicalisation. But in the context of labour migrants from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan who are away from home, the question of whether low levels of education increase vulnerability to violent extremism needs to be investigated further.

A key element at the heart of this research which this report was unable to unpack was the impact of the detailed diversity among Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz communities and the effect this might (or might not) have on violent extremism emanating from these communities. The many cultural, social, economic and historical differences between these countries and peoples are the topic of a much larger research project. But there were some noticeable issues that emerged from the research and in particular around people's perceptions of one another. For example, according to interview subjects, migrants from Kyrgyzstan hardly mix with other Central Asians, and see themselves as more individualistic and educated than other Central Asian migrants. Many interviewees also revealed a considerable degree of prejudice against ethnic Uzbeks, in particular ones from southern Kyrgyzstan who were seen as problematic.

Of the three migrant communities in this study, the Uzbeks had more to say about the challenges of Russia's migration system, in part due to the fact that, unlike migrants from Kyrgyzstan, they do not benefit from being in the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Migrants from Tajikistan were perceived to be the most religiously observant community of the three, as well as the most cohesive communally. Tajik interviewees were less concerned about their country not being a member of the EEU. Logically, membership of the EEU should make it easier for people to integrate and get jobs, which in turn should reduce the problems associated with radicalisation to violent extremism – the fact that this did not appear to be the case might be a significant finding, but one that is hard to support conclusively on the basis of available data. It is also important to note that the volumes of labour migrants from the three countries at a national level are vastly different, with migrants from Uzbekistan constituting the overwhelming majority of Central Asian labour migrants in Russia. Given the bias and generalisation evident in participants' responses about their own and other ethnic-national communities, the authors of this report chose to avoid making sweeping comparisons about the difference between the three communities and how it shaped the emergence of violent extremism among a minority of individuals.

Based on the information gleaned from interviews, radicalisation and recruitment to violent extremism is a marginal issue for labour migrants from the three Central Asian countries covered in this research. Why is this? Several potential perceived sources of resilience were identified by participants: the Russian authorities; community leaders; employment; family, including the guidance of family elders or the foreman in the workplace; religion; and education. In fact, except for minor differences, these factors were consistently mentioned across the context of all three Central Asian countries.

However, there are two particular perceptions on sources of resilience worth highlighting here: (1) the positive role of the Russian authorities and (2) the positive role of community leaders. With regard to the first point, it is important to stress that the data can be contradictory. While negative experiences with the authorities – such as the clamp down on migrants by Russia's law enforcement

agencies in the aftermath of the St Petersburg Metro bombing – were highlighted as a potential structural push factor, several interviewees nevertheless highlighted the government's security capacity as a protective factor. It is important to reiterate here that the literature suggests that a heavily securitised state approach can generate grievances.¹¹ However, the perception among several interviewees is that the net effect appears to be positive in terms of protecting against violent extremism and terrorism.

The second point about the perception of effective community leaders offers a valuable insight into factors of resilience. Many interviewees highlighted the positive role that community leaders have in supporting migrants, helping them adjust to life in Russia and, in some cases (such as mosque leaders), providing alternative narratives to those promulgated by violent extremists. Community leadership includes diaspora leaders, leaders of civil-society organisations, consular and diplomatic officials, entrepreneurs, foremen and union leaders in the workplace, and religious leaders. The dominant perception among respondents was that community leaders, in their various forms, had built a good relationship with the authorities, looked after the welfare and interests of their communities, and were positive role models for migrants. It is important to provide support for these spaces and leaders: they provide resilience.

11. Marc Sageman, *Misunderstanding Terrorism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017); Shadi Hamid, *Islamic Exceptionalism: How the Struggle Over Islam Is Reshaping the World* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 2016).

V. Conclusion

Mohammed S Elshimi and Raffaello Pantucci

VIOLENT EXTREMISM HAS substantial political, social, psychological and economic costs, as well as significant regional and international impact. This report sought to bridge the knowledge gap of why a minority of individual labour migrants in Russia from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have turned to violent extremism. Through its milieu approach, this research project has generated data that both provides important new insights on radicalisation and recruitment into violent extremism among labour migrants from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in Russia, and also reaffirms the results of other studies – raising questions for further research.

Looking more specifically at radicalisation to violent extremism, it is important to identify what natural sources of resilience already exist and bolster them. While relations between the state and labour migrant communities are not always perfect, research showed how in some contexts good networks of communication had been established and these played an important role in keeping people away from extremist ideas. These need to be encouraged. Furthermore, the problem of radicalisation is one that touches on all communities – so greater cooperation and discussion between Russia and the three Central Asian states is going to be important to manage this problem. Given that people are now leaving the battlefields in Syria and Iraq and in some cases heading home, the moment for closer cooperation and discussion is at hand.

Finally, the number of labour migrants who turn to violent extremism is very limited. This is important to remember as there is a danger otherwise that increased stigmatisation of the entire community will generate greater alienation and conflict, and ultimately exacerbate the problem of radicalisation. Given the growing number of Central Asians who have appeared in prominent roles in high-profile terrorist attacks around the world, there has already been a steady shift in the public discourse around Central Asians being involved in violent extremist activity. This trend should not be exacerbated further and it is important to keep the issue in appropriate proportion.

Appendix

Labour Migrants from Uzbekistan

Table 1: Demographics

Total Interviews	Discarded Interviews	Remaining Interviews	Focus Group Participants
67	15	52	3 Uzbek males aged 20–29

Table 2: Ages of Interviewees

20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	Unknown
6	12	15	14	4	1

Table 3: Gender

Male	Female
44	8

Table 4: Ethnic Profile

Total from Uzbekistan	Of which				
45	Uzbek	Uzbek-Tajik	Russian-Tajik	Tajik	Tatar
	41	1	1	1	1
Total not from Uzbekistan	Of which				
7	Russian	Tatar	Dagestani	Unknown	
	3	2	1	1	

Labour Migrants from Kyrgyzstan

Table 5: Demographics

Total Interviews	Discarded Interviews	Remaining Interviews	Focus Group Participants
83	0	83	15 Kyrgyz males, aged 19–30

Source: FG1 held in Krasnoyarsk with 7 Kyrgyz participants; FG2 held in St Petersburg involving 3 male Kyrgyz working for a construction company; and FG3 held in St Petersburg involving 5 male Kyrgyz working for a Turkish construction company.

Table 6: Ages of Interviewees

19–29	30–39	40–49	Over 50
30	13	26	14

Table 7: Gender

Male	Female
Kyrgyz	
43	12
Uzbek	
24	3
Azerbaijani	
1	0

Table 8: Ethnic Profile

Total from Kyrgyzstan	Of which		
83	Kyrgyz	Uzbek	Azerbaijani
	55	27	1

Labour Migrants from Tajikistan

Table 9: Demographics

Total Interviews	Discarded Interviews	Remaining Interviews
68	3	65

Table 10: Ages of Interviewees

20–29	30–39	40–49	50–59	60–69
21	16	16	11	1

Table 11: Gender

Male	Female
57	8

Table 12: Ethnic Profile

Total from Tajikistan	Of which		
	Tajik	Uzbek	Kyrgyz
65	61	3	1

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Sarah's research focuses on Russia's foreign policy, particularly towards the EU, Ukraine and Syria, as well as China's growing influence in Central Asia and how this affects Russia's relations with the region. She also set up a Russia-UK track II security bilateral dialogue, which brings together think tankers and academics from Russia and the UK to discuss security challenges in the bilateral relationship. Apart from foreign policy, Sarah has a special interest in understanding financial crime and illicit finance emanating from post-Soviet countries. In 2016 she served as specialist adviser to the UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, assisting it on its enquiry into UK–Russia bilateral relations.

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