

RAN REHABILITATION

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CONCLUSION PAPER

*RAN REHABILITATION Working Group Meeting
25-26 May 2023, Stockholm, Sweden*

Mentorship in a rehabilitation setting

Key outcomes

Mentorship plays a significant role in the rehabilitation of (formerly) radicalised individuals. In addition to offers of practical advice and support (including, for example, housing, career and education), psychological care and the supervision of legal conditions (when on probation), mentorship can provide highly individualised support for dealing with the personal changes that accompany the rehabilitation process. Mentorship projects, approaches and systems are versatile. They may involve trained professionals, peer support or volunteers, and take place either or both on and offline. What is true across the board however is that mentorship always relies on the participant's autonomous motivation to change.

The key objectives of this meeting were to gather experiences of how mentoring is implemented in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) rehabilitation work within the EU and beyond, to discuss the challenges that practitioners are currently facing and to see to what extent adjacent fields can serve as a source of inspiration to deliver insights for improvement. Core issues addressed included determining compatibility of the mentor and the mentee, developing a relationship built on trust and minimal standard requirements for becoming a mentor. A checklist with practical recommendations based on the insights shared during the meeting was drafted for practitioners and organisations that intend to set up a mentoring programme, involve mentorship in their rehabilitation efforts, or want to reflect on their current way of implementing mentorship in the rehabilitation process of (formerly) radicalised or extremist individuals.

The following key insights and challenges were identified:

- **Identifying a good match** between a mentee and a mentor is crucial to a successful mentorship, as it requires **consent and mutual trust**. Many factors play into this, including interpersonal ones or the risk level associated with the mentee.
- **Different actors can be mentors**, including practitioners working in exit programmes and probation, formers who are sufficiently disengaged themselves and capable of guiding someone else in the rehabilitation process, and even volunteers who have received adequate training.
- Mentorship is **distinct from other approaches** present in the sphere of rehabilitation from (violent) extremism, such as coaching or counselling, as well as from psychological or therapeutic interventions. It calls for a personal connection between the parties involved rather than a strictly professional one and is not intended to reduce the likelihood of (re)offending. However, it can also be used in conjunction with other strategies.

- Mentorship can provide both the mentees and the mentors with a **new self-perception** as well as an **opportunity to develop** the **prosocial skills** required to be part of society.

Discussion highlights

Experiences with P/CVE practices including mentorship approaches from within the EU, Kenya and the United States were presented and discussed, and from in-depth reflection on these discussions a checklist with basic guidelines for mentoring in rehabilitation settings was created.

What is mentorship (and what is it not)?

- Mentorship can be understood as a one-on-one relationship between a mentor and a mentee, built on mutual consent, trust, support, communication, and a desire to grow and learn. This trust needs to go both ways. It is not only important for the mentee to trust the mentor with sensitive and vulnerable information about themselves, it is also important for the mentor to have trust in the commitment of the mentee.
- The overarching goal of mentorship in the context of rehabilitation from (violent) extremism is the mentee's reintegration into society and their abstaining from future (extremist) violence, harming themselves or others. This provides a direction for and establishes guidelines when it comes to personal development, growing and learning.
- Mentorship differs from other rehabilitation efforts such as exit work, coaching and counselling, as well as from psychological or therapeutic approaches. The focus lies on low-threshold support and human connection as opposed to centring the prevention of recidivism and approaching rehabilitation from a primarily securitised perspective.
- Depending on the risk level associated with the mentee, mentorship may require specialised knowledge and professional skills on the part of the mentor beyond simply "being there" for the mentee. This is exemplified by the graphic below, depicting a progression of prevention and risk level associated with the level of professionalisation required from the mentor.
- Mentoring in the fields of secondary and tertiary prevention requires at least a basic understanding of the ideological context and extremist group dynamics. For disengagement, deradicalisation and rehabilitation from long-term engagement in an extremist group, more specific knowledge will be required, for example a basic understanding of trauma and/or expertise to work with traumatised people.
- Different actors may take up the role of the mentor in the rehabilitation of (formerly) radicalised individuals/extremists. Apart from practitioners working in exit programmes and probation who generally have a relevant background by education (e.g. social or youth work, psychology or psychiatry), another option is to involve formers who have completed their own rehabilitation process to the extent that they can be trusted with guiding others, or even volunteers who have received adequate training.
- It was brought up that it can be helpful to think of disengagement from extremism as a healing process and violent extremist actions as a pain expression, without, however, denying personal responsibility.
 - On a related note, it was mentioned that in some cases, the mentor might — consciously or unconsciously — represent a parental or big brother/sister figure to the mentee.
- Challenges related to mentorship include building trust, securing safety of the mentors, addressing public/press attention and the personal multi-problem situation in which the mentees most often are. To cope with these challenges, adjacent fields where mentorship is being implemented for target groups in a vulnerable and/or complex situation can be a source of inspiration.
- Individuals who have spent time in radical environments often are not used to experiencing kindness outside of their former group. Therefore, unexpected kindness (for example, a mentor showing an active

interest in the mentee's well-being) — perhaps even by a member of a group that the ideology frames as the enemy — can open minds by causing cognitive dissonance.

- Apart from individual mentorship, mentoring can also take place in group settings. However, due to data protection regulations, this is not equally possible across EU Member States.
- Mentoring is a marathon, not a sprint. Although often only temporarily applied in rehabilitation settings, mentoring is not a quick fix due to the needed trust between mentor and mentee.

Benefits of mentorship as part of a rehabilitation approach

- Spending years of one's life within an extremist movement can involve the neglect of personal, professional and social development and certain milestones missed, such as job training, a degree, friendships or family life, as mainstream goals did not seem important during the time spent in the movement. Mentorship can help address such pent-up demands in a highly individualised manner.
 - o Research in the adjacent field of adolescent delinquency shows a positive correlation between mentoring relationships and increased social capital, such as self-esteem, education and employment achievements
- Mentees can obtain a new self-narrative and perception by seeing themselves through the eyes of someone who engages with them voluntarily and who holds a positive attitude towards them. At the same time, mentorship can be a rewarding experience for mentors.
- Mentors can role model certain values to the mentee. For example, it is easy to tell someone that they should develop more ambiguity tolerance, but it becomes easier to understand what that looks and feels like when a mentor exemplifies it by seeing two sides to something and living with the uncertainty of finding no definite answer.
- Mentees receive an opportunity to develop the prosocial skills required to be part of society and experience healthy attachment just by way of interacting with the mentor.
- The mentor can act as a mediator between the mentee and other professionals involved in the rehabilitation process, such as a therapist.
- The mentor is not part of any institution (law enforcement or judiciary) that the mentee may hold grudges against. Therefore, possible hostility towards "the system" based on ideological reasoning or due to actual negative experiences (e.g. feelings of structural neglect) is not applying to them in the same way, which will give them an easier starting point for building trust.

"What makes for good mentorship?" – Checklist

In this list, elements for good mentorship have been gathered as reported during the meeting.

Profile of mentors

- Belief in human rights and the potential for personal change.
- Connected to and understanding their own feelings.
- Ability and willingness to have a dialogue without providing all the answers but listening in a non-judgemental manner instead (e.g. not "What's wrong with you?", but "What happened to you?").
- Being a former can be both an add-on and an obstacle for mentors as their experience may allow them to recognise the situation that the mentee is in while at the same time potentially trigger their own traumas.

Selection and preparation of mentors

- Understand why individuals are applying to be a mentor and what their motivation is. Is it in line with what you wish to achieve with your mentorship programme?
- Mentors will be able to cater to different needs of mentees. A pool with a wide variety of mentors (gender, age, (professional) background) can be useful.
- Consider involving experienced mentors when preparing future mentors. Let future mentors attend sessions if the mentee is fine with this.
- Create a handbook for the mentors that contains your vision on mentorship, guidelines on how to handle challenging situations, and practical information including on methodology.

Safeguarding mentors

- Consider and be aware of compassion fatigue, as mentors are “burning to light someone else’s candle”.
- Have clear rules on personal safety and a protocol for escalation. Where can meetings take place? What to do when feeling threatened?
- Organise supervision to provide opportunities to debrief and consult.
- Have a procedure for when after a while it turns out that there is no (longer a) match between the mentee and mentor.

Mentees

- Make sure that mentees acknowledge (co-)ownership of their rehabilitation process.
- If feasible, ask them to write progress reports.
- A mentee should not become dependent on their mentor in a similar way to their past reliance on their extremist contact network. Instead, they need to be empowered to depend on their own abilities.

Methodology/customisation aspects

- Establish a mutual commitment to respectful communication.
- Have a clear understanding of the goal of mentorship in the rehabilitation process.
- Have a clear definition of the target group you want to help. Are you dealing with highly ideologised individuals? If so, what are the minimum requirements mentors have to fulfil to work with them and what is the maximum level of challenges they may be encountering that mentors can help with? This assessment may limit both the profile of mentors and mentees to work with.
- Follow an asset-based approach. This means focusing on the resources a mentee brings, including for example their previous social network and their professional and personal skills, instead of merely focusing on risk factors.
- Take into account personal and structural limitations of the mentee and focus the mentor’s capacities on attainable goals.
- When mentorship is part of a broader rehabilitation programme, have a structure in place to exchange and fine-tune with other professionals.
- Safeguard the confidentiality of the conversations. Be clear about limits of what the mentorship can accomplish. Ask for consent of the mentee if you want to share information.

- Allow for flexibility to customise the programme to meet the needs of the mentees as long as it aligns with the ultimate goal of the mentoring process: rehabilitation. Flexibility and prioritising in timing (what to handle first) and kind of activities to jointly engage in can increase the motivation for change.
- Have procedures for handover between mentors. This is a delicate process with regard to safeguarding trust. If it becomes necessary to change mentors, for example due to availability issues, it can be helpful to have a transition period where both mentors are present.
- Provide food for thought and try to let mentees take on a new perspective. Creative activities can be helpful for this.
- Use conversation techniques such as non-violent communication, appreciative enquiry, and motivational interviewing. Have follow-up communication opportunities available for the post-mentorship period.

Rules of engagement/relationship between mentor and mentee in practice

- Both parties should dare to say no when the mentorship relation is not working (anymore).
- Acknowledge that mentoring involves a close and personal relationship.
- Work on intersubjective understanding, meaning to exchange perspectives and agree on the understanding of a complex issue in a way that it is equally recognisable and comprehensible to several observers. In brief, working on intersubjective understanding involves collaborative efforts to establish a shared understanding of a complex issue (e.g. why people have different opportunities). This is achieved usually by exchanging perspectives, seeking common ground, and ensuring that the resulting understanding is accessible and comprehensible to all involved parties, allowing them to equally recognise the different viewpoints and interpretations.
- Involve the mentee in shaping the objectives of the mentorship.
- Evaluate the mentorship on a regular basis.

Relevant practices

1. The Norwegian **National Mentor-training** is implemented by the Resource Centre on Violence, Traumatic Stress and Suicide Prevention, Region West. It consists of a 9-day multidisciplinary training for volunteers with the aim of deradicalisation and disengagement from extremism.
2. **Intersubjective body mapping** is an experimental art-based approach to fostering communication and addressing issues of reintegration, such as building trust and understanding, between returning foreign terrorist fighters, victims/survivors of terrorism, law enforcement professionals and community members.
3. The **Croatian Model of Roma Mentors** was set up by the Croatian probation service to establish mentors as links between government institutions and the Roma community, seeking to motivate the community to fulfil legal obligations.
4. **Mentor+** is a youth mentoring programme to prevent juvenile offending through the use of digital means.
5. The Bulgarian after-school programme **Golden Fish** helps young people at risk of radicalisation develop their social skills as well as their resistance against misinformation.

Follow-up

Topics for further exploration at RAN Practitioners meetings include somatic (body-based) approaches to rehabilitation, such as the intersubjective body mapping practice presented in this meeting.

Further reading

Bertelsen, P. has developed this freely accessible e-learning on Mentorship of radicalised individuals:

1.1. The basic idea of LGT mentoring

<https://panopto.au.dk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=b93877d5-99ca-42e2-b428-ada40120b8da>

1.2. The Life Psychological method

<https://panopto.au.dk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=d09932a2-3556-4cc1-bf49-ada40120c5a2>

1.3. The ten general human life skills and the 360°-tool

<https://panopto.au.dk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=56f8d8c0-7072-4c40-ab98-ada40120cf0a>

1.4. Exercise 360-degree tool

<https://panopto.au.dk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=b2f67b08-b09f-4fae-a6a2-ada40120e829>

1.5. Boosting the solution focused process

<https://panopto.au.dk/Panopto/Pages/Viewer.aspx?id=d68e201b-77b4-4518-b241-ada40120fc5e>

Kelley, M. S., & Lee, M. J. (2018). When natural mentors matter: Unravelling the relationship with delinquency. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 91, 319-328. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.06.002>

RAN Practitioners small-scale expert workshop [Involving formers in exit work](#), November 2021.

Wilchen Christensen, T., Freear, M., & Suleiman, H. (2020). *Strengthening resilience to violent extremism – STRIVE II. A mentorship manual for countering violent extremism in Kenya*. Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies. https://static.rusi.org/strive_ii_manual_final_web_version.pdf

Winterbotham, E. (2020). *How effective are mentorship interventions? Assessing the evidence base for preventing and countering violent extremism*. Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies. https://static.rusi.org/pcve_mentorship_final_web_version.pdf