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CONCLUSION PAPER

*RAN PRISONS Working Group Meeting**15-16 November 2022, Berlin, Germany*

What is in the European prison toolbox of DDR programmes?

Key outcomes

In recent years, there has been a growing number of violent extremist or terrorist offenders (VETOs) entering – and being released from – the correctional systems across EU Member States after serving their sentence. This has resulted in an increasing focus being placed on their distancing and disengagement from extremism and violence as a key outcome of the incarceration period of these inmates. A growing number of tertiary prevention interventions have been implemented across the EU and there is now a large variation among EU Member States with respect to deradicalisation, disengagement and resocialisation (DDR) programmes and tools used in the work with VETOs in prison. The goal of this RAN PRISONS Working Group meeting was to explore the various tools and programmes across the EU dealing with DDR in prison. Practitioners and researchers from different EU Member States gathered to share their experiences and learn from each other what key tools and programmes are being used, what are the preconditions for the implementation of DDR programmes and what are the recommendations for successful ones. The following key outcomes summarise the meeting's overarching insights:

- **Variety of approaches to working with VETOs in prison:** Often, VETOs are considered a unique group of prisoners and addressed specifically via dedicated treatment programmes in many Member States, where one of the key priorities for the incarceration period is disengagement and deradicalisation. In many contexts, however, VETOs are offered general reintegration and rehabilitation measures the same way as for other offenders.
- Specialised DDR programmes dedicated to VETOs also build on existing expertise, methods and approaches that are used with other inmates too, such as classic social work, cognitive behavioural therapy, anti-violence training and reintegration support. These **methods, however, need to be adapted to the specifics of the (often heterogenous) target groups** and individual radicalisation pathways, as well as to how the deradicalisation process works.
- What is **specific to DDR programmes** as compared to general rehabilitation interventions offered to all inmates is in how the target group is defined and selected, in the increased duration and intensity of the care, emphasis on certain aspects of the work with inmates, or additional methods being used (such as religious counselling, narrative and worldview work, mentoring in the transitional phase). Knowledge about radicalised environments and radicalisation processes is essential in order to adapt methods adequately.

- DDR programmes have some **common elements** such as risk assessment based on VERA-2R and similar tools, a multi-agency/multi-professional approach, individual work with inmates around disengagement and strong focus on reintegration after release.
- In general, there is a **hierarchy of needs** addressed via DDR work, although comprehensiveness and methods might vary — starting from a risk and needs assessment, individualised treatment plan, addressing basic needs and trust building, work on stabilisation and transition management (e.g. mentoring and coaching methods), work on identity, narratives and worldviews, and social reintegration support.
 - **Disengagement is intertwined with successful reintegration.** Education and job support programmes that are available also for other offenders for reintegration are considered key elements in the DDR process in supporting disengagement.
 - **Ideology, narratives, worldviews and religion** are addressed by many programmes although the goal is not necessarily changing the inmates' beliefs (deradicalisation).
- **Key preconditions** for DDR programmes to be beneficial and effective include: well-trained and sufficient staff, minimum standards and good conditions in prison environments, prison leadership commitment and prioritisation of DDR, better tools for risk and needs assessment, political support, and improving the public perception and expectation regarding the role of DDR in prison.

Highlights of the discussion

The discussion highlighted that every EU Member State addresses the topic differently in terms of definitions of target groups and phenomena to be addressed, objectives/desired outcomes, actors involved and responsibilities, and execution of programmes (duration, format, specific methods and types of interventions). Many specialised DDR programmes for VETO inmates are implemented across Europe (DK, NL, DE, SE, NO, AT), but even then the target groups can vary and the focus can be either on Islamist or right-wing extremism (RWE) offenders, or both, as well as on inmates convicted of other crimes who are assessed as vulnerable to radicalisation. Returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) are another target group of DDR interventions, while some programmes work with mixed groups of VETOs and regular offenders (e.g. DE and FR). In other Member States such as Greece, Romania and Ireland, VETOs are enrolled in treatment and rehabilitation programmes that are offered to the general offender population.

Key characteristics of DDR programmes in the EU

- **Target groups and level of specialisation.** Different programmes in different EU Member States are designated for and implemented with various groups, such as with focus on Islamist or RWE offenders, returnees, general offenders at risk of radicalisation or programmes open to all offenders. For example, a disengagement programme by the French prison administration is offered to mixed groups of VETOs and general offenders in a group setting. Participation in the DDR programmes is in the majority of cases on a **voluntary basis** to increase motivation and commitment.
- **Desired outcomes/objectives:** DDR programmes prioritise disengagement and social reintegration as a more realistic outcome, and focus less on deradicalisation, which is seen as a component of disengagement work, but not the main objective. They focus on changing (violent) behaviour rather than changing the inmate's belief system and ideology, although examples of programmes working with VETOs primarily on ideology were also mentioned (e.g. DERAD in Austria). However, disengagement work also inevitably touches on worldviews, narratives and religion in some form or other.
- **Risk and needs assessment.** All DDR programmes are preconditioned on an assessment of needs of inmates and the risk of violence they pose. Risk assessment based on structural professional judgement tools such as VERA-2R, continues to be the most used and regarded important element of DDR work in prison in terms of assessing risks and deciding what interventions to implement. While its added value is to structure the process, it also has limitations, as it is not designed with the deradicalisation and

disengagement process in mind. Practitioners often are not trained to use its results in the DDR process. In addition, these tools are developed for violent offenders, but many of the inmates in question are not convicted for violent offences. There is the need to complement such tools with social diagnostics and needs assessment tools.

- **Multi-agency cooperation and multi-professional approach.** A common feature of the DDR programmes discussed during the meeting is the (need for) cooperation between different actors/professionals, but also among multiple agencies, regardless of whether the programme is primarily run by the prison administration or by a civil society organisation (CSO), or as a public-private partnership.
 - There are many good examples of how multi-agency cooperation works in practice, for example through case conferences (DE), and case discussion platforms in the Netherlands and Belgium, where all relevant actors take part, such as municipality, prison and probation staff, security and intelligence, exit workers and family support services.
 - The DDR programme of the prison administration in Denmark relies on a multi-agency approach that brings to the table all profiles and competences available in prison. This state-led approach has also limitations as trust might be difficult to establish — inmates know the programme is part of the state prison system. External mentors from civil society can also be engaged if needed, especially in the stabilisation phase and post-release.
 - CSOs providing DDR interventions might face bigger barriers in multi-agency cooperation and access to inmates, as they are external to the prison administration and are not involved in daily prison life. They need to first establish work relationships and mutual understanding of roles and mandates with prison staff. In the Netherlands and Belgium the role of CSOs seems to be very much institutionalised as providers of DDR services in detention. Elsewhere, cooperation is more challenging (e.g. in Germany it differs very much depending on the state and even prison).

Key principles, methods and tools used in DDR work

- In general, there is a **hierarchy of needs** to be addressed via DDR work within an **individualised, tailor-made plan**, although methods might vary — starting from basic needs and trust building based on classic social work, through stabilisation and working on identity, narratives and worldviews. Participants agreed that the potential for success of a programme increases the more holistic it is in terms of the needs addressed.
- A survey of 58 programmes across the EU showed that practices and methods used in DDR work with VETOs are in their majority general, also used for other inmates⁽¹⁾. While many of these approaches are not new, they **need to be put in the context of the deradicalisation and disengagement process**. This requires aspects such as knowledge of the extremist scene and its role in the inmate's life and social environment, and also a focus on some more deeply rooted issues such as identity, biography and narratives.
- **Social work** with this target group entails talking about the crime itself, encouraging the inmate to take responsibility for the offence and identifying resources for reintegration into society. The focus is also on support with basic needs and daily life such as housing, employment, finances, relationships and social network rebuilding.

PRACTICES	CODE	FREQUENCY
Motivational interviewing	01	6
Cognitive-behavioural approach	02	16
Biographical work	03	6
Working alliance (trust building)	04	5
Anti-aggression/anger management training	05	2
Therapy	06	4
Motivation in prison	07	2
Classic social work	08	22
Social networks/recognition	09	7
Involvement of local authorities	10	7
Mentorship scheme	11	3
Change talk (conversation for change)	12	4
Deradicalization (activities focusing on ideology)	13	11
Religious intervention	14	9
Non-applicable	99	7

Source: EUTEx Survey of existing practices in 58 programmes

⁽¹⁾ Based on a presentation of preliminary results from a study conducted within the EUTEx project.

- **Working alliances** is an approach focusing on building rapport, trust and a meaningful working relationship between the inmate and the prison councillor as a key driver for change — the bond between two people, and their ability to work collaboratively to set goals and tasks. In the work with VETOs, achieving this can be challenging, since many inmates do not understand why they have been sentenced, and many have been convicted of a terrorist offence for sharing a video online. This work requires a long work process between practitioner and client in order to develop trust between the two, to allow the work process of disengagement and resocialisation. Practitioners describe the process as demanding, but also relatively successful ^(2,3).
- **The systemic approach** was also found useful in working with VETO inmates in several contexts, which focuses on the social environment and how the inmate's social field needs to be restructured. In the context of DDR, knowledge and understanding of the extremist scene and its role in the radicalisation process is key. This method also entails work with families and personal and professional relationships. The idea behind it is to work with the offender's surrounding and create one that will support in its way in the rehabilitation process. This approach requires a multi-agency approach as many actors participate by contacting and working with different figures in the offender's surrounding.
- **Cognitive behavioural therapy** focuses on changing attitudes, cognitions and values to affect a change in behaviour and it is often used in DDR work. In the work with VETOs, **schema therapy** is also used successfully, where the coping mechanisms (including aggression) developed based on past trauma are examined and replaced with, for example, enhanced social skills ⁽⁴⁾.
- **Counselling** is a common method used in DDR work that can take many forms and touch on different topics, including ideological and philosophical questions, critical thinking, along with more standard coaching on life skills.
- Several **specific methods** are used both within these broader approaches and individually, namely: motivational interviewing, biography work or lifeworld approach, problem solving, change talk, psychological or psychiatric therapy.
- **Coaching and mentoring** in the stabilisation phase and during the transition between prison and release and in after-release follow-up were found to be important in the work with VETOs. These are most often offered by CSOs (e.g. in DE and DK), which are not constrained by an institutional mandate and can move between settings with the inmate, but also by probation or other services that do the follow-up after release.
- **Individual or group interventions.** Some of the programmes are designed for individual work, such as mentoring and biography-based work, while other programmes are being delivered in a group forum, such as religion-based programmes, civic and democratic education, inter-faith dialogue, including in secondary prevention and with mixed groups of VETOs and other offenders. This can help VETOs feel less stigmatised and isolated and enable interaction with a wider and more diverse social environment.
 - A DDR programme in France is provided to small groups of 12 inmates (a mix of common offenders and VETOs), who over 20 sessions work with different stakeholders on themes such as empathy, open-mindedness, media literacy, anger and emotional management.
- **General rehabilitation measures** used in prison are considered by practitioners as key to supporting the DDR process, such as vocational training, housing and more general counselling (in Ireland, Greece, Romania, for example) — employment support is considered a key reintegration measure; finding a new job and a new social environment helps with disengagement from old behaviours and environment. Similarly, **in-prison education**, such as political/civic education or language classes (for example,

⁽²⁾ Haas, S. M., & Smith, J. (2019). Core correctional practice: The role of the working alliance in offender rehabilitation. In P. Ugwudike, H. Graham, F. McNeill, P. Raynor, F. S. Taxman, & C. Trotter (Eds), *The Routledge companion to rehabilitative work in criminal justice* (pp. 339-351). Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315102832-33>

⁽³⁾ Ross, E. C., Polaschek, D. L. L., & Ward, T. (2008). The therapeutic alliance: A theoretical revision for offender rehabilitation. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 13(6), 462-480. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2008.07.003>

⁽⁴⁾ Friendship, C., Blud, L., Erikson, M., Travers, R., & Thornton, D. (2010). Cognitive-behavioural treatment for imprisoned offenders: An evaluation of HM Prison Service's cognitive skills programmes. *Legal and Criminological Psychology*, 8(1), 103-114. <https://doi.org/10.1348/135532503762871273>

courses in the local language for easier future integration or Arabic courses for Muslim inmates to be able to read the Quran) is considered a good complementary tool in DDR programmes.

- **The role of religion and religious councillors.** While in some places there are religious actors involved in interventions with VETOs and general offenders in their rehabilitation (such as the role of chaplains in Belgium, or the CEC method⁵ as an alternative to imprisonment in Italy, provided by an international religious NGO), more often DDR programmes seek to find common ideological ground based on a discourse deriving from human rights. **Interfaith encounters** between prisoners from different religions encourage understanding of one another, in prison and outside of it.
- **Work with families and communities.** As part of a DDR programme or for the time the prisoners will go back to their families and communities, there is a need to work with the social surrounding in order to create better infrastructures and support systems for inmates' return to society after release. DDR programmes that also provide family counselling such as FORSA in the Netherlands, as well as many others, actively engage families and social networks in the rehabilitation process.
- **Measuring success.** For practitioners an intervention is successful when there is a healthy social reintegration of the inmate after release and if they have disengaged from violence (lack of recidivism). Practitioners warn against the assumption that all prisoners are rational when assessing their 'success' in DDR programmes, as some require intensive psychological or psychiatric care. Others are being left in a vacuum after release by revoked citizenship, which means all efforts are in vain.

Recommendations: What is needed for successful DDR work in prison?

After taking stock of the wealth of methods and key common principles used as part of the DDR toolbox, practitioners highlighted several important preconditions for enabling the set-up and successful implementation of DDR work in prisons, with focus on recommendations for prison management and policy.

For practitioners and prison staff

- **Well-defined target groups, needs and realistic goals.** An almost general rule is that DDR programmes should be based on a solid definition and multi-professional understanding of the target group(s), their needs and the risks they pose, as well as on realistic goals for what can be achieved during their incarceration period.
- A **tailored individualised treatment plan** is the standard, as well as involvement of different professional profiles in case management and care. This plan should be based not only on standard risk assessment but also social diagnostics and needs assessment tools that take into account the barriers and protective factors in the deradicalisation process.
- **Diversification of methods to respond to different needs**, including a systemic approach, work with families, but also mental health aspects (schema therapy), work with narratives and worldviews, combine group and individual interventions, strong focus on rehabilitation support, education (languages, civic education), interfaith encounters, cultural sensitivity. Coaching in stabilisation and mentoring in the transition phase are also key to strengthen the prison–exit continuum.

For prison management and policy

- **Prison conditions and capacity to work on DDR.** For DDR work to be effective, prison conditions matter as a key precondition to ensure a good working relationship between inmates and prison staff, as well as the sufficient coverage by staff such as social and mental health workers to respond to diverse needs. The understanding and commitment of the **prison leadership** to the importance of DDR work and its core principles is key.

⁵ [Prisoners' Educational Community - Sharing Life - The Pope John XXIII Community - APG23](#)

- **Type of prison regime and management approach for VETOs in prison.** Separation regimes present specific challenges to DDR – as inmates already feel marginalised, it contributes to further isolation and therefore lower motivation to participate in DDR programmes. Group dynamics among VETOs in separation wings also need to be considered as a challenge to DDR objectives, as well as factors such as false compliance. DDR interventions with mixed groups of offenders on the other hand help avoid further isolation and stigma of VETOs, and enable normalisation and exchanges with a wider and more diverse social group.
- **Qualified staff and training provision** (prison staff and/or external practitioners) is one of the key factors for successful DDR work. Trainings on the processes of DDR should be provided to a broader range of practitioners and should include many factors beyond methodology alone, such as culturally sensitive approach, political education and basic understanding of radicalisation. Targeted trainings are needed not only on the use of risk assessment tools but also on how to use their findings in the DDR process and individual treatment plans.
- **A multi-agency/multi-professional approach** should be continuously strengthened and prioritised. More effective communication among different actors, round tables and other available methods should be used more systematically to improve the relationship and collaboration between agencies and professionals.
 - Recognise the role and contribution to the DDR process of 'external' professionals (such as CSO practitioners) with **more specialised knowledge** of radicalisation, ideological and theological aspects or those providing more specific treatment/intervention methods. Enable smooth cooperation and awareness of their work among prison staff and other agencies involved in case management.
 - In places where DDR programmes are being implemented (or supplemented) by CSO practitioners, there is a need for mutual workshops, frequent meetings, clear understanding of roles and mandates, and robust protocols for sharing of information.
- **Continuity of services and staff retention.** Ensure the continuity of services between prison, probation and release, as well as stability of the teams and staff providing interventions.
- **Political support and funding** are crucial for the existence of DDR programmes and their success. In some cases, politicians use this topic in the public discourse in a negative way, in others the importance of DDR is not sufficiently prioritised and programmes are underfunded and understaffed. More effective communication between policy and practice is needed to improve understanding of needs, priorities and outcomes, as well as of the complexity of DDR work and the role of legislation and funding.
- **Communication of DDR work to the public.** It is important to humanise VETOs and gain support for prison staff and CSO practitioners in the public eyes and communicate their work to the public. There is a need to communicate the importance of the programmes and their benefits for the public, but also normalise and depoliticise DDR work in the public debate.

Follow-up

Practitioners identified a number of topics and issues for future RAN activities, such as the need to continuously examine the impact of the type of **VETO prison management regime** (separation or dispersal) on DDR work and its outcomes, as well as updated knowledge on the **use of risk assessment tools** – what is currently used and what works. The use of other complementary tools such as social diagnostics and needs assessment should be further explored and integrated in the work with VETOs.

Strengthening political – and public – awareness and support for the importance of DDR work in prison and beyond, towards realistic expectations and depoliticisation, including to more transparent strategic communication and normalisation of the public image of VETOs. The **role of prison management** to ensure minimum standards for DDR work in prison was also identified and will be further explored in a working group meeting in early 2023. **Gender sensitivity** in risk assessment and DDR work continues to be a subject requiring further exchanges, for

example in terms of making existing risk assessment tools but also DDR interventions more gender-specific/responsive.

Relevant practices

- [Intersubjective body mapping](#) for reintegration of returning FTFs: an artistic approach combining bodily, sensory and cognitive aspects to understanding challenges related to the reintegration process, including understanding and trust, as experienced by returning FTFs, community members and security personnel in Mombasa, Kenya.
- [Kick-off](#) (DE) by Turkish Society in Schleswig-Holstein e. V. focuses both on Islamist extremism and RWE and offers individual counselling and group interventions (discussion groups on political and religious issues, movie and debate nights, creative workshops) for inmates with a focus on systemic approach and democratic education.
- [FORSA and Family Support Centre programme](#) (NL) by LSE, the Dutch National Support Center for Extremism, using diverse methods for disengagement in prison, including systemic approach.
- [CEC method](#) (community, education, convicts) (IT) is a rehabilitation approach offered in community-operated custodial centres as an alternative to imprisonment in Italy, led by the international religious organisation Community Pope John XXII Association and inspired by [APAC prisons](#) in Brazil.
- [PräWo](#) (DE) secondary prevention programme by [Violence Prevention Network](#): a pedagogical workshop series on tolerance and democracy for young inmates or probationers with migration background who are vulnerable to Islamist radicalisation in Baden-Württemberg ⁽⁶⁾. The workshops address topics such as Islam and human rights, rule of law, democracy, experiences of discrimination and extremism. The method aims to strengthen empathy and tolerance, weaken polarised views, and reduce violent behaviours and discriminatory actions against others.
- [JUST X](#) (DE) is a comprehensive distancing and exit programme by Violence Prevention Network in Berlin. It focuses on both Islamist and RWE offenders and combines diverse methods, including social work, political education, pedagogical and biographical work, social competence coaching, anti-violence group trainings, stabilisation coaching and post-release mentoring.
- [Legato PräJus](#) (DE) offers systemic distancing counselling for Islamist extremist offenders in prison and probation, preventive talks for inmates, as well as group interventions for juvenile offenders.

Further reading

Costa, V., Liberado, P. et al. (2021) [One Size Does Not Fit All: Exploring the Characteristics of Exit Programmes in Europe](#)

EUTEx (2022) [Insight No. 2: Risk assessment, disengagement and reintegration practices at work](#)

RAN Rehabilitation Manual RAN PRISONS (2021) [How to effectively train prison staff and partners for P/CVE](#)

RAN PRISONS (2021) [Religious counselling, training and interfaith dialogue in prison](#)

RAN (2022) [The role of civil society organisations in exit work](#)

⁽⁶⁾ See: <https://www.bmfsfj.de/resource/blob/194460/d9fd9bb67dc90f688e64a4a1e3aa81/praevention-und-deradikalisierung-im-strafvollzug-data.pdf>