

Study Visit

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CONCLUSION PAPER

RAN Practitioners Study Visit

30 June - 01 July, Nuremberg, Germany

Cooperation between NGOs, non-security and security stakeholders in Germany

Key outcomes

In the context of P/CVE, NGOs and other non-security stakeholders, can be – and are often already – active and trustworthy partners in terms of national and regional security. In some instances, this manifests as an implicit and indirect partnership, whereby NGOs in the context of rehabilitation contribute to safer societies through their work. In other cases, however, formats for active cooperation between NGOs (and other non-security practitioner organisations/institutions) and security actors, such as police or intelligence agencies, exist as well. At the same time, such cooperation remains contested among practitioners, often due to a fear of securitisation of non-security oriented social and pedagogical work. As a result, the positive potential of cooperation between security and non-security stakeholders is sometimes completely ignored and, where it does exist, is not always realised in an optimal way.

To gain more knowledge and practical tools on how such cooperation can be organised, practitioners will visit the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees' (ger.: BAMF) "Advice Centre on Radicalisation". The Advice Centre coordinates a network of state-led and NGO-led family support and tertiary prevention projects across Germany and therefore acts at the heart of cooperation in the context of secondary and tertiary prevention of Islamist extremism in Germany. The overarching objective of the study visit is to provide insights into different cooperation and coordination mechanisms of security and non-security stakeholders in different German contexts, to support other European practitioners in the continuing development of their own of cooperation models.

After a brief overview of key discussion points and key considerations, recommendations are presented further below.

Highlights of the discussion

The main discussion featured a wide variety of different perspectives, from the criminal police via federal and state-led coordination mechanisms to non-governmental practitioners. Below, some of the key highlights are summarised.

Nation-wide coordination mechanism: The coordination mechanism established by the BAMF Advice Centre on Radicalisation focuses on bringing together all relevant actors from civil society and different state institutions. It thereby aims to act as an interface between state authorities and civil society actors in order to bundle their respective areas of expertise strengths of all actors involved (e.g. security, public funding, strategic networking capabilities on the state-side and deep-rooted practical experience, experience in project work, a complementary variety of working approaches on the NGO-side). To achieve successful cooperation in this regard, continuous exchange platforms between all involved actors are necessary. These platforms offer an opportunity to exchange on practical challenges and developments beyond each institutions geographical and professional focus.

Providing a central hotline for help: Establishing one central and well-known go-to-hotline within BAMF has worked well to provide fast and tailored support to individuals seeking help regarding (suspected) radicalisation. The biggest portion of callers (i.e. persons seeking advice) are parents and relatives of potentially at-risk or radicalised individuals. They are closely followed by the professional environment and the wider private environment of potentially impacted persons, which are again followed by persons from the schooling system looking for advice. Employers and authorities form the smaller portions, with affected individuals, who wish to leave extremist scenes behind, forming the smallest portion of persons who reach out to the hotline directly.

Partners on the ground: A key asset of the hotline is its distributive function. The professionals behind the hotline (spanning social workers, psychologists, former police officers, among others) provide general advice and support to the caller while simultaneously assessing if there is need for further counselling on the ground. If this is the case, the caller will be transferred to one of the practical projects on the ground, depending on their own location. In many instances, however, the advice centre is already able to provide significant support to individuals who feel overwhelmed with issues such as the conversion to Islam of one of their children, students, or friends, without there being a need to transfer them to local counselling programmes.

Case-based cooperation between police and NGOs: Where close cooperation between police and NGOs engaged in case work is desired, staff continuity remains a crucial factor for success. Cooperation depends on mutual trust building processes, which may be lost if there is a high turnover of professionals (on both sides). Once established, however, such cooperation holds the possibility for a holistic case management and analysis process, incorporating both security and the concerns of counselling professionals and their clients. From a police perspective, long-term case management including disengagement and/or deradicalisation efforts can be a vital part of threat management. At the same time, NGO practitioners may also benefit from this cooperation through increased security when working with violent individuals, but also by receiving the police's perspective on individual development, which may prove a useful addition to their own analyses.

Standardised operating procedures: When working on a topic as sensitive and personal as disengagement, deradicalisation and rehabilitation, the establishment of standardised operating procedures (SOPs) is the starting point of good security/non-security cooperation. The questions of "Who needs to inform whom about what and when?" need to be discussed and protocols need to be established from the start. These need to acknowledge both the practitioner NGO's need to adhere to their own professional and ethical standards (which include hard boundaries regarding information sharing) as well as the need for information-sharing especially in situations of potential self-harm or harm of others. Especially aspects around data protection laws need to be worked out in cooperation with

good legal advice. This requires a lot of time and effort (and does not come without limitations) but the experience in Germany has shown that it can in fact work.

Formalised and non-formalised cooperation formats: While SOPs are crucial, non-formalised formats of exchange are also crucial in order to build trust and mutual understanding between security and non-security actors. These should be implemented in addition to formal, regular meetings, and are an opportunity to prove each actors' accessibility to the other.

Flexibility to expand cooperation: Depending on the needs of each case, it may be necessary and useful to also include specific actors and institutions that are not usually part of the given cooperation mechanism. If the justice system is involved, for example, involving the prison management or a probation officer to align measures and ensure compatible case management may be crucial. In other instances, the child and youth welfare office may need to be involved. In order to be able to cooperate closely when it is necessary, trust building and exchange processes need to start early on, also beyond the core team of a cooperation mechanism.

Recommendations

The recommendations are based on the presentations from the visit to BAMF.

Basic pre-conditions for cooperation: Some basic pre-conditions can be distilled for a healthy cooperation between NGO's and security officials:

- Trust
- Transparency
- openness in the cooperation
- equality as partners
- shared responsibility

Furthermore, the importance of continuity has to be underlined. Continuity in meetings and staff are important for building the above mentioned pre-conditions and to have clear mandates. Lastly, the cooperation should work according to a strategy and action plan with clear guidelines for the cooperation and a legal framework to move in.

Added value: Cooperation between security officials and civil society will lead to early detection and prevention of radicalisation, which leads to the broadening of the target group with the involvement of institutions and NGOs. The opportunity to address issues early will also lead to faster progress in cases and a better and effective cooperation between actors. In turn, this all leading to a multi-disciplinary approach on each case.

Limitations: there should be limits in the cooperation. Actors should only share what is needed for each case with only those who need to access the info. In this way, everyone should stick to their specialisations. The NGOs are not security agencies and vice versa. Moreover, the cooperation should not be one-sided and with respect to the goals and work of the partners. Lastly, respecting the legal and procedural framework remains important.

Lessons and challenges in NGO/security cooperation: While there are obvious pro's to the cooperation of NGOs and security officials, there are challenges:

- Measuring success is not easy: what are the numbers/statistics?

- The legislative framework unwillingly limits actors.
- Incorporating mental health practitioners into the cooperation is a challenge
- Talking openly about 'problems'/failures.

Key take-aways for in-depth understanding of NGO and security cooperation:

- Cooperation between both is possible.
- Some guidelines in the cooperation are needed.
- Role play as a method to get insights into each other's roles.
- Contact points in each police stations/prison/schools/etc.
- Multi-disciplinary approach to case management
- Continuity of staff on both organisations in case management.

Follow up

The participants came up with a couple of suggestions:

- The wish is to have more study visits on the NGO and security cooperation and to have more in-depth learning. If we want to tackle this topic further, then we also need to focus on failures and lessons learned instead of idealised versions of the cooperation.
 - o Practical workshops on how to cooperate, with best practices and challenges.
- Exploring the role of prisons in such cooperations.

Further reading

- Federal Office for Migration and Refugees, [The Advice Centre on Radicalisation](#).
- RAN [Specialised Paper – The role of civil society organisations in exit work](#), 2022.
- RAN [Issue Paper – Multi-agency working and preventing violent extremism I](#), 2018.
- RAN [Issue Paper – Multi-agency working and preventing violent extremism II](#), 2019.
- RAN [Study Visit to Paris on 'Effective management of the prison-exit continuum'](#), 2021.
- RAN [Rehab WG – Returning FTFs and their families: Practitioners' insights on improving the return process](#), 2021.