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**CONCLUSION PAPER***RAN digital small-scale expert meeting:**Lone Actors: Making use of needs and risk assessment tools in P/CVE**10 December 2021, online*

# Lone Actors: Making use of needs and risk assessment tools in P/CVE

## Key outcomes

The RAN small-scale meeting on Lone Actors: Making use of needs and risk assessment tools in P/CVE took place on 10 December 2021. The meeting brought together civil society practitioners and rehabilitation caseworkers, such as youth and social workers, mental health professionals as well as practitioners working in exit, rehabilitation, prison and probation. The goal was to identify challenges for first-line practitioners in making use of risk and needs assessment tools in (tertiary) prevention and intervention work related to so-called lone actors. The meeting also provided practical solutions for using comprehensive assessment frameworks and presented examples to show how these could inform holistic case management and rehabilitation of lone actors.

Some of the key findings of the meeting are listed below.

- Be aware of the important **differences** between lone actors and group actors.
- Focus on **needs and protective factors** because these are just as important as the risks.
- Social diagnostics and needs assessments are **complementary tools** to risk assessment and management. Together they are part of a more holistic approach for the rehabilitation of lone actors.
- Different types of assessments should be **part of an integral approach to the management of cases** of violent extremist offenders. Examples from Austria and Germany were shared during the meeting. An important aspect highlighted is the co-ownership of the individual to ensure a better result at the end.
- While conducting an integral approach, it is important to **understand the different parties** involved. Certain terms can be understood differently by mental health practitioners as opposed to practitioners working in the security sector. When collaborating with other organisations try to understand each other.

This paper will first describe the main themes discussed during the meeting. In the second part, recommendations concerning lone actors and the use of needs and risk assessments are presented. Subsequently relevant practices are presented and the paper concludes with an outlook on future meetings dealing with related topics.

## Highlights of the discussion

### Lone actors

- Lone actors share certain features with group actors and differ from group actors on other points. Most of them for example **suffer more often from a disorder of thinking (personality disorder, delusional disorder, psychosis, autism spectrum disorder), have a lower level of social competence, have more single-issue beliefs, narcissistic traits, 'extreme overvalued beliefs' and more often pathological fixation on a person or cause and suicidal intentions**, compared to group actors.
- The pathway of lone actors generally starts with a **failure** to achieve life goals, combined with feelings of humiliation and grievance and the desire to take revenge and gain notoriety. Subsequently, blame is projected on a certain out-group which becomes the target. The lone actor fails to embed within a group, which leads to isolation and the decision to act alone. Eventually, they see an **attack as the only solution**.
- Overall lone actors are **less visible compared to group actors Further, they have fewer resources and less attention to operational security, plan an attack in a shorter period of time, cause fewer fatalities and leak their motivation and intent more often** online and offline.
- **Assessing the needs of lone actors**<sup>1</sup> is relevant to understand the source of their grievance, show understanding and compassion for their feelings, and identify alternative choices. It will also help to understand what has failed to protect them to take this path, clarify the consequences of continuing along this path and identify and implement sources of protection and support. The needs assessments rely on a number of social diagnostic tools used in pedagogical and social-work based interventions and counselling by non-government or non-security actors. The use and development of these tools is done jointly by practitioners across multi-disciplinary case conferences.
- **Assessing the risks of lone actors**<sup>2</sup> is relevant to recognise the signs of fixation and the mind-set of intent, identify potential threshold behaviours, assess the individual's capability to carrying out an attack, clarify who is at risk, in what circumstances and how this risk can be managed and embedded in an alternative identity and pathway. Furthermore, it is relevant to remain aware that P/CVE in and of itself creates a binary choice between rehabilitation and martyrdom, and that some lone actors are convinced that there is no other path than martyrdom. Risk assessments are usually conducted by security actors or professionally trained prison staff, but it is important that they are discussed in a multi-disciplinary setting to also consider the perspectives of non-security actors on the rehabilitation needs of the individual.
- **Multi-agency work and information sharing** is important to identify behaviour patterns of lone actors and risk and needs assessment frameworks can help to structure these different sources of information. There is a need for more effective tools for cooperation between security actors and CSO or other practitioners (e.g. social workers), as the way different actors structure, use and communicate the information they hold differs. Case conferences are often used to discuss cases from both security management and social needs /rehabilitation perspective.

<sup>1</sup> See RAN Ad-hoc paper (2021) [The potential of social diagnostics for P/CVE](#) for more information and examples of social diagnostics and the importance of assessing needs. Examples of social diagnostics are inclusion charts, network maps and biographical timelines.

<sup>2</sup> See RAN Ad-hoc paper (2021) [Risk Assessment in Prison](#) for an overview of risk assessment tools used both in prison and security contexts. Examples of risk assessment tools are VERA-2R, ERG22+, RRAP, IR46 and RADAR-iTE.

## Implementing needs and risk assessments

- Probation and exit practitioners face challenges when conducting assessments. For instance, they have to deal with **information gaps**, when they can only start their assessment after release from prison instead of during imprisonment or have to deal with other institutions who are not willing to share information.
- Tools for **social diagnostics and needs assessment** can complement comprehensive risk assessment since these focus on the needs of an individual client in the rehabilitation and reintegration process and help to identify protective factors. These assessments can also inform an inter-disciplinary design and implementation of interventions across different professional fields. These would usually use methods such as biographical timelines, network maps, inclusion charts and are applied by social workers or other non-security practitioners (such as CSO exit councillors) in multi-disciplinary case management.
- **The protective factors are as important as risk factors. The needs should be central, not an afterthought**, since they can manage and protect against the risks. Even though the driver cannot be removed, it is possible to create a release plan - an alternative plan to the individual's violent plan. However, it is very difficult to find an alternative that looks as attractive. What is needed is individual plans that meet the needs, the sources of protection. It is difficult to identify a list of protective factors for lone actors, as they are very individualistic. Therefore, practitioners should look beyond a generic list.
- **Social needs assessments** are used mainly by social workers or other councillors, but are increasingly seen by practitioners as **complementary instruments** to risk assessments when designing and implementing a support plan. The goals and focus of the needs assessment are different – to identify protective factors, motivations and resources that will help in the rehabilitation process.
- It is important to **involve the offender in discussions about their needs and to formulate an intervention plan** together with the intervention providers (exit workers, probation staff). This will increase their engagement and motivation. Examples of this are the **social net conferencing** approach (Austria), which also involves the social environment of the individual in the process (see *Relevant practices*).
- The role of psychologists working with the offender is just one part. The **social environment** (family members and/or friends) **is also important**. They should be considered and involved in the needs assessment and in the intervention plan.
- The **3R methodology** (risks, resources, resonance) is used by CSO-led counselling in Germany for the assessment and management of cases of violent extremist offenders. It looks at **biography, needs and social situation** of the client and combines existing tools and methods of social work (biographical timelines, network maps, inclusion charts). The sources of information include interaction with the client, public information and information shared by other actors involved. The client is involved as much as possible in the process to inform and validate the support plan designed by case workers.

Risks	Resources	Resonances
• <i>What individual risks does the client face in their deradicalization process?</i>	• <i>What resources (internal/external) can be used for the deradicalisation process?</i>	• <i>Understanding the clients perceived relationship with the world.</i>

- **Case conferences** are valuable tools to discuss both risks and needs of the client and agree on an intervention plan which then activates the multi-agency work (Who has which role and in what part of the intervention? What is the client's role?). The **perspectives and wishes of the client are considered**, which is not the case in professional, security-oriented risk assessments and management.
- The 3R model of social diagnostics is also applied in **cases of lone actors in which the factors relevant for reintegration might differ**. This may include a lack of integration within an extremist group and the level of secrecy displayed by the client. No assumptions should be made before having a view of the whole picture and the complexity of factors.

- There are **challenges in relation to mutual understanding** between different professionals and on the role of risks and needs assessments in the rehabilitation process. The different focus of the two methods is not well understood, as well as the inseparability of risk and needs assessments and the interventions themselves. Information sharing between actors on which to base different assessments remains another key challenge.

## Recommendations

- Be aware of the differences between lone actors and group actors, but also of individual and personal differences.
- In addition to the risks, focus on needs and protective factors since these are just as important. Taking away the risk factors is not always possible. When enhancing protective factors, it is possible to create an alternative for martyrdom and help embed the individual in a satisfactory life. Protective factors can manage the risks.
- Protective factors are not the same for everyone. Do not consult only general lists of protective factors but look at the individual when creating a plan. Furthermore, think of the role professionals could play when creating a plan as well as the community.
- Really understand someone's story and identify relevant criminological or non-criminological (no obvious link with re-offending) factors Work with the needs and factors that are connected to re-offending.
- When conducting an assessment involve the person himself/herself as much as possible into the process and make a plan together. Creating co-ownership will give a better result at the end.
- Start as early as possible with risk and needs assessments. As with risk assessments, tools and methods for social needs assessment (social diagnostics) require intersubjective quality standards within social and pedagogical work to be used in the right way by practitioners involved in multi-stakeholder case management settings and communicated to other actors involved.
- Understand the different parties involved. The term 'vulnerability' may be understood differently by social workers or mental health practitioners as opposed to practitioners working in the security sector who mainly focus on risks; recidivism risk / the security risk posed by the individual. Social workers and mental health practitioners would rather define risks as the risks faced by the client in their deradicalisation process. When collaborating with other organisations try to understand each other.
- Raise awareness of social diagnostics and needs assessments as complementary tools to be implemented together with risk assessment and management. Improve practitioners' understanding of their respective objectives and their role in the rehabilitation process of lone actors.
- Create common standards and quality criteria for social and needs assessments in tertiary prevention work with lone actors, to support social or psychological care workers to better structure the information and insights from the social diagnostics and communicate to other actors involved in multi-agency case management about its role, the objectives and outcomes of rehabilitation processes.

## Relevant practices

1. **Social net conferencing**, Neustart (Austria) offers offenders in prison the chance to develop a mandatory plan for their future after their release. Offenders work together with their social network (or net) to create this plan, and compliance with the plan is supervised by the probation officer. This method benefits radicalised individuals by helping them develop a strategy or plan covering daily life, work, housing and so on, alongside their social network and associated professionals. In addition,

Neustart conducts regular case conferences with security actors to discuss insights from both risk assessments and the social net conferencing.

2. **The 3R (risk, resources and resonances) model of social diagnostics**, Violence Prevention Network (Germany). This approach is used by the VPN exit councillors and starts with a biographical and social assessment to understand the biographical developments in general and of the individual specific, and the social situation before, during and after the radicalisation process. Subsequently, a needs assessment is conducted to understand (un)fulfilled needs related to radicalisation. Based on these assessments a diagnosis and plan are made and implemented. After implementation the process is evaluated and depending on the results the same steps will be repeated. The individual is involved as much as possible in the process. This methodology can be used with different ideologies, as well as with lone actors. The assessments are carried out by the VPN counsellors (usually social workers or other trained professionals) with support of a researcher. This methodology does not include a risk assessment. However, joint 'case conferences' with the security actors are important to discuss the results of both – risk assessments and social needs assessments to gain a comprehensive picture of risk and vulnerabilities/protective factors, and also to use these insights to design, monitor and adjust the intervention plan accordingly.

#### Biographical Assessment

- Understanding biographical developments in general and the individual process of radicalization specifically.

#### Needs Assessment

- Understanding (un)fulfilled needs in the context of radicalization (esp. CRS: *coherence, recognition, and sensuality*)

#### Social Assessment

- Understanding the social situation (social and functional *integration*) before, during and after radicalization

## Follow up

Three topics were suggested during the meeting for further exploration.

- Social diagnostics methods and application in relation to interventions with lone actors.
- Developing quality criteria for social and needs assessment in rehabilitation work, along with further guidance on their role and complementarity to risk assessments, good practices on their use in interventions with clients and in multi-agency case management, as well as the types of professionals working with such tools (mainly social workers and non-security case managers).
- Strengthening tools for cooperation and mutual understanding between security and non-security actors in multi-agency case work and interventions with lone actors.

## Further reading

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- Barelle, K. (2014). Pro-integration: disengagement from and life after extremism. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 7(2), 129-142.
- RAN Ad-hoc paper (2021) [Lone Actors in Digital Environments](#)
- RAN Ad-hoc paper (2021) [Lone Actors as a Challenge for P/CVE](#)
- RAN Ad-hoc paper (2021) [Risk Assessment in Prison](#)
- RAN Ad-hoc paper (2021) [The potential for social diagnostics in P/CVE](#)
- RAN Cross-cutting thematic event (2021) [Lone actors – Jointly taking stock of recent developments and combining knowledge](#)
- RAN Health (2017) [Risk assessment around lone actors](#)