

### Exit programmes and interventions in prison and probation<sup>1</sup>

The third RAN P&P meeting took place in Berlin, in close cooperation with the NGO Violence Prevention Network (VPN). The aim of this meeting was to shed light on the different 'exit' programmes and interventions that are being developed and implemented in prison and probation with regard to violent extremist offenders within the European Union. Similar programmes and interventions are mentioned often in political and media debates without enough clarity. The aim of the meeting was to investigate structures and activities actually behind these labels. Objectives of this gathering was also:

1. Working towards a shared understanding of what an exit intervention or programme in the prison and probation setting encompasses/should encompass;
2. Offering guidance on how to develop such interventions and programmes;
3. Providing a framework that allows for comparison and reflection through presenting different approaches from different Member States (described in detail in annex 1-3).

This ex-post paper reflects the main points discussed during the meeting:

1. What is a programme/project/intervention?
2. What distinguishes an exit programme and intervention from other general and specific programmes and interventions?
3. How do we do exit work after release or in probation?
4. How do we evaluate success of exit programmes with extremist offenders?

### Programmes and interventions

Originally, programmes in the prison and probation settings have their roots in the 'what works' approach. The approach has evolved over time into a 'how does it work' approach. Insights from general prevention of crime also helped providing a useful framework for dealing with violent extremist offenders. The Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model is the most evidence-based model present at the moment used in the prison and probation sector throughout Europe:

- *Risk*: investigates the risk level (in terms of recidivism) of the target group and based on this level (low, medium or high) the intensity of interventions is decided;
- *Need*: investigates the criminogenic needs of the target group (static and dynamic characteristics, threats, problems, or issues of an individual that directly relate to the individual's likelihood to commit a crime/ re-offend) which determines the content of the intervention needed;

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<sup>1</sup> Both 'programmes' and 'interventions' are used to refer to de-radicalisation; however, in this document a difference is drawn between what is programme and what is intervention and the last one is used throughout the paper to avoid ambiguity.

- *Responsivity*: Determines how to deliver the programme to the target group to be most effective. This might be different for different target groups (e.g. women/men, juvenile/adults).

Many currently known risk assessments are a direct consequence of this model. However, as the term implies, the 'risk' factor might be overemphasized compared to the needs. From this body of literature and practice, a few features were selected as criteria to develop qualitatively standardised programme:

- Strongly structuralised;
- Highly manualised;
- Program integrity;
- Mostly based on psychological models;
- Cognitive behavioural theory: thoughts influence attitudes which influence behaviour;
- Should always be evaluated.

Over time it became clear that the RNR approach was not as effective as initially expected because of:

- Disappointing results;
- Limited popularity for the model due to:
  - Needs defined as potential risk;
  - Quantifying needs and risk;
  - Problematic relationship between program integrity and responsivity;
  - Little emphasis on relationships (e.g. between staff and offender).

In this context, the desistance approach started to emerge. It differs from the RNR approach in the way it looks at different factors. Instead of focusing on the root causes for people to become criminals, it looks at the factors that keep people away from criminality (protective factors over risk factors). Three levels of desistance can be distinguished:

1. Primary desistance: refrain from undesirable, criminal actions (stop re-offending);
2. Secondary desistance: identity change. This means the offender is able to see him- or herself as not being criminal anymore;
3. Tertiary desistance: society accepts the identity change and views of the ex-offender as a part of society and not as a criminal anymore.

When it comes to interventions following point are key:

- Working at an individual level: a 'one-size-fits-all' approach does not allow adjustment of interventions to individual peculiarities and complexities of each target group/person (bottom-up approach. Therefore flexibility is important: programmes should give a clear guidance but should not be too detailed, as to leave room for tailoring interventions on the individual cases;
- Multidisciplinary cooperation/approach is needed as radicalisation is an issue touching upon several aspects of the life of prisoners. Therefore, it is important that exit programmes acknowledge this complexity, especially taking in consideration of prisoners' re-entry into society after the sentence (holistic approach);

- The stakeholder implementing the intervention needs to guarantee transparency both towards the offenders as well as towards other stakeholders). NGOs are seen as a favourable partner for the implementation of interventions, especially by the prisoners as they are no part of the “system” that prosecuted and sentenced them;
- Conveying authentic and credible messages. Proper use of language can help (e.g. avoid words like ‘radicalisation’ and ‘exit’) in building a trustful and honest relationship with the client;
- Voluntary participation is a fundamental prerequisite for the success of any intervention of disengagement and de-radicalisation.

## ‘Exit’ programmes and interventions

How should interventions aimed for terrorist offenders or regular criminals vulnerable to radicalisation in prison differ from other target groups or the prison population as a whole? Prison is by definition a delicate environment, likely to cause (further) radicalisation, because of isolation, frustration and lack of trustful social interaction, experienced by prisoners. At the same time this is a good window of opportunity to implement de-radicalisation<sup>2</sup> interventions, as prisoners are in a closed and controlled environment.

Member States have different approaches on this, with some examples of countries which do not have any special programme for radicalised offenders, but rather work on other issues such as ‘criminality’ with the regular prison population. In principle, all offenders need to ‘exit’ from criminality, gangs, hooliganism and so on. Therefore the notion of ‘exit’ is not specific for radicalised offenders and ‘exit interventions’ in their general meaning need to be part of wider regular programmes. In Germany, for example, approaches to the de-radicalisation process are different when it comes the stakeholder implementing the intervention. Providing different approaches is beneficial to the ultimate aim of re-educating prisoners to society, as it leaves room for decision which approach suits the individual case best. In addition, another strong feature of interventions of disengagement implements in Germany is the choice of having NGOs’ staff as actor implementing the intervention: being external, they are considered as credible messenger by prisoners. Similar results are seen in the case of the Netherlands, where the independent Dutch Support Unit Family is assigned by the government.

For VPN the first step, when transferring right wing interventions into working on religiously inspired radicalisation, in particular Islamic radicalisation, was to hire trainers who are (partly) Muslims themselves, respectively who – at least – have a good knowledge of Islam. Indeed, the first methodological principle in this field is the importance of dialogue: what extremist prisoners want, is someone they can talk to about

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<sup>2</sup> “De-radicalisation is a common term in public debate however not much appreciated by most of the people working on it. The term doesn’t reflect the whole issue of persons leaving an extremist environment and/or thinking pattern. Apart from shifting mind-set and thinking this process requires also behavioural (like abstaining from violence as a solution) and practical (like work, housing and school) changes. Disengagement is commonly used for these aspects. Exit is used for the combination of de-radicalisation and disengagement. Other used terms are more referring to the goal of the process like rehabilitation or resocialization. Despite the incompleteness of the word de-radicalisation will be used in this document however in this context defined as all efforts to leave violent extremism behind.” (RAN Exit, Ex-Post Paper, London).

their main concerns and for a radicalised Islamic prisoner, the concern is often his/her own religion. Therefore, a knowledgeable person in Islam is needed to sustain the dialogue.

Another important aspect of a de-radicalisation process is the social environment of the person. If the family itself has a tendency for Islamic-inspired extremism, the radicalised person would need to leave the family too. Here it is where the voluntary engagement of the participant is key in order to keep the commitment to the intervention.

Finally, de-radicalisation is a process: it should not be seen either as the intervention itself or as a static result. The process should have a holistic rather than a technical approach: whether the process is completed has to be carefully evaluated by a competent practitioner.

### ‘Exit’ after release and in probation

Probation widely differs in Member States. Clearly, these differences also effect the start and/or continuation of exit work after prison. In some Member States (e.g. Sweden) prison and probation services are part of the same unified agency. In Germany, on the other hand, prison and probation are not linked: in terms of intervention, it means that officers responsible for the exit process in and outside prison are not the same. However, preparations for release start in advance with a meeting among all the relevant authorities and stakeholders, such as police, probation and public prosecutor. Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the Multi Agency Public Protection Agreements (MAPPA) brings together several authorities and services such as police, prison and probation, to evaluate the release and conditions for probation period on a case-by-case basis, based on information collected also during the custody period. The work of MAPPA starts six months before release and it involves a continuous review as people progress in their period of detention.

Once the prisoner enters probation, generally a transition in the case-management takes place. In the case of Germany, it is relatively easy for NGOs to step in and create a bridge between the two phases, by offering their help to prison and probation services and thus maintaining a consistency in the ownership of the case. The NGOs can be asked to step in at any stage both in prison and probation. In addition, prison authorities offer the opportunity of starting a specific intervention to the offender for the remaining period in prison.

Transition and continuity in the process is a challenging yet important time. Likewise during the work in prison, NGOs maintain contact with relevant authorities: despite being aware of anonymization, NGOs communicate with security authorities when they notice something ‘security-relevant’ with their clients. E.g. they mention that they want to leave to Syria. However, transparency towards the client is paramount, not to ruin the trustful relationship which has been created. Therefore, discussion with authorities remains at an anonymous level until it is decided that it is time to take appropriate measures to stop any dangerous intentions.

Exit interventions can solely work on the person who wants to exit violent extremism or also support the family or other parts of the social environment. The Dutch Support Family Unit works on both sides. As mentioned before, any intervention must be voluntary. However, the notion of ‘voluntary’ is not a clear cut. In many cases, parents call to look for help as they are worried about their children’s behaviour. In

similar cases, the same programme includes support for the parents while helping the children to critically think about their engagement into extremism. The support of the family is really important, as when parents disagree with similar attitudes of their children, they tend to argue and confront each other, instead of opening a dialogue.

## Evaluating success

The evaluation of success in the prison and probation environment has been defined as absolutely necessary, yet challenging. In the context of prisons, like in other settings somehow related to the field of radicalisation, it is difficult to develop an evidence-based approach because of the difficulty in finding a group which could be considered as a 'control group' (both for organisational and ethical reasons).

Before evaluating an intervention, it is necessary to create a framework of indicators which guarantees its good quality. As some participants underlined, alongside collecting good practices it is also important to look for quality indicators in the growing arena of service providers of interventions. Some of the quality indicators are:

- Support of a sound theoretical framework;
- Clear definition of target group;
- Focus on dynamic risk-factors, rather than static ones;
- Effective methodologies;
- Skill-oriented;
- Pedagogical aspects;
- Programme integrity and quality control;
- Regular evaluation;
- Ethical responsibility;
- Physical conditions;
- Appropriate documentation;
- Continuity in the case management;
- Engagement and strong motivation, both from the side of the client and the stakeholder implementing the intervention.

Following quality indicators should not go against guaranteeing some degree of flexibility to interventions. However, flexibility doesn't pose a justification for the violation of quality indicators. Evaluation of interventions is an issue which many Member States are facing. Evaluation is important to adjust interventions where they are not properly working, in addition to justify the need of funding for similar measures. Yet, the issue of evaluation leave open some challenges:

- Before evaluating, it is important to agree on definitions of extremism and radicalisation, as well as on programmes and interventions;
- Interventions in this field need to be individualised to be as effective as possible: in turn this poses the question of how to evaluate interventions which are highly individualised as opposed to standardised;

- A good solution could be the evaluation of results, as opposed to outcomes<sup>3</sup>, looking at the risk and protective factors that could represent a pathway to offending, across context and across time;
- Individuals are subject to several influences coming from multiple sources: it could be a problem to isolate the impact of the intervention itself from all other external influences;
- Evaluation could take place from multiple perspectives: for example, an evaluation from the point of view of prisoners would differ from an evaluation from the view of professionals or policy makers;
- When commissioning an evaluation, people expect quantitative data; however in this field quantitative evaluation is almost impossible.

Challenges like those mentioned above often make a proper work in the development evaluation costly and not actually feasible in practice. VPN had an evaluation of one of their four programmes, which mainly consisted in checking recidivism and re-offending. A big challenge was also the anonymization of the records of the database they used to carry out the evaluation. In the UK an evaluation methods is under development now, but the effort is confirmed to be particularly difficult when taking into accounts all the challenges and variables one might encounter.

## Annex 1: Exit work in prison and probation in Berlin

Prison administration in Germany is tasked to the 16 Regional Ministries of Justice, with a total of 214 prisons across the country, including detention centres and open prisons (decentralised administration). Probation is also at the level of regional authorities. Prison and probation are not connected in the German system, which could create a problem when transferring the case management from one authority to another, as prison and probation are not the same officers. Therefore, for NGOs is easy to step in and offer themselves as connecting bridge between the prison and probation phase, thus guaranteeing a continuity in the interventions.

In terms of terrorists, there is no central prison specialised for these offenders nor separation from other inmates. Prisons are structured by age (youth and adults), by organisation (open and closed) and by gender. Official aims of the German penitentiary system is 're-socialisation of offender', as well as the 'protection of the general public' and radicalised offenders can participate in the same programmes or measures offered to the whole penitentiary population.

The Berlin penitentiary system counts 31 prisoners with radical Islamic background (no women): 14 potential offenders and 17 sympathisers. Four of them are in juvenile prisons. In June 2015, the Berlin Senate Department wrote a concept paper for dealing with radical Islamism in the Berlin correctional centres. Four key tasks are highlighted in the concept paper:

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<sup>3</sup> Clarification on definitions. Output: directly delivered by the intervention, typically tangible and can be counted; Results: effects on the target audience, directly attributable to an output delivered (short term outcome). Outcome: medium-terms results for specific beneficiaries that are the consequence of achieving specific outputs, often referring to behavioural changes.

- Intense cooperation with state-level security agencies;
- Prevention of the radicalisation of other inmates;
- Specific interventions and programmes to support de-radicalisation, but no specific wings where to put radicalised inmates;
- Preparation of the release in cooperation with relevant external organisations.

It is important to create an atmosphere free of discrimination in prison, as often radicalised or vulnerable inmates already feel discriminated in the society. For example, there is full acceptance of religion in prison life: Friday prayer with Imams are organised as well as special events for Islamic holidays. A special training for Imams to work within the prisons is about to be developed.

When it comes to implementing interventions and specific measures for offenders, there is no single approach. Different approaches are promoted by several stakeholders (including NGOs). Supporting different approaches turned out being a successful decision, as it makes it possible to choose the most suitable approach depending on the client (prisoner – individual case). Budget and funding for stakeholders implementing similar interventions are negotiated every year with national and regional ministries. Violence Prevention Network (VPN) is a network of experts in prevention of extremism and de-radicalisation. Interventions are tailored on small groups and/or single persons both outside and inside the prison. VPN is also active in the field of prevention, delivering awareness activities in schools and organising vocational training for people in the field. In its experience<sup>4</sup>, VPN has elaborated some guiding methodological principles to guarantee the quality of interventions, such as:

- Dialogue is exercised instead of arguing: stakeholders have the task to talk *with* prisoners about what they prefer to talk about. Stakeholders should not ask prisoners what they want to know from them;
- Personal independence and self-responsibility;
- Voluntary participation;
- Methodological flexibility;

Aims of these interventions are the change of both behaviour and mind-set, as well as teaching people to have their own opinion of the world on the basis of what they can see rather than what they are told. They also need to be taught how to defend their own opinions and be more intellectually resilient.

Key success criteria in de-radicalisation process can be, *inter alia*, willingness to change, recognition of inconsistencies in own narrative, self-revelation and self-responsibility (changing idea and perception of themselves) and finally disengagement. However, before the final disengagement, it is important for the client to create a new alternative social environment around him/her to avoid recidivism.

A de-radicalisation interventions is made of three steps: 1) participation in de-radicalisation programme (either individual or in group); 2) creation of stable relationships alongside a gradual desistance from violent behaviour and questioning of ideological justification; 3): stabilisation after release.

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<sup>4</sup> VPN worked with: right-wing extremists (2001); right wing extremist and youth at risk of being attracted by Islamist extremists (2007); tight-wing extremists, youth at risk plus Islamist terrorist (2011); same as before plus ‘wanna-be’ jihadists and foreign terrorist fighters (2013).

## Annex 2. Exit work in prison and probation in the United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, the approach to interventions of de-radicalisation is defined in the Health Identity Intervention (HII). The Section of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) responsible for Extremism Offending Interventions has four main functions:

1. developing interventions;
2. developing staff to deliver interventions;
3. quality assurance of interventions;
4. research and evaluation of interventions.

The Section was established up after the London attacks on 7/7 2005 and it was set up by psychologists to help prison staff dealing with those convicted under the terrorism legislation of 2008. The basis for the HII was the Extremist Risk Guidance, which included 22 indicators to shape the path towards extremist offending. HII was created on the lessons learnt from ERG22+, meaning on the monitoring of how those 22 factors intervened in the process and adapting the new intervention consequently.

From experience in the field, it emerges that in the engagement process, identity is central. Similarly identity is also paramount in the process of disengagement, which is not too far from the process of engagement. Indeed, it is made of reflection, creation and investigation of doubts, until people are ready to review their commitment. Desistance literature was also taken into account when HII was created. In the combination of literature and innovative practices, HII was meant to fill a gap between the impact of social factors (innovation) and psychological factors (literature).

In the pathways to extremism (engagement-intent-capability), differences arise whether it is criminal or non-criminal. In the first case, offenders are additionally motivated by self-interest, criminality and violence, especially when a desire for excitement and adventure might facilitate violent engagement. Therefore, HII aims at facilitating circumstances that promote disengagement and desistance, increase people's personal agency, emotional tolerance and acceptance. In order to do that, important features of interventions are: trustful relationship with the facilitator; flexibility of the programme; use of established methodologies together with innovative approaches. In terms of flexibility, it is important to underline that HII is tailored on the individual rather than on the level of risk: the team created an overview of the prisoner through information from decentralised prisons.

In terms of risk in the community, Multi Agency Public Protection Agreements (MAPPA) in the United Kingdom bring together prison, probation and police in order to manage the risk from offenders (adaptation of a scheme used initially for sexual offenders) - other services can be brought in, on a case-by-case basis. When somebody is released from custody, conditions are quite restrictive at the very beginning, although they can be less strict later on.

In managing the risk, information is very important. Multi-agency cooperation also works within prisons and with the information brought out from there. This information is analysed and consequently defines the intervention: information is needed and used to re-address and re-evaluate the intervention regularly, as well as evaluate the progress of persons in their sentence.



### Annex 3. Exit work in prison and probation in the Netherlands

The Dutch TER Team (terrorists, extremists, radicals) and the Dutch Family Support Unit are both active in probation.

The Dutch Family Support Unit started in 2015 after a pilot project. It works with an assignment from the government (funding, as well) to support families of radicalised persons and radicalised offenders themselves. Despite the assignment, it functions independent. The Unit is commissioned by the municipality or by the Terrorism Department to follow certain situations.

The definition of 'voluntary' is key. An exit intervention is an intervention where the person in a radical (in this case, jihadist) movements wants to leave it. Therefore, it is an individual and voluntary choice. However, there are cases of exit interventions which require at the same time support for the family of the radicalised person. In these cases, the notion of 'voluntary' might be weaker. Relatives might call the Unit to ask for support and help for a member of their family.

Agreements are important to make the work of the Unit successful:

- With the municipality which commissions the case, which entails regular meetings with mayor, school, families and social networks;
- With the prison, when the client is in prison.

They have classified three categories of people they might end up working with:

- Naïve: these are mainly girls, generally insecure people, in the process of forming their identities. They generally have little interest in the ideological dimension of Islam and recently started practising their religion;
- Idealistic and politically driven: persons are mainly male aged 16-20 years old. They have strong opinions, they are stubborn, firm and charismatic and often with a criminal past. Ideologically driven ones are a small group older than 20 years. They represent the 'hard-core extremism'. They have knowledge of Islam and politics, are smart and intelligent; finally they dominate less online but rather spread propaganda offline.