28/04/2021
CONCLUSION PAPER
RAN small-scale expert meeting
5 March 2021, 10.00–13.00 CET – Digital Event

Effective and Realistic Quality Management and Evaluation of P/CVE

Key outcomes

Due to the complex nature of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) programmes, the target groups they address as well as the variety of involved stakeholders, implementing measures of process regulations and evaluations can be challenging. Quality management and evaluations are, however, indispensable to make grounded statements on the effectiveness of P/CVE work and prove to be of particular importance when it comes to creating a learning environment for practitioners and when seeking to improve accountability.

This small-scale expert meeting sought to discuss the perspectives of research and practice in the field of quality management and evaluations of P/CVE, in order to gain a better understanding of underlying challenges and feasible measures in this context. Based on this, the key objectives of the expert meeting were to explore ideas on how the RAN constituency can further engage with the topic, promote and facilitate the implementation of evaluations as well as ensure quality standards across the Network.

Key insights from this small-scale expert meeting included the following:

➢ In the design phase of evaluations, all stakeholders should formulate and agree upon comprehensive definitions of key concepts, a theory of change, the terms of reference and indicators of success.

➢ Considering ethical dimensions throughout evaluation processes is important, especially as the work of practitioners in secondary and tertiary prevention is based on (long-term) relationships and trust with clients.

➢ Information sharing between state and non-state as well as between security and non-security actors tends to be a sensitive topic in the daily practice of joint P/CVE work and needs to be considered when evaluating multi-stakeholder practices.

➢ The implementation of quality management measures and evaluation should be integrated into the work routines and daily practice of P/CVE work as much as possible.

➢ As multi-agency approaches become increasingly relevant, particularly in the context of secondary and tertiary prevention, quality assurance measures and evaluations should broaden their focus on evaluating multi-stakeholder structures. In this way, monitoring and evaluation can be conducted from a client-centred comprehensive perspective.

Highlights of the discussion

This paper summarises the key points and recommendations that were brought forward by the topical experts who participated in the small-scale expert meeting.

- In the field of P/CVE, **internal evaluations and quality assurance measures** are implemented on a daily basis — e.g. through note taking, reporting, monitoring or through conversations with colleagues. This raises the question of how internal evaluations could be formalised in order to improve processes as well as short-term outputs and long-term impacts of programmes. Quality management measures are a prerequisite for evaluation and its outcomes and adds an operative angle to theoretical concepts of evaluations.

- **Increasing standardisation of P/CVE work** can strengthen the professional practice and improve transparency as well as accountability. Particularly in the case of reoffenders who participated in disengagement, deradicalisation and rehabilitation programmes, standards are immensely important when reprocessing the situation, on an organisational level as well as on a practitioners' level. As there have been some high-profile cases of reoffenders in EU Member States, to re-evaluate if standards of quality assurance have been kept is crucial. Implementing a set of standards can also be helpful when conducting evaluations, as long as they are sensitive to the context at hand and leave room for flexibility. When defining standards, it is therefore important to not overwhelm practice with strict models that may hinder innovation of practitioners ([1]).

- **Monitoring** is an integral part of identifying if project objectives and project work (still) align and if the applied methods and practices are adequate according to the theory of change. Having a monitoring component within programmes is important for supporting involved stakeholders' reflective understanding of the impact of their work.

- **The integration of different work streams and stakeholders** with different professional backgrounds (from research and practice) as well as the inclusion of funders and policymakers at an early stage of the evaluation process in order to combine knowledge and expertise proves to be highly beneficial:

  o **When combining researchers' and practitioners' perspectives, viewpoints might be diametrically opposed in some cases**, as each stakeholder brings different interests and ideas to the table. Practitioners often face immense time pressure to implement tasks related to quality management and evaluation, as such tasks are not necessarily part of their daily work. In many cases, the continuance of their work can depend on the outcomes of evaluations. Hence, they are confronted with an additional political pressure when it comes to being evaluated. Researchers on the other hand are often pressed to produce new content and to follow new trends in the field of evaluation.

  o The concept of "**pracademics**" (compound word from "practitioners" and "academics") either refers to someone who combines both roles in their job *or* to merging the knowledge of researchers with the expertise of practitioners. This concept already exists in several fields of P/CVE. Regarding evaluations, a similar concept would be helpful to combine perspectives of evaluators with the side of the evaluated.

([1]) See: Nordersjö, 2020: Framing Standardization: Implementing a Quality Management System in Relation to Social Work Professionalism in the Social Services

- When implementing quality management measures or conducting evaluations, the initial objectives sometimes get out of focus. In collaborative approaches, all stakeholders should be aware of the **baseline assessment**, meaning they should know the specific factors against which the outputs are measured ([2]). In the design phase of evaluations, all stakeholders should formulate and agree upon comprehensive **definitions of key concepts, a theory of change, the terms of reference and indicators of success**.

- As many P/CVE programmes are facing limited project periods and funding duration, aspects of **formative evaluations**, which serve the purpose of improving and steering the object of evaluation (measures, processes, network structures, etc.), *while* implementing measures can prove helpful. While other types of evaluations should not be neglected, formative/ inductive elements are helpful to modify ongoing measures. Especially concerning the fact that professionalisation of P/CVE programmes is developing rapidly (as a reaction to a fast-changing extremist scene), evaluation measures need to keep up with that pace.

- **Information sharing between state and non-state** as well as between security and non-security actors tends to be a sensitive topic in the daily practice of joint P/CVE work. Evaluating measures and programmes based on multi-stakeholder cooperation between civil society organisations and security agencies or state and non-state actors comes with additional challenges regarding ethical questions and data protection.

  o From practitioners' perspectives, the objectives of evaluation programmes can be categorised into two main aspects: **Evaluations are either conducted to improve a practice or to prove its effectiveness in order to justify (continued) funding for the programme**.

  o **Discussing (potentially diverging) objectives early on and throughout the process will help to continuously manage expectations.**

  o **Considering ethical dimensions throughout evaluation processes** is important, especially as the work of practitioners in secondary and tertiary prevention is based on (long-term) relationships and trust with clients. Evaluating this work and data collection can hence raise issues of confidentiality and data protection.

  o Post-evaluations, **a lack of follow-up** can cause frustration amongst evaluators and the evaluated programmes alike. Evaluation reports tend to be quite lengthy with mainly academic wording. Similar to the need to agree on a joint vocabulary and key concepts at the beginning of the process, a common understanding of the format and communication of evaluation results is equally important. In general, a common language shared by all involved stakeholders is crucial.

Recommendations

Several recommendations and possible steps forward were discussed in the scope of the small-scale meeting.

  o The design phase of an evaluation should be used as an opportunity to agree on a **common understanding and shared terminology**. If the meaning of central terms and core concepts are defined in the beginning, this will help throughout all following steps of the evaluation process.

  o Similarly, the implementation phase of an evaluation should focus on **translating complex findings into tangible and applicable solutions**.

([2]) Wouterse & Verdegaal, 2019: Monitoring & Evaluating counter- and alternative narrative campaigns, RAN Ex Post Paper, p. 6.

o **Avoid viewing practitioners as "research objects"** by developing multi-method evaluation designs (including both process- and impact-oriented elements) while integrating the knowledge and expertise of practitioners, policymakers, funders and researchers. Ensure that there is an intensive and well-structured exchange between the stakeholders involved in the evaluation of practices, relevant research findings and policy responses. This will also help evaluation reports to "land" politically.

o **The implementation of quality management measures and evaluation should be integrated into the work routines** and daily practice of P/CVE work. Internal and external evaluations at regular intervals will help to lower the threshold and potential hesitance amongst stakeholders and ensure sustainable improvement of programmes.

o As multi-agency approaches become increasingly relevant, particularly in the context of secondary and tertiary prevention, quality assurance measures and **evaluations should broaden their focus on evaluating multi-stakeholder structures**.

o View the question of quality assurance and evaluation from a **client-centred perspective**. Many radicalised individuals undertaking P/CVE programmes are often targeted by several programmes, either in parallel or subsequently. Focus on the question of how these programmes interlock and how information sharing is handled between different practices and stakeholders is an underdiscussed issue, which should be followed up on further.

o **Include formative and inductive elements** in evaluation routines to improve them through structural aspects.

Follow-up

As outlined above, many additional points of discussion remain that require further exploration within RAN on how first-line practitioners from different institutional and organisational backgrounds can best engage with the topic of quality management and evaluation in the field of P/CVE. The topic will be further discussed in the following upcoming RAN activities in 2021:

- The findings of this small-scale expert meeting will feed into a dedicated **specialised paper**, which aims to provide further information on how first-line practitioners can best engage with this topic in their daily practice.

- In Q4, a **webinar** will focus on implementing quality management standards in evaluation and in the daily practice of first-line practitioners.

- An additional '**fireside chat'** will set a focus on quality control in disengagement and exit programmes.

- At the end of the year, a **consolidated overview paper** will be published centring on the topic of external evaluations of P/CVE programmes in the context of secondary and tertiary prevention.

Further reading

Hofman, J., & Sutherland, A. (2018). *Evaluating interventions that prevent or counter violent extremism – A practical guide*. RAND Corporation.
https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2000/RR2094/RAND_RR2094.pdf

Holdaway, L., & Simpson, R. (2018). *Improving the impact of preventing violent extremism programming: A toolkit for design, monitoring and evaluation*. International Alert & UNDP.
https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/Global Policy Centres/OGC/PVE_ImprovingImpactProgrammingToolkit_2018.pdf

Koller, S. (2020). *Good practices in evaluating tertiary PVE programs: InFoEx Workshop, Berlin, September 19-20, 2019*. DGAP Report, 8. Forschungsinstitut der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik e.V.
https://dgap.org/de/forschung/publikationen/evaluation-von-deradikalisierungs-programmen

Nordersjö, K. (2020). Framing standardization: Implementing a quality management system in relation to social work professionalism in the social services. *Human Service Organizations: Management, Leadership & Governance, 44*(3), 229-243. https://doi.org/10.1080/23303131.2020.1734132