

17/04/2023

CONCLUSION PAPER

RAN REHABILITATION Working Group Meeting

4 April 2023, online

The time aspect of rehabilitation

Key outcomes

In the field of rehabilitation and distancing from violent extremism, time is an essential resource. As a practitioner, building the working relationship (also referred to as 'working alliance') required for an exit intervention takes time. Additionally, the personal development of a radicalised person to a rehabilitated individual is a time-consuming process. Also on an organisational level, referring to other agencies or working in a multi-agency setting also cannot instantly be achieved. On top of this there are external variables that play a role, such as the length of a criminal offender's jail or probation sentence or the available resources of the implementing organisation (including personnel and funds).

As a result, rehabilitation interventions often need to be modified to what is feasible. This forces practitioners to prioritise and thus potentially neglect other specific working areas while keeping track of the overall aim: their client's comprehensive and sustainable distancing from violent extremism.

While the time aspect of rehabilitation is crucial to the distancing process, it had not been specifically addressed yet within RAN Practitioners prior to this meeting. Thus, the meeting offered an opportunity to build a comprehensive understanding of what challenges exit practitioners encounter in relation to managing the time aspect in their interventions and what solutions they have found to do so. Core issues addressed include the time required for the individual disengagement, rehabilitation, and resocialisation process of the intervention recipient and for practitioners to build a functioning working alliance as well as safeguarding achievements made in the exit process.

The following key outcomes were noted:

- If limited time is available, be clear to the participant on what issues you will work with them. A realistic planning is key. Rather under promise and over deliver than the other way around.
- Avoid 'eternal' support as in the end it is needed that people learn to stand on their own feet.
- Organise aftercare as radicalisation is not a linear process and new situations can increase the risk of relapse.
- An assessment-based approach can work well to finish support when the objectives are met.
- Rehabilitation programmes are not always the end of support needed on all aspects of life. It is recommended that a follow-up is being organised in time.

Discussion highlights

Practitioners' experiences, shared from different EU Member States and beyond, showcased different challenges and solutions to working with time restraints.

Structural conditions and external factors

- The time available for exit interventions that promote the processes of disengagement, deradicalisation and resocialisation (DDR) is often determined by external factors. This greatly varies between closed and open rehabilitation settings¹.
 - Within the prison and probation systems, factors such as sentencing, judicial orders as well as various risk and needs assessment tools and approaches determine the available timeframe for an exit practitioner to engage with an intervention recipient. Especially when sentences and restrictions are short, it is hard to achieve sustainable progress. Some measures can be put in place to mitigate. First, a 'warm' referral from the prison to the probation exit programme, or from the probation to the societal exit facilities, can be helpful, because the exit worker does not have to start from scratch again. Also the participants can benefit from this, since they are often not too eager to repeat their story again for practitioner after practitioner. There are also methods where a practitioner follows the participant from prison to post-release. This results in a timesaving process and trusted support during the pivotal change between prison and society. Continuity is both favourable for participants as for their family.
 - In open settings, in which radicalised individuals or their social environment actively seek support in exit programmes, time is generally less of a limiting factor. However, funding and available staff personnel are not infinite, especially for civil society organisations. When it comes to funding, the way in which a project is financed determines the available time. When a certain caseload of participants to be supported or the length of a trajectory is set, flexibility will be limited. By contrast, if the arrangements are based on hours of practitioners or goals to be achieved, there is potentially more time (although it might lead to waiting lists). There are also contracts between commissioning parties and exit programmes that determine an average support time, thus leaving flexibility based on assessments by the practitioners involved.
- Political support for the rehabilitation and resocialisation of radicalised individuals as well as violent extremist and terrorist offenders (VETOs) is not a given, but a crucial factor, especially in terms of funding. Knowing that recidivism can destroy political support for rehabilitation², expectation management regarding the challenges and the necessary resources for successful exit interventions is crucial.
 - DDR must be understood as highly individual non-linear processes, just like the radicalisation process itself. If someone has been stuck in (violent) extremist thinking, feelings, and behaviour for an extensive amount of time, this is unlikely to change overnight.
 - Lack of time for an intervention means that the individual eventually might become the community's problem. Therefore, investment in communities receiving the rehabilitated, released or exiting individuals is crucial, including building community organisations' capacities for social cohesion, emergency response and links to authorities.

¹ Meaning within or outside the penitentiary system.

² M. Hecker, 137 Shades of Terrorism. French Jihadists for the Courts (2018)

'So how long does DDR take?'

This is the question it comes down to. The honest answer would be 'it depends'. While it is impossible to answer this question universally, known factors that can influence the timeframe allocated for interventions include:

- 1. The time needed to create trust between the client and the practitioner and for practitioners to build this between the client and society**

There are several elements that influence this factor. Depending on the level of trust towards authorities, it can take more time if the practitioner is working for the government. A shared language or cultural background of the practitioner and the participant can be helpful although this is not always the case (for example, coming from another tribe or adhering to another religious group can also work as a hindering factor). As stated above, trust is easier to create and to maintain if the same practitioner(s) stay(s) involved.
- 2. Trauma and mental health conditions (neuro-typical vs neuro-divergent individuals)**

Trauma both can be related to the period in the extremist environment as in the predeceasing biography. Older traumas can be found by using Adverse Childhood Experience questionnaires. Especially neuro-divergent individuals might need more time for rehabilitation. When the state of the disorder is too instable it can even be impossible to start or continue working on rehabilitation.
- 3. Addictions**

Addictions may hinder the capabilities to work on rehabilitation from extremism or to build trust. For example, practitioners can come into the position that they cannot reach the person behind the addiction. This sometimes results in a dilemma where to start to get life back on track. There is no general answer to this question and requires an approach based on the needs of the individual. Some cases also include mental health issues making the situation even more complex.
- 4. Risk/threat level**

When assessment shows that risk of relapse or posing a threat to others or themselves is considerable, further support is desired. If the threat level is too high and participants are still prone to extremist actions, it is time to stop or pause and to take other necessary actions.
- 5. Time to avoid falling back on stereotypes**

If no sufficient time is taken for getting to know each other there is the risk that both practitioner and participant fall back on emotions and biases. Stereotyping causes delay in the further process when both discover they are not really connected, which can lead to misunderstandings or restarting the assessment of needs and trust building. Practitioners note that stereotyping is more likely to happen when their caseload is too high and when there is no time to discuss cases with colleagues.
- 6. The motivation or intrinsic will to change**

When an individual is really motivated to change it can speed up the process (as long as the perceptions of changes remain realistic).
- 7. The starting position**

Questions that may influence the time needed are for example: Is the participant still in the extremist environment or did he/she already leave? Is there a positive network of family and friends that are supportive? Is the extremist environment likely to perform repercussions?
- 8. The right inventions in the right time**

The DDR runs in the smoothest way when interventions are available when needed. Waiting lists are not only causing delay but also can influence the level of trust in the practitioner and the process, and result in frustration.

Indicators that the DDR process is finished

It is impossible to achieve a 100% certainty that a former extremist individual is completely reintegrated. The change might turn out not to be sustainable and relapse might occur. A few indicators that the DDR process is coming to an end were however provided by practitioners:

1. When the needs and plans formulated at the start of the rehabilitation process are met

This should apply both to from the perspective of participant and the practitioner. Needs and plans are being formulated, tested on reality and the appetite for working on them. They are part of the trust building process and increase ownership from the participant

2. When assessment results show sufficient progress

If conducted in different phases of the DDR process, progression can be noted. Assessments can refer to specific methods (for example VERA2R) that are often in use in prisons and probation. An alternative assessment can be held during case conferences or by filling out questionnaires by practitioners on a regular basis. The latter options are more in use by NGOs as they often lack information (e.g. on security) needed to complete the specific methods.

3. Distancing from other extremist individuals

Especially in a prison setting this can be observed quite easily. In a societal setting it is more complicated, although active participation in non-extremist environments (for example, making non-extremist friends in school or at a sports club) can be an indicator.

4. Participants feeling comfortable and being able to make their own choices

In an extremist environment there is no place for own choices, opinions or other expressions of individuality. Everything is prescribed and determined by (the leaders of) the movement. Taking back control over the own life is an important goal for rehabilitation. Throughout the DDR process the need for support to take decisions decreases.

There are situations in which participants think that they are done, while practitioners have doubts. It depends on the situation what can be done. In prison and probation settings there is a higher chance to keep individuals in the programme, although it is harder to work with those who are no longer motivated. In voluntary settings there is no way of keeping them on board. It is good not to act too judgemental, in order to keep the threshold low for future situations in which they might need a practitioner again!

Recommendations

- As provider of rehabilitation programmes, do discuss the time aspect of DDR processes with commissioning bodies. This helps to have a common understanding on what can be done in the time given, either per DDR trajectory or as an organisation.
- Have a solid assessment mechanism in place, both to estimate how much time a participant needs and to measure if someone is ready for society without further support of the rehabilitation practitioner.
- Leave enough time for trust building and outlining the trajectory with the participants to avoid delays in a later stage.

Follow-up

Although the time needed to finish a DDR process depends on plenty of variable factors, further research on length and efficacy would be welcome. Most of the information is retrieved by experience of practitioners.

Further reading

RAN Prison WG (2023) [Dealing with false or non-compliance in prison – intervention strategies to mitigate risks, Rome, 07-08 July 2022](#)

RAN Prison WG (2023) [What is in the European prison toolbox of DDR programmes?, Berlin 15-16 November 2022](#)

RAN Practitioners (2022), [Study Visit to Paris on 'Effective management of the prison-exit continuum' Adverse childhood experience scale](#)