

RAN PRISONS

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CONCLUSION PAPER

RAN PRISONS Working Group Meeting
04-05 June 2024, Barcelona, Spain

Practical methods and approaches to conducting multi-agency case conferences of violent extremist or terrorist offenders (VETOs)

Key outcomes

Across the EU, exit work and DDR programmes (deradicalisation, disengagement and resocialisation) differ substantially in terms of implementing actors, type of programmes, objectives, as well as target groups and setting. Previous RAN PRISONS meetings have concluded with the recognition that multi-agency case conferences are essential for managing programming for violent extremist or terrorist offenders (VETOs). This is where all relevant stakeholders meet periodically, according to necessity or other frequency and with a range of possible stakeholders participating to share information and discuss the developments and future interventions in the disengagement, deradicalisation and rehabilitation of the inmate.

This Working Group meeting focused on the “how”, aiming to come up with practical methods and approaches for conducting these multi-agency case conferences. We heard from participants who shared examples of good practices from their local contexts, discussed the conditions for their implementation, and explored the opportunities and limits of this approach.

The consensus among meeting participants was that different stakeholders bring different positive attributes to this field, and that multi-agency case conferences allow them to be greater than a sum of their parts, as long as there is clear leadership and delineation of responsibilities; alignment on goals, values, and terminology; and most importantly, the establishment of trust between stakeholders.

- **Involving VETOs and their families at some stages of the multi-agency case conferences will lead to better outcomes:** through improved continuity, increased compliance, and onward support throughout the DDR process.
- **Civil society organisations are well placed to coordinate multi-agency case conferences** due to their flexibility to personalise rehabilitation programming, adapt to changing needs, and maintain a role throughout the process when others have a more tightly defined remit relevant to specific phases.
- **Establishing alignment of values, goals, and communications approaches is foundational for effective multi-agency case conferences** as the different stakeholders are not automatically aligned on any of these points. Prioritising this and establishing common standard operating procedures, backed up with joint training, will lead to better results.

- **Many countries have different structures, multistakeholder dynamics, and face different challenges in terms of VETOs** leading to a difficulty in transposing one country's experience and good practices directly into a new setting. However, there are some common themes, principles, and approaches, which, if contextualised appropriately, could be useful across all member states.

Highlights of the discussion

Participants engaged with 4 presentations during this working group meeting that covered Catalonia's approach to VETOs, the experience of various multi-agency case conferences in Austria, challenges and solutions from the case study of a VETO in the United States of America, and considerations for how good practices could be adapted to an open prison setting in Greece. During several discussions, all participant shared their experience according to their local context regarding multi-agency work and case conferences.

- In Catalonia, we learned that they evolved their approach to multi-agency case conferences following the return of foreign terrorist fighters and their families from Syria.
 - To create this, their specific goals were to enhance networking, develop a common narrative, reduce risk factors, and develop individualized plans.
 - Above all, they prioritised getting everyone around the table. This included migrant charities, welfare services, mentors, and schools, as well as previously identified stakeholder such as law enforcement, prison staff, probation services, and family.
 - From there, they focused on achieving alignment of values and principles, and establishing governance structures for the multi-agency approach. As a result, they could identify who should lead (in their case: the specialized unit of the prison service and the municipality), who should always be present (local and regional police, and the case manager), and who should attend specific meetings when relevant (other stakeholders). This gave them a solid foundation to achieve the objectives, and followed best practice learned from other EU insitutions and projects.
- Neustart, a civil society organization, presented the approach they take within the Austrian system. Having worked in the probation system since 1957, they have adapted their work to deal with VETOs since 2015 and currently work with 92 such cases – both those incarcerated for terrorism-connected offences, and non-terrorism-connected offenders, who are assessed to be radicalized.
 - Their approach to multi-agency case conferences has evolved over time, with a big step forward since 2021 under new Austrian anti-terror policies, and different forms in operation:
 - Case conferences for state security are used for terrorism-connected offenders and allow security authorities to exchange confidential information with other stakeholders, including charities like Neustart, but do not involve the clients themselves
 - Social network case conferences, which are led by Neustart, are less focused on security, and involve a wider range of participants such as probation services, the client themselves, their family, welfare services, and the public prosecutor's office. In contrast to the conference type above, they can only take place with the consent of the VETO.
 - They consist of a referral and preparation phase ahead of the conference, which itself is broken down into information, family-only, and decision phases. These lead to a release and review phase. According to Neustart, the added value here is the multi-agency nature of the approach, the active participation of the client, and the community engagement style, involve family and friends, therefore geared towards reintegration and sustainability.
- Parents for Peace shared their experience of working with VETOs and their family members in the USA. Concerned family members and other intimate bystanders contact them through helpline to share their

concerns of radicalized loved ones, leading to in-depth secondary prevention approaches, and ongoing support for families to continue playing an active, preventative role. However, in some cases (as in the case study presented), this occurs as the client enters the criminal justice system, leading to considerations that are relevant for RAN Prisons.

- Parents for Peace recognized the opportunity to support the client with deradicalization and rehabilitation approaches, during the year that he was held in custody ahead of sentencing. They were able to access him through his lawyers and family members, who facilitated virtual counselling sessions
- This engagement led to Parents for Peace being asked to testify during the sentencing, and resulted in the judge recommending continued intervention opportunities during his incarceration, separate from the usual system that is in place in that prison and that state. However, when he was moved to a maximum security prison, they lost this opportunity; instead they provided support and training to his family, who were allowed to maintain contact, and who continued the deradicalization and rehabilitation interventions.

The discussion in breakout rooms surrounded three key questions, each with several parts:

- Who are the different stakeholders who should participate in the multi-agency case management of VETOs and why? Who should coordinate? Does this differ across stages?
 - Prison governor and staff are important to this process due to their long-term relationship with the VETO, observations from their incarceration, and ability to intervene on a daily basis. But they often lack the specialist knowledge in the field of deradicalisation, disengagement, and resocialisation to be able to coordinate a case conference.
 - Security agencies have an overview of the landscape, and the mandate to operate with VETOs but sometimes suffer from a lack of trust. They could be involved pre-incarceration and during, but as they are not likely to be involved post-incarceration, may not be best placed to coordinate.
 - Criminal justice actors have the power to act, and the necessary access to information, but may have a limited scope, or suffer from a conflict of interest to pursue rehabilitation. Similar to security agencies, they should be involved pre-incarceration and during, but as they are not likely to be involved post-incarceration, they should not coordinate.
 - Probation services are present throughout the whole process and can stay close to the other relevant actors. They may be in a good position to coordinate the multi-agency case conferences, but some participants identified that they have too narrow a remit to be able to do this.
 - Civil society organisations come with specialised expertise and often employ multi-professional teams. They are able build trust with VETOs and among the different stakeholders due to their separation from the state, and bridge to communities. Their flexibility to move between institutional mandates and support VETOs throughout the the prison-exit continuum is a strength; so they may be well placed to coordinate a multi-agency case conference.
 - On a needs basis (case dependent), involving municipalities, social services, mentors, and support networks such as mental health professionals. They likely each have too narrow a remit to be able to coordinate a multi-agency case conference, and lack in authority over the other stakeholders involved; and they may not be involved in all cases, but when a need is identified, they should be brought in early and supported with the relevant information so as to enact their responsibilities.
- What are the challenges, and how can they be improved?

- The lack of a clear legal framework could lead to misalignment of expectations and processes among the different stakeholders involved. Establishing this would set out expectations and processes, and be integrated with other systems in place. The basic model with protocols should form a standard operating procedure that can be communicated openly to all stakeholders, removing the gaps between them or potential for misunderstanding. All stakeholders involved should be adaptable to the individual case, within the confines of the framework, to allow for individual differences required to pursue the aims
- Participants identified tension between the desire to involve as many stakeholders as possible, and the the risk that we slow down the process, make it too expensive, and not scalable. Identifying the core group of stakeholders, promoting consistency with personnel involved, and appointing a clear coordinator will mitigate this.
- If CSOs are to take a coordinating role, they may lack access to information, authority over the other stakeholders, or training/resources to implement multi-agency case conferences consistently. Confidentiality vs security needs continue to be a point of tension between CSOs and security actors. A strong rapport and full transparency with the inmate on what information CSOs are obliged to share is useful.
- There is often a lack of trust between the different stakeholders: shared training experiences, legal standard operating procedures, alignment on principles, a commitment to open communication, and clarity over goals and delineation of tasks will improve this. Useful practices are work shadowing, 'doing the rounds' together, introduction sessions of CSOs to a new prison (and addressing mutual biases from the beginning of the relationship), mutual feedback rounds, joint trainings and team building, conducting interviews with inmates jointly, having a point of contact from each actor, as well as good structure for documentation.
- Sufficient resources should be devoted to multi-agency case conferences (human, financial, administrative), which is likely to save money in the long term through efficient coordination. Training could be improved through role play, to ensure scenario-based capabilities are shared between all stakeholders. Particularly for locales without formal case management, training could be adapted from other models: neighbouring problem areas like gender-based violence, or conflict/de-escalation training. CSOs work in tertiary prevention is insufficiently resourced as it is often based on fixed-term project funding, which leads to problems of sustainability and the potential for long-term planning.
- What is the role of the client in the multi-agency case management?
 - Trust between practitioners and clients, and among stakeholders involved is key in the rehabilitation process. This can change depending on whether the participation is voluntary or compulsory. Trust must be a two way street, and built through confidentiality. For multi-agency work to be efficient, trust should be built among all parties, as well as a legal framework that allows information sharing between them. This can also present a challenge, as private and sensitive information being exchanged might harm the trust between the client and the involved practitioners. Therefore clear communication about the multi-agency nature of this work, and recognition that clients may trust some actors more than others is important.
 - Multi-agency work can provide tailor-made programming. Collaboration between state agencies and CSOs can provide a wider range of DDR interventions, as not all prisons have the staff, expertise, and resources to offer specific programming for a tailor-made. Moreover, holistic case - management of the inmate, which considers all aspects of their life in prison and post-release and considers risks and needs, can allow a better DDR process which that leads to better participation of the client.
 - The prison-exit continuum is a priority. In some EU Member States, some members of the multi-agency collaboration work with the clients from imprisonment until long after release. In Germany and the Netherlands, CSO exit workers start their relationships with their clients in prison and strive to work with them until after their release, and always in a multi-agency setting.

Recommendations

- **Establish a clear legal framework and case management system** to ensure alignment on core principles, goals, processes, communications approaches, and information sharing practices, so that multiple stakeholders have a common operating procedure for each case.
- **Deliver joint training** to all stakeholders on this approach so that all parties get hands on experience working with each other, and can start building trust with one another ahead of live cases.
- **Prioritise building trust** through regular case-independent meetings discussing and agreeing on procedures, to allow for better mutual understanding and appreciation of respective approaches, and the development of common terminology and structured templates for collaborative working.
- **Appoint one stakeholder to lead** the case management approach, but include a broad base of other stakeholders with clear responsibilities, some of which may be shared, recognizing that some stakeholders should have a role only in some parts of the process.
- **Involve VETOs and their families** during multi-agency case conferences to enhance continuity, increase compliance, and guarantee onward support throughout the DDR process.
- **Promote consistency** in personnel from each agency attending these meetings to allow for relationship building, problem solving, and clear communication.

Relevant practices

1. CATALONIA has established [multiagency schemes](#) to ensure holistic intervention for VETOs and transition from prison to community, learning on best practices from other EU countries. They have successfully identified the key stakeholders, aligned on principles, established a robust governance process, and have prioritised communication and trust-building among the stakeholders involved.
2. NEUSTART (AT) has adapted its [casework approach to VETOs](#), and involves all relevant stakeholders in the Austrian setting through a clear process. They manage different kinds of case conferences, depending on the situation. Their social network case conferences involve a wide range of participants, and are successful because of the multi-agency nature of the approach, the active participation of the client, and the community engagement style, and the involvement of family and friends, all geared towards reintegration and sustainability.

Further reading

icommit Project (2023), [Project Manual, a practice-rooted guide to P/CVE collaboration & casework](#)
 International Journal of Recent Advances in Multidisciplinary Topics (2022), [Yayasan Debintal: Community-Based Deradicalisation Program](#)
 RAN (2020), [Rehabilitation Manual](#)
 RAN (2022), [The role of civil society organisations in exit work](#)
 RAN (2022), [What is in the European prison toolbox of DDR programmes?](#)
 RAN [Collection of Approaches and Practices. Exit Strategies](#) (p. 130-200)
 RAN (2021), [Study visit to Paris on 'Effective management of the prison-exit continuum'](#)
 RAN(2023), [The Dutch multi-agency approach to rehabilitation of Radicalised Detainees \(MAR\)](#)
 RAN (2023), [Information exchange between the 4 Ps-police, prosecution, prison and probation](#)
 RAN (2023), [The role of prison leadership to ensure minimal standards for P/CVE work in the prison](#)

