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EX POST PAPER

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Evaluating disengagement, deradicalisation and resocialisation efforts

When it comes to disengagement, deradicalisation and resocialisation efforts – also known as 'exit work' – the expectations of the programmes are high and costs per trajectory are considerable. Evaluating these programmes is indispensable in order to arrive at a stronger evidence-based or empirical foundation for exit programmes. Different stakeholders with varying perspectives and roles are involved: practitioners implementing the programmes along with their organisations, policy-makers or (local) authorities as funders of the programme and researchers as (external) evaluators. The challenge lies in aligning trust, demands, time and work flows and creating a common language for the purpose of evaluation. This means evaluation must be included in the project design and should involve all relevant stakeholders throughout the entire project. Defining a shared Theory of Change and a common objective are beneficial to aligning stakeholders' expectations.

Evaluating exit programmes

This paper follows the RAN Policy & Practice event on the 'Evaluation of exit programmes' during which practitioners, policy-makers and researchers involved in evaluating deradicalisation, disengagement and resocialisation programmes met to discuss how to best evaluate such programmes.

The participants recognized the need for a **stronger evidence-based or empirical foundation for P/CVE interventions**, amongst which disengagement and deradicalisation programmes (referred to as 'exit programmes'), have grown over the past years. This is inter alia illustrated by the High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation, which included a call in its final report of May 2018 for a 'more systematic evaluation of prevent policies and interventions in order to strengthen the evidence base of EU and Member States actions', thus underlining the need to map existing initiatives, conduct research and organise peer evaluation in different fields¹. One of these needs includes exit work.

When it comes to **exit work in particular**, expectations are high and costs per participant's trajectory are considerable, focusing on a relatively small target audience, as compared to primary prevention efforts. Fuelled by a perceived high extremist threat in different Member States, the general public and politicians expect exit programmes to result in peacefully reintegrating the target audience. Additionally, the volume of criticism rises after terrorist attacks and in cases of relapse. To be able to know whether exit programmes are indeed effective, several stakeholders feel the need to evaluate their programmes. **Policy-makers** are interested in the effectiveness of the exit programmes because they are accountable for the safety of their citizens and are often the ones commissioning the interventions, as well as funding them. Organisations and **practitioners** delivering exit programmes want to know which elements are most effective and in which situations, whether they are doing the right thing (methods and tools) and whether they are doing it right (quality). Finally, **researchers** or **external evaluators** want to study how underlying theories of change apply and which elements of different approaches seem to work best, in order to compare them. Apart from this academic interest, they often have the role of assessors or teachers/advisors to both the policy-makers and the practitioners.

Even though many stakeholders feel the need to evaluate their interventions, there are still many questions relating to **practical and methodological approaches** on how to best design, commission, and implement evaluations, as well as how to subsequently communicate and implement results. Answers to such questions are considered to be helpful or even essential for different stakeholders to be able to evaluate their approaches.

The RAN Policy & Practice event fostered exchange on such practical and methodological approaches by focusing on how to **define goals and success**, how to work with a **Theory of Change** and on **involving evaluation in the project design**. This Ex Post paper elaborates on these matters, followed by some suggestions on how to **facilitate collaboration between different stakeholders** involved in evaluation.

Including monitoring & evaluation in the project design

Including evaluation only at the end of a programme limits the opportunities for monitoring and evaluation. Some of the required data may not be available, which can make it much more difficult to determine whether a programme has been successful or not. Instead of focusing on such an end-evaluation, it is therefore best to **include monitoring & evaluation** (M&E) aspects in the project design from the start and think of M&E as an **integral part** of the exit programme. This will allow time to consider the **objective** and purpose of the programme and the evaluation, encourage involved stakeholders to execute the monitoring and evaluation – thus ensuring resources in terms of time, finance, expertise and data – and to make any (minor) adjustments during the project if necessary and, finally, allowing the results of the evaluation to be well received and followed up by the stakeholders. To ensure evaluation is included in the project design, it can be made a **mandatory** part of the **call for proposal** or the contract between the commissioning entity and the organisation implementing the programme.

It is worthwhile investing time and effort from the start of the project in the **relationship between the donors** or funders of an exit programme and the **practitioners** implementing the programme. It is beneficial to any

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-security/20180613_final-report-radicalisation.pdf

evaluation when all actors involved understand their roles and act accordingly, so everyone knows what is expected. This includes not only discussing roles and expectations but also coming to a joint understanding of the evaluation's goal, scope and limitations. It's essential to **involve practitioners from the start** in the design of the evaluation, since practitioners usually have on-the-ground experience that can prevent the project or evaluation design from focusing on irrelevant aspects and as such prevent malpractice².

Another important reason to include evaluation in the project design is to guarantee **the collection of and access to data**, especially so if an external evaluator is involved. To ensure that this individual has access to the relevant data, a **trustful relationship** needs to be built between the practitioners and the evaluator. Organisations implementing exit programmes should inform their practitioners in advance that there will be an evaluation and explain what this requires of them. This includes deciding jointly what kind of data should be collected throughout the process, how and when to collect these, and how the data will be processed for the evaluation report. These are important factors to reach a **common understanding** of what needs to be done and why, which will further enhance the feeling of trust between the two parties involved. In addition to the evaluator and the practitioners, the donor of the exit programme should also be led to understand why and how the data collection will lead to a good evaluation.

Monitoring and evaluation can be done either by an evaluator from within the organisation, or by an external one. The table below shows some factors to consider with an external evaluator versus an internal evaluator.

External evaluator	Internal evaluator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually expert on M&E • Dedicates time to M&E of exit programme – ensures there is enough time and space for this • External, more objective view • Building trust requires time and attention • Specific arrangements might need to be made to ensure access to data • Involves higher costs • Expertise of the field and its specifics is not guaranteed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows the field, the organisation and its specifics well • Is not always expert on M&E • Tends to be less objective, –might have a 'double role' in organisation • Costs are lower, as person is already involved in the organisation • Trust is built in already • Access to data easier to organise • Ensuring enough time for M&E might be difficult as role is usually combined with another internal role

Finding a way to align **trust, demands, time, work flows** and **language** from the beginning is a challenge of evaluation. Be aware that different parties might use different 'languages' to discuss aspects of evaluation. Setting up a discussion about the evaluation process and its design from the beginning between the different stakeholders will increase chances of reaching meaningful evaluation results as well as increasing the results' acceptance among the stakeholders.

Defining goals and success

One of the issues that practitioners, policy makers and researchers alike encounter is the **difficulty of defining what success is** for an exit programme. Success might be different for every stakeholder involved in a P/CVE intervention, including the target audience. Success for one person (e.g. not believing in a certain ideology anymore, having a stable life situation independent from additional help such as social workers) might be unachievable for another. Programmes therefore often consist of **tailor-made interventions** and vary from one person to another. Another difficulty of defining success has to do with **attribution**: To what extent has your exit programme contributed to a person's deradicalisation? Furthermore, a well-designed exit programme may also fail due to political or cultural reasons.

Success for exit programmes usually consists of disengagement (leaving a radical environment and violent behaviour), deradicalisation (leaving a radical ideology), functional integration (such as housing, employment and

² RAN 2018 Guidelines on the evaluation of P/CVE Programmes and Interventions

health care) and social reintegration (family, friends, community) in the long term³. **Indicators** for measuring success are thus the recidivism rate (either for any crime or only ideologically motivated crimes), whether someone has found a job or education after the exit programme, or the extent to which someone succeeds in (re)building a social life outside of the extremist milieu. Measuring success requires **qualitative and quantitative methods** and indicators, as it also measures changes in behaviour and belief/ideology.

Another factor in defining success and formulating measurable indicator would be the **shared endeavour** among the programme donor, the practitioner and/or their organisation, and the evaluator. A basic definition of success could involve the following factors: there is no reoffending, family relations are healthy and participants' well-being is strong throughout the process. Additionally, the involved stakeholders should acknowledge that a 100% success rate cannot be achievable, for several reasons. In other words, a **realistic failure rate** should be included in the evaluation of the programme or case.

Increasing stakeholders' understanding of **why and how** an exit programme has been successful or not can be achieved by developing a Theory of Change.

THEORY OF CHANGE

A **Theory of Change (ToC)** is a helpful concept that provides a comprehensive description and illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context (**what works, how, and why?**). ToCs explain the **causal relationships** between input, activities, output, outcome and eventually impact. As such, they help in understanding the combined factors that affect an intervention or programme and could lead to success. As they might also help build the theoretical basis of a programme or intervention, they may ultimately help in building the evaluation design⁴. A Theory of Change pinpoints the **strengths and weaknesses** in your causal chain. It not only shows whether a programme failed or succeeded, but how and why this happened, thus allowing for improvements in its effectiveness. ToCs also ensure you evaluate the right thing, provide opportunities to **identify unintended effects** and **enhance stakeholders' consensus** for evaluation and programme improvement.

In complex situations it can be difficult to prove causality, as many factors influence each other. In (de)radicalisation cases, a diverse mix of factors is at play: ideological, influence from peer groups and extremist actors, family, psychological. To come to a better understanding of exit programmes and the successful factors in them, it is crucial to develop a **context-sensitive** Theory of Change: Why is the intervention you propose for a certain type of extremist supposed to lead to your expected outcome? When developing a ToC, it is common practice to work backwards; start with identifying the **long-term goals (impact)** of the programme or intervention, then identify all the conditions (**outcomes and outputs**) that must be in place to obtain such an impact, and how these relate to one another⁵.

A schematic example of a Theory of Change can be found below:

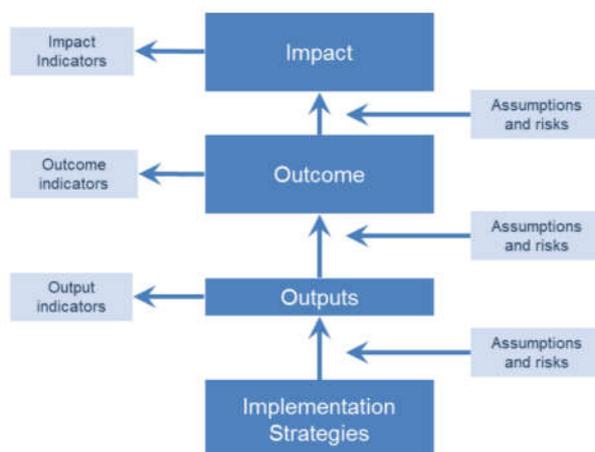


Figure 1: Schematic depiction of Theory of Change⁶

³ RAN Rehabilitation Manual, Draft version. September 2019.

⁴ See p. 15 of the RAN Guidelines on the evaluation of P/CVE Programmes and Interventions

⁵ See definition on <https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/>.

⁶ United Nations Children's Fund, Supplementary Programme Note on the Theory of Change, Peer Review Group meeting, 11 March 2014, UNICEF, New York, 2014, p. 4. See www.unicef.org/about/execboard/files/PRGoverview_10Mar2014.pdf.

In order to develop a Theory of Change, a thorough understanding of the target audience is necessary. This can be achieved through a combination of desk research and qualitative interviews with different stakeholders such as **practitioners**, or even (former) members of the target audience, where appropriate and possible. Involving practitioners in developing a ToC is crucial, as they often have first-hand experience in working with the target audience and can thus quickly distinguish identify whether alleged causal effects in practice or not. It is also important to involve programme funders, as agreeing on a **shared Theory of Change** will bring everyone on board of the project's realistic aims and how and why this is done through the different elements of the programme.

It is argued that Theories of Change should be seen as **'a living thing'**; just like the project itself, they evolve along the way. Developing an initial ToC in the project design will be helpful in identifying goals and success, and in initiating the process of understanding why and how your intervention leads to the desired output and outcomes – or not. This allows a **recursive process** of obtaining empirical insights into how and why tertiary prevention works. It also allows for the programme's evolution or adjustment on an empirical basis, favours data collection and can be a bottom-up process. As a ToC is a dynamic thinking pattern that encourages learning and adjusting, it should also encourage implementers of a programme to be honest to their funders. This entails informing them on what didn't work or go as planned and how they handled this through an adjustment to the Theory of Change and the intervention. Honesty also leads to **transparency** in communicating the results of the programme, both to the funder of the programme and to the general public. Some challenges remain, however, when it comes to defending a good programme if there are differing views in terms of its success from policy practitioners and the general public.

To allow for a **bottom-up process**, the different stakeholders should be involved in updating the Theory of Change. As the programme is put into practice, practitioners will play a pivotal role in understanding whether certain elements work or not. To make sure that their findings feed back into updating the ToC, they should be in regular contact with the evaluator. Involving the funders of the programme in this process will help to understanding at the end why the programme has worked or not. ToCs help from shifting the focus only on goals and indicators to focusing on their interrelatedness and the process as a whole, which should help **increase understanding** about the effectiveness of the programme. One of the questions that cannot be answered is whether all stakeholders involved can agree to a shared Theory of Change and who has the final say in case of disagreement.

OBJECTIVE AND TYPE OF EVALUATION

Once the goals of the exit programme have been defined, one can consider what the the objective of the evaluation should be. This is reflected in the type and design of the evaluation. Different goals of evaluation such as improvement of working methods, being accountable, showing impact on client and society, require different types of evaluation. Possibilities are as follows:

- **effect or impact evaluation**, which focuses on outcome and impact;
- **process evaluation**, which focuses on what happened and why;
- **mechanism evaluation**, why did the intervention work as planned, or didn't;
- **economic evaluation**, related to a cost-effectiveness analysis of the intervention;
- or a **realistic evaluation**, in terms of what works, in which context, for whom, and how?⁷

To reach consensus of what needs to be evaluated and why, stakeholders involved in a project – and thus in evaluation – should discuss beforehand what the objective of the evaluation is. In the best-case scenario, this leads to a shared goal and mutual agreement on the type and design of the evaluation. When the Theory of Change has been developed in a collaborative manner, it is likely to facilitate a common understanding of the evaluation objective. If stakeholders have different objectives for the evaluation and these are not contradictory or overlapping, doing several evaluations should be considered. One might consider having an external evaluator involved in one type of evaluation (e.g. a cost-effectiveness analysis) and at the same time organising a peer or self review that focuses on process, mechanism or impact. This would lead to two different outcomes of evaluations, measuring different things.

⁷ See p.9 of the Guidelines on the evaluation of P/CVE Programmes and Interventions.

Using all strengths

It seems that all stakeholders evolved in evaluating exit programmes agree that each partner has their own strengths and that ideally, these would reinforce one another. However, **making use of the strengths** of policy-makers or donors of the programme, the practitioners and the exit organisation and possible external evaluators can be a struggle in daily practice. Although the partners are interdependent, it can be hard to work outside of one's own 'silo'. This Policy & Practice event initiated an exercise to see the added value of each of the stakeholders involved and come up with some initial ideas on how collaboration can be improved. Some identified **key qualities** of all three stakeholders are listed below:

Policy-makers / donors	Practitioners and their organisation	Researchers / external evaluators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allocate resources (time and money) • can connect different parties who are not used to working together • agenda-setting (both <i>for</i> politics and <i>from</i> politics) • pivotal role in communicating results of the evaluation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • knowledge and expertise related to the target group, the interventions • 'on-the-ground' expertise • pivotal in gathering data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • capacity and skill to evaluate • expertise on how to process the data gathered, how to make sense of it • objectiveness and different perspectives • assessor or advisor to practitioners and policy-makers

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the unique qualities possessed by each stakeholder, some **recommendations** to improve collaboration were given as follows:

- **Start collaboration from the project design stage and include evaluation there.** Monitoring & evaluation are integral parts to the project design and are best thought of from the beginning onward.
- **Acknowledge the interdependent goals and needs of the different stakeholders.** Whereas practitioners might want to use evaluation to improve their work with former (violent) extremists/terrorists, it could be the case that the donor is more interested in learning whether the programme is effective. Even though this means both want the best results, acknowledge that a different perspective might lead to different requirements.
- **Invest sufficient resources in trust-building.** When each stakeholder has another perspective, ensure there is enough time to understand each other and work on a common language. In the end, you don't want to do the evaluation because you must, but because you want to learn from it and improve. Explain why certain things matter to you and why you need them. When there is room for acknowledging errors and an open and honest exchange, the evaluation will be more reliable and conclusive.
- **Practice good expectation management** in what you deliver and what you expect. To build an open and honest evaluation culture, it's important to discuss what each stakeholders' expectations are and what you can and cannot deliver. Constraints in time are often heard in relation to short-term financing. This influences the results of your evaluation as well – if the project only receives funding for two years, it's difficult to say what the impact has been in the long term.
- **Share your concerns about and/or motivations for evaluation.** Don't be too shy in sharing your concerns because the programme's future depends on the funding authority. If you feel like expectations are set too high, share your concerns with the other stakeholders and explain why you're concerned. It's equally important to share what your motives for the evaluation are and what you hope to achieve through the evaluation.
- **Have a common understanding on use of terms in an evaluation.** Be clear up front about your outcomes, indicators and other terms used in the evaluation. What is disengagement or deradicalisation for all stakeholders? What is the recidivism rate and how and when will it be measured? Does recidivism count for all types of crime or only to crimes related to violent extremism? What is success for the exit programme?

- **Make clear who is responsible for what part of the evaluation.** Decide together who is responsible and the roles, tasks and responsibilities this brings. When all stakeholders are aware of the roles they fulfil, they can act accordingly or be notified if they are deviating from what had been agreed upon.
- **Decide collectively how the evaluation outcomes will be reported.** Presenting the outcomes of the evaluation is an important element in showing your results in an insightful and accessible manner to a larger audience. Depending on the goal of the evaluation, the results might be presented differently to each audience. Decide collectively on the level of transparency, on the matters shared with the organisation and its practitioners, the funders, the larger policy area, and the wider audience. The level of detail might require adaptation to the specific audience.

In line with these recommendations, two documents should be highlighted here:

Peer and Self Review

Following the 2018 RAN MS Workshops on the evaluation of P/CVE interventions, one of the 2019 RAN Roadmaps was dedicated to evaluation. The key deliverable of the roadmap is the **Peer Review Manual Exit Work**. The review format provides the organisations doing exit work and their practitioners with an extended checklist to judge the quality of their work and preliminary notions on their effectiveness. The review format is a first step to get more exit programs and interventions that are based on state-of-the-art knowledge and that can account for their methods and activities.

Peer and self reviews are common practice in different fields like medical services, social work and research, for example. The basic goal of review is to have a critical look on the work that colleagues and/or you are delivering to improve quality. To effective, a clear method of reflecting is needed, as well as a clear and safe procedure in which practitioners are motivated to be frank.

Peer review has the advantage that people from outside your organisation but with the same background or professional tasks have a look at your work. Being at a certain distance allows them to have a helicopter view and to stay out of biases that might be present among a group of practitioners doing the same work in the same organisation. In the meantime, they can make suggestions based upon their experience in the field. Self review, when a group of practitioners are assessing their own performance and project, lacks this outside look. On the other hand, self review is easier to organise. Exit work programmes can largely benefit from a structured method of reflection on the intervention to see what strengths and weaknesses are and what actions are needed to perform better exit work.

The RAN Peer and Self Review Manual aims to provide practical guidance for those who want to work on improving their exit work programme. The main element of the manual is a questionnaire that can be used for both self and peer review. Together with information on how to use this questionnaire, a suggestion for a working procedure and some worksheets, it is a tool that intends to make people ready for thinking about and improving quality on the working floor.

The **Practical Guideline for Policy Makers and Practitioners for Planning, Implementing and Following-Up on Evaluations in Exit / Intervention Measures (in the Field of Islamist Extremism)** was initiated by Germany, with support of the European Commission, in the framework of the Project Based Approach. Next to Germany, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Italy and the Netherlands were involved as well as Asimetric Group, Deutsches Jugendinstitut and RAN. The guideline highlights points of special attention when commissioning, implementing or execution evaluations or when communicating about those. Next to addressing the question of "Why evaluate?", the following topics are discussed:

Before the evaluation (planning phase)

- Evaluation basics
- Cooperation framework of involved stakeholders
- Designing an evaluation
- Commissioning an evaluation

During the evaluation (implementation phase)

- Implementing an evaluation
- Preparing for the aftermath of the evaluation

After the evaluation (follow-up phase)

- Communicating the outcomes of an evaluation
- Implementing the results of an evaluation

Performing evaluation improves not only practice, but also policy: It is a necessary part of designing, executing and taking stock of policies. As such, it is a prerequisite for carving out a working, coherent strategic approach in P/CVE. Evaluation and structured exchange about good practice and lessons learned in P/CVE work, but also regarding the do's and don'ts of how to plan, implement, and follow up on an evaluation, allows us to learn from one another and from the experiences that we have collected. As a result, measures and approaches are targeted more effectively, and adapted to new challenges in fighting radicalisation. The Practical Guideline, a collaborative effort by various Member States of the European Union, aims at providing practical support to policy-makers and practitioners with this complex task. It serves to enhance compliance with evaluation standards and good practice when evaluating exit facilities/intervention measures.

This document is by no means an exhaustive guideline on how to evaluate programmes focusing on disengagement, deradicalisation and resocialisation. It has aimed to provide some important elements when designing a project and to highlight how evaluation can be included from the start, as well as raise issues related to defining goals and successes and how a Theory of Change can be used to discover what works, how it does and why. When it comes to evaluation in P/CVE, different stakeholders are involved who usually have varying perspectives and wishes related to evaluation. Acknowledging differences and using each other's strengths through collaborative work building on trust, from the project design to implementing the results of the evaluation, will allow practitioners, policy-makers and researchers alike to further discover what works best, when, why and how.

Suggestions for further reading

RAN *Guideline evaluation of PCVE programmes and interventions* (July 2018). Retrieved via

https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ms_workshops_guidelines_evaluation_of_pcve_programmes_and_interventions_july_2018_en.pdf.

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