PRACTICAL GUIDELINES
Management of exit programmes

Introduction

The general objective of the RAN EXIT Working Group is the enforcement of skills of practitioners in exit work. This document focuses on an advanced topic: the management of exit work and/or facilities. Compared to other programmes in P/CVE, managers of exit programmes deal with the specific circumstances that exit work encompasses: what is the difference with management of other interventional programmes? And, what special skills do managers of exit programmes need and how do they recruit, coach and safeguard their staff? Moreover, a manager needs to be aware of external factors: how can they deal with the pressure from the outside, such as press and public opinion? And, how can they cooperate with the government and/or other stakeholders that fund them?

These very basic guidelines for management of exit work have been produced during the in-depth meeting of RAN EXIT in Frankfurt on 17 and 18 January, which both managers and researchers attended. For further suggestions or in-depth questions, please contact the RAN Centre of Excellence.

Key messages in this paper

Management of exit programmes

Managers deal with the specific circumstances that exit work encompasses. This document sets out the internal and external factors to take into account in the design and management of an exit programme or facility.

DEALING WITH
INTERNAL FACTORS

1. Skills

- Knowledge about extremism
- A personality that people trust
- Communication and management skills
- Being able to handle sensitive and secret information
- Being able to handle threats, risk and aggression

3. Staff

- Recruiting
- Coaching
- Safeguarding

2. Designing an exit programme

- Choosing the right methods and a unity of approach
  - Definition of the target group
  - Definition of theory of change
  - Definition of how to measure success
  - Definition of the goals
  - Definition of access
- Creating a safe environment
  - Transparency: possibilities and limitations
  - Data security

4. Dealing with partners

- Media
- Funders
- Partners: working in a multi-agency setting

DEALING WITH
EXTERNAL FACTORS

<div style="text-align: center;">*INTERNAL FACTORS*</div>

1. Being a manager of an exit programme: the necessary skills

Working in exit programmes implies having to deal with very different kinds of individuals and institutions as well as legal, ethical and organisational frameworks. Leading an exit programme therefore requires very diverse competences and personal qualities. The section below outlines a selection of skills that help a manager to function well in the position of leader ([1]).

- ✓ **Knowledge about extremism and the complexities of exit and reintegration processes.** Personal experience in being an exit worker is useful, but not sufficient to manage an exit programme. He or she should also know about the main outcomes of research on extremism and exit processes, as they provide a broader picture than personal experiences. Likewise, only theoretical knowledge does not suffice; the leader also needs practical experience from dealing with extremists and formers.
- ✓ **A personality that people trust — both clients or formers as well as colleagues and external partners.** Having – or building – trust is a fundamental requirement for functioning well in the position of leader. Potential clients will not contact an organisation that is led by a person who is not credible. Mentors and other colleagues need to trust their leader. Social workers, police and funding institutions will only collaborate if the leader of the exit project is credible and trustworthy.
- ✓ **Communication skills.** The leader will most likely be invited to give talks about the project, about violent extremism or about exit processes — e.g. for various groups of professionals or youth. Moreover, there will also be a lot of media interest: exit work is a controversial project that might be criticised by the media and politicians. As a consequence, there might be crises where it will be necessary to defend the project against criticism.
- ✓ **Management skills.** Exit projects are generally small organisations or small units within a larger organisation. The leader has to manage issues such as budgeting, reporting to funders, log keeping, handling tension and conflicts between staff. Mismanagement will undermine the continuation of the project.
- ✓ **Being able to handle sensitive and confidential information.** Individuals leaving a violent extremist group may do so at the risk of their own lives. Some of them may have committed crimes they have not yet been held responsible for by the justice system. Therefore, the exit manager and mentors have to deal with such information and establish rules — and limits — of confidentiality.
- ✓ **Being able to handle risk, threats and aggression.** Some of the clients/formers may still have a very aggressive way of responding when they meet resistance or challenges. It may take a long time for a client to readjust to a "mainstream" way of behaving towards others. The project leader and the

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([1]) Quoted from Tore Bjørgo (University of Oslo) during the RAN EXIT expert meeting in Frankfurt (17–18 January, 2019).

mentors have to be sufficiently robust to withstand such behaviour. They also need to be firm and establish limits for what can be accepted and when a client has to be dismissed from the programme.

As it is hard to find one person who has all these capabilities, shared leadership across more than one person can be an alternative. Moreover, some of the tasks can be delegated to various staff accountable to the manager.

2. Designing an exit programme

Besides the personal capacities of a manager, the programme itself should become a solid basis for clients, exit workers and partners. This means a safe environment has to be created and the right methods should contribute to a trustworthy and innovative programme for all actors involved. Below, a selection of guidelines provides a basis for setting up and maintaining a good direction in regard to organisational structures and objectives.

2.1 Choosing the right methods and a unity of approach

- ✓ For all exit programmes, it should be clear who your **target group** is from the start, so clearly define the characteristics of your target group and communicate this to both clients and partners. What is their ideological narrative, age, organisation, militant (or not), and are they leaders or members of a group? Please note, if you reach out to potential clients, the concept of an exit programme can also scare away your target group.
- ✓ Clearly define your **goal**. Is the programme focused on deradicalisation or disengagement? Choose the right strategy that is interlinked with the national context and challenges. Please note, deradicalisation, a genuine change of mind, can be much harder to accomplish than focusing on disengagement.
- ✓ Be able to communicate the "theory of change" behind your programme. What will the change for each participant be about? How will you measure this change?
- ✓ Define how clients should **get access** to your programme. Show where you are and what you can offer and find ways to engage with people with a low threshold, or clarify that clients should engage with you first. Take into account confidentiality rules towards third parties as well as in the team.
- ✓ Be a **transparent** organisation and agree about possibilities and limitations of the programme for the clients. For example, you should from the beginning create transparency about cooperation with state institutions, such as police, local or national authorities or intelligence services.
- ✓ It is impossible to exactly transfer your model or project to another country. There is no one-size-fits-all programme. Take into account laws, market, people, connections and political context in the development of a programme.

2.2 Creating a safe environment

- ✓ Create and realise a **trustful** image. Do not work with fake names and use faces for the project. If you expect the clients to be honest and transparent, you should act the same way. Exit work is about trust.
- ✓ Have a strategy in place to **secure information** regarding both the clients and the team, and communicate about it. There is usually no need for people to have very confidential communication, but some people are feeling very insecure or at risk (i.e. who want to leave an extremist organisation). Therefore, you need to be able to offer this secure communication.
- ✓ Deradicalisation does not work if you only work on an ideological level. Offer your clients elements that are needed for **resocialisation** and a place in society, like structural employment, housing, social network, changes of names for their own safety, and so on.

The overview below outlines all other security measures to consider as a manager.

The office
- Do not communicate the address of your office online or offline (signage).
- Keep sensitive documents and files safely secured in your office.
- Employ security.

Protecting staff
- Conceal staff members' home addresses.
- Keep colleagues informed about each other's appointments and whereabouts.

Case management
- **Analyse the threats:** groups, person(s), roles, dangerous knowledge, history.
- **Shield:** prepare an information plan and measures for the exit procedure.

Communication
- Regulate information. Do not share sensitive information over insecure mediums.
- Do not use private phones for work.
- Control information: Who knows what?

High-risk cases
- Collaborate with security agencies.
- Create disinformation to mislead former groups.
- Form emergency plans and contact structures.

Protecting the client
- Tell the client to make a note of all threats.
- Provide them with a logbook.
- Relocate them to a new environment.
- Create a safe environment where the client can share their story.

Figure 1: Security measures ([2])

([2]) RAN EXIT, <u>Setting up an exit intervention</u>, Ex post paper. Berlin, Germany, 13–14 February, 2017.

3. Staff

Recruiting the right staff is one of the main challenges that managers of exit programmes across Europe are facing. Moreover, the manager has the responsibility to coach and safeguard their staff in a field where threats and emotions are part of daily work. However, a good team is of vital importance. This section provides guidelines on how to deal with these challenges.

3.1 How to recruit

Recruiting the right staff in the field of exit work remains a challenge throughout Europe. The degree of "exit worker" does not exist yet, and anyone can use this title, which makes recruitment not an easy job. Internal training is needed to make new employees fit for the job. It is impossible to come up with an extensive list of general prerequisites and skills for exit workers, given the diverse conditions in which they have to work. However, there is generally a need for social/therapeutic workers who are able to work on complex crises and caretaking and who are able to talk to different people and institutions, such as municipalities, government and clients. Also, experience with radicalisation is required. Formers can be recruited as valuable exit workers, but the manager has to be aware of their special needs and the potential risks as well. The RAN ex post paper 'Setting up an exit intervention' presents aspects and characteristics that might be relevant when assessing the suitability of any exit worker, in terms of personal characteristics, attitude, knowledge and experience, and skills [3].

3.2 Professional and personal development

Enabling coaching is a vital part of a manager's job. There are multiple levels on which a manager can provide or facilitate coaching for the staff:

- ✓ Multidisciplinary meetings at the office can contribute to the professional development of the staff and give them an opportunity to see different perspectives within the team and to discuss individual cases between colleagues. They can also be used to discuss changes in the network of the organisation and to analyse developments in this group.
- ✓ The facilitation of opportunities for a safe space for staff to talk about their job in general as well as challenges they face. This opportunity can contribute to the personal well-being as well as personal development of exit workers.
- ✓ If an employee faces specific challenges that influence his/her personal well-being and development, it should be possible to turn to a personal coach.
- ✓ Some exit facilities provide for staff trainings on a regular basis.

3.3 How to safeguard

Because violence can occur while working with clients, it is important to safeguard the staff — i.e. by making sure that before taking on a new client the case is discussed and risks are assessed. As has been outlined

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[3] RAN EXIT, Setting up an exit intervention, Ex post paper. Berlin, Germany, 13–14 February, 2017.

earlier in this document, it is recommended to use the real names of employees to create trust. However, home addresses should be concealed in order to safeguard the staff.

Furthermore, the work itself can be intense and emotional. Also, it may be difficult for staff to unwind from the work, due to news items on the topic emerging on a regular basis. These aspects should be acknowledged by the manager. An annual check-up by a forensic psychologist may contribute to assessing the well-being of staff.

EXTERNAL FACTORS

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4. Dealing with partners

4.1 The media

In the field of radicalisation and exit work, media crews will often appear on the front to examine if and how exit programmes work. Regrettably, media attention is often at the highest point in cases of crises. Whereas it important to be well prepared in such a case, an organisation involved in exit work may also have reasons to proactively seek media attention. This section outlines the main guidelines for exit programmes dealing with media.

- ✓ A manager needs to be proactive and have a **strategy** in place in case of a crisis, not only towards press but also towards authorities. If you are not fully up to date and don't have all the information, you should meet the press at a later stage when you can react to put everything in perspective.
- ✓ It is important that only **one spokesperson** is communicating with media. If needed, hire an extra facility or person who is specialised to take over/advise on communication in case of a crisis.
- ✓ Make sure that **your story matches** the story of other colleagues or institutions involved that may speak to the media too.
- ✓ Build a network of good and trustful media contacts. In cases of incidents, you can choose to bring in all the **reliable media contacts** you have already worked with to update them.
- ✓ Be aware of where the **media attention** will come from; is it quality press or tabloids? If you give journalists more background information, a story can become more nuanced. Also, be aware that there is a difference between TV, radio and paper news items and the way they structure your information.
- ✓ As a **government institution**, there can be more restrictions when it comes to contacting press. Still, you can know what topics you are working on might be interesting for the press, foresee media attention and **fine-tune** this with those responsible for communication in your institution.
- ✓ It is **counterproductive to hide** incidents or other problems that may occur in relation to exit programmes, because media are following exit programmes closely. If something is going on, it is an

option to inform the press proactively. The media can prepare interviews or publish a paper with your own comments through a reaction beforehand.

- ✓ **Formers** frequently wish to appear before the media themselves, but can benefit from guidance by exit workers to see both dangers and opportunities of going public.
- ✓ **Share success stories.**
- ✓ It is not necessarily a bad idea to stay under the radar in the **initial phase** of an exit programme. This gives you time to start up your project. It is easier to communicate results than plans. Of course, you still need a media strategy for crises.

4.2 Working in a multi-agency setting

Besides ways of dealing with the media, and even cooperating with them, exit programmes are often part of a broader network of institutions preventing and countering radicalisation. Root causes of extremism are diverse and reintegration of former extremists needs different professions and competences, which is why exit programmes can choose to partner up with a wide range of institutions, specialised groups, and governmental and civil society groups, such as the police, social work, prison, job centres, schools, NGOs, youth centres, churches and so on.

When designing a programme, define ways of cooperation with these institutions to divide responsibilities, manage expectations and agree on ways of exchanging information. This section sets out guidelines on how to cooperate with such a large network.

- ✓ There is often a deep interest of security agencies and police to be informed about your organisation. When designing the programme, it is important to **define ways of information exchange regarding national and European data protection laws**.
- ✓ Build **a trustful image**. Manage expectations and roles with your partners by being transparent about what you can't deliver and won't deliver.
- ✓ **Code of conduct**: do not criticise others in the public. Speak about your own programme. If there is a need for criticism, meet the addressee in private.
- ✓ Institutional trust is often also based on **personal trust**. Personal trust is the tipping point in creating an atmosphere of collaboration.
- ✓ Different actors involved can have different agendas. Therefore, be aware of the **risk of over-sharing information**.
- ✓ It can be hard to decide when to solve something internally and when to search for a partner. Everything that can be arranged locally, should be arranged locally. Create partnerships with partners who have knowledge about extremism. The decision often depends on the time frame: you cannot hire a new person if you only need specific competences on a temporary basis.

4.3 Funders

Besides cooperating with a large network, exit programmes are often dependent on funding. When your programme is funded by external parties, it is important to maintain a network of potential funders to keep the programme in existence. Some initial guidelines are stated below.

✓ Search for multiple funders and **do not rely on a single one**. This makes a programme more robust.
✓ There are multiple tactics when looking for funds. Search within **different departments** of the government and compare funds with those of other European countries.
✓ **Target employees on the lower levels** of companies and authorities if you are not able to directly contact the people who are responsible for funding. They are also able to spread your message or offer a pilot.
✓ It can be difficult to **balance between confidentiality and trust**. How much information can a funder ask from you in return for their subsidies versus how much information can you share without violating confidentiality rules of your clients or data protections laws? Therefore, it is important to agree with funders from the beginning regarding what you can share and why in order to manage expectations beforehand.
✓ Funding exit programmes is mostly connected to the current political agenda. It can make sense to keep contact not only with representatives from the funding ministries, but also with politicians themselves to ensure a stable support of exit work beyond legislative periods.