

RAN Derad Declaration of Good Practice – Principles of Sustainable Interventions in Disengagement and Rehabilitation (Deradicalisation) from Involvement in Violent Extremism and Group Hatred.¹

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Summary in progress –
open to comments and suggestions from RAN participants

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Preamble

With this declaration we would like to make an attempt to formulate basic principles of good practice in disengagement/ distancing/ rehabilitation (deradicalisation) and down-stream prevention (distancing) of violent extremism. The purpose of this is to prompt a commonly shared process of identifying good practice methodology. The document is aimed primarily at first-line practitioner colleagues who would like to engage in a reflection on their own work, contribute to the declaration and/or engage in more in-depth practice research on methodology and evaluation criteria – within and beyond RAN. The text also aims to be useful for policy makers and national pilot project workers who wonder how to best begin when launching programs of disengagement/ rehabilitation and prevention first time. In its present form the declaration comprises observations and statements on the meaning and implications of ‘trust and relationship building’, on ‘the setting’ in which participants and facilitators work, on ‘good practice methodology’ on the micro level, on the ‘institutional and work contexts’ including public discourses on ‘politics and religion’ and on the ‘use of media, creative/ cultural methods and sports’.

Since 2012 the working group on disengagement/rehabilitation (deradicalisation) interventions within the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN Derad) has been conducting workshop meetings for first-line fieldwork practitioners who facilitate – with whatever approaches and in whatever contexts – intervention processes with people who are considered to be entangled in violent extremism. In these workshops, the colleagues from different countries and work areas (as right-wing or religiously legitimated violent extremism) exchange experiences and lessons learned on what works in this complex and challenging

¹ The first edition of this summary has been drawn from: “The Narrative Principle: Good Practice in Anti-Hate Crime Interventions, within the Radicalization Awareness Network”, Harald Weilnböck (in: Right-Wing Extremism in Europe – Country analyses, counter-strategies and labor-market oriented exit-strategies. Ed. by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation 2013, p. 379-408.) http://www.cultures-interactive.de/tl_files/publikationen/FES_Rechtsextremismus-in-Europa_Das-Narrative-Prinzip.pdf.

kind of psycho-social intervention work. Nine international one and a half day workshops with 25 attending practitioners on average have been held in the course of 4 years, convening several hours on what colleagues thought is good practice (sessions of 3-4 hours among other sessions on related contextual issues). In 2015 two bigger workshops (average of 35 persons) were conducted which were entirely dedicated to discussing the principles of good practice interventions during a two half day workshop. Throughout all workshops the sessions were documented by note taking; results were exchanged and further discussed via email. Since RAN_2 (and the transfer of RAN Derad into RAN Exit) this work has been discontinued.

Practitioners from almost all EU Member States have participated in RAN Derad so far. They work in fields as different as social services, community work, child and youth welfare, family assistance, psychotherapy/ mental health, civil society/ non-governmental organizations, social-entrepreneurial companies and statutory institutions; hence, some work in closely delineated institutions (e.g. prison/ probation, schools) others work in open contexts (street/ community work, preventive police work etc.). Some practitioners work fulltime in a dedicated project of preventive or rehabilitative interventions (generally referred to as deradicalisation), others deal with violent extremists or susceptible (young) people as part of their general work mandate. The types of violent extremism and group hatred which colleagues from RAN Derad encounter do differ – and so does the degrees of acceptance of the attitudes and ideologies among the wider local community, the general public and/or the media.

As to a suitable working definition of the subject matter that practitioners found practicable in their daily work, RAN Derad colleagues from different Member States have made the experience that using terms around ‘de/radicalisation’ had misleading and unhelpful effects in the direct field work. The term *violent extremism* seems more applicable while the vocabulary which has proven most helpful is based on semantics of *group-hatred* and *violent polarization* (following W. Heitmeyer’s evidence based concept²). As for gauging ideological stance/ attitudes – and in order to properly identify appropriate kinds of participants for the intervention the most applicable criterion/ term and seems to be *acceptance of human rights*. As a designation for the actual interventions, the most acceptable terms among practitioners seem to be *disengagement*, *distancing* and *rehabilitation* – rather than deradicalisation.³

Hence, the terms, concepts and conclusions which RAN Derad declaration formulates on the basis of numerous workshop exchanges are thus built in a commonly shared process of bottom-up thinking, based on the practitioners’ sense of what is practicable and useful in their work. Furthermore, we drew substantially on recent intervention research.⁴ As bottom-up results they have the capacity to adapt quickly to new phenomena within actual field work around phenomena of violent extremism. For instance, the base

² <http://www.uni-bielefeld.de/%28en%29/ikg/projekte/GMF/>.

³ A first draft in German of a paper on terminological clarifications can be found at CI website soon „Words do matter!’ - Begriffe und terminologische Klärungen im Bereich Extremismusprävention in der nationalen, europäischen und internationalen Arbeit”, soon to be translated.

⁴ That research, among many others, includes the TPVR project (EU/“Towards Preventing Violent Radicalization”), conducted by the London Probation Trust (2009-11); the LIPAV project (EU/“Literary and Media Interaction as Means of Understanding and Preventing Adolescent Violence and Extremism”), conducted by Cultures Interactive (Berlin); several governmental “Federal Model Projects”; and the Belfast-based CHC project (EU/“Challenge Hate Crime”), conducted by NIACRO (Northern Ireland Association for Care and Resettlement of Offenders). The results were effectively reconfirmed by the following: the Copenhagen conference “Tackling Extremism: Deradicalization and Disengagement” (2012), which was organized by the Danish Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration; “Preventing Extremism: A Danish Handbook Series,” the OSCE recommendations reports on anti-Semitism and discrimination against Muslims (2008/10); and Saskia Lützing, “The Other Side of the Story: A qualitative study of biographies of extremists and terrorists” (2012).

criteria – of group-hatred and defiance of human rights – would also allow referring to and practically approach a newly recognized phenomenon as “racist violent extremism”.⁵

Generally, in their day to day practice throughout the different Member States, disengagement and rehabilitation facilitators mostly work with young persons from two major groups – one comprising various types of right-wing/ neo-Nazi/ white supremacist violent extremism, and the other comprising AQ/ ISIS inspired or religiously inspired violent extremism. Presently, in a number of countries there is some degree of hesitation to view what is generally called left-wing extremism on the same scale as neo-Nazi and AQ/ISIS violent extremism (while national policies and intelligence reports usually list these as the three main groups of concern). Firstly, the issue of left-wing extremism seems to play a relatively little role in current first-line practice of very many RAN Derad members Secondly, today’s left-wing activist/ militant groups seem to differ in that they tend to be in support of human rights, solidarity, inclusion and democracy and do not define enemy groups according to ethnic or religious lines.

However, RAN Derad practitioners consider anyone a suitable participant of their interventions who is affiliated to a subculture which exercises violence/ physical struggle and forms of (self) destructiveness which have an ideological context – as, for instance, is likely to be the case with young people in milieus as different as sectarianism, gangs, veteran militias, hooligan groups and possibly also in cults (and which would also be the case with returning foreign fighters from Peshmerga militias who fought against ISIS). All such subcultures may easily turn into violent extremism at some point. RAN Derad practitioners have often made the experience that embracing on a pathway towards violent extremism and terrorism is not a linear process – but is, in fact, quite unpredictable. Quite different young people from varying sectors and strata of society, being motivated by different impulses and grievances, may get entangled in violent extremism(s) along different ways (while access to economic means and societal participation does play a significant role overall). Consequently, this requires to expand the notions about the target group, even if this sometimes crosses the boundaries of mandate and competence of administrative bodies. While a policy documents may state, for instance, that “hate speech, hate crimes ... or hooliganism” or gangs and cults “are not at the primary focus”, first-line practitioners experience may compellingly suggest that these are, on the contrary, integral parts of the problem. If policy documents state, for instance, that “hate speech, hate crimes ... or hooliganism” inter alia “are not at the primary focus of (its) activities” Sometimes this crosses the boundaries of competences statutory bodies have drawn

Yet, despite all variations throughout the different professional fields and countries and despite the fact that a flexible country by country approach is needed in each instance, RAN Derad practitioners have found points in common when it comes to the practical work of disengagement (deradicalisation) and rehabilitation. These principles will be stated here as first edition of a living-text document – which will in the coming years be further developed and transformed into a web-text allowing for more in-depth elaboration at specific points, a broader discussion of terminological issues and controversies, reference to the RAN Collection of Practices, and adding illustrative case story vignettes which emphasize the meaning and implications of each of the principles:

⁵ The term “racist violent extremism” has been coined after the June 2015 attack in Charleston, South-Carolina, USA. However, it can also be an appropriate reference to the German neo-Nazi death squad National Socialist Underground since this terrorist cell murdered 9 perceived foreigners and seems to have had some degree of affiliation with racist groups as the German chapter of the Ku Klux Klan.

Good practice interventions of disengagement and rehabilitation (deradicalisation) ...

Trust and relationship building is key

1. ... are based on an extended process of **direct personal interaction** and *relationship building*; they rest upon **trust, confidence**, and personal *commitment*. Specifically, this implies trust among the participants and between participants and facilitators – and also confidence in the intervention process and its benevolence for all parties engaging in it.
2. ... unfold in a *safe space* and in **full confidentiality**, which means that any reports on the participating individuals should not be shared with authorities, in particular if the participant is part of an institution (e.g. prisons, schools etc.) so that the participants' future fate in this institution is in no way affected. For instance, drop out of the intervention will not go on the person's record.

However, in view of the community of people inside the institution, confidentiality means non-attribution, i.e. the intervention as such can be openly talked about (as it may also be reported on and be subject of professional quality assurance). But this exchange is limited to information that is not traceable to any of the individual members.

Facilitators explain to the participants that they can absolutely rely on their confidentiality but also point out where national law sets limits and obliges every citizen to report to police, which in most countries is the case when capital crimes are reported or when crimes are said to be in the planning.

3. ... are, in principle, **voluntary for the participants**, while it is feasible and beneficial that potential participants are motivated beforehand through preparatory and motivational interviews (not so much through incentives). They may then enrol in the intervention on the basis of a minimal willingness to aim for some, yet undefined degree of personal change and then, ideally, embark on a process of incremental buy-in and understanding of the intervention.
4. ... proceed without **formal and openly assessing the participants** since this would endanger the process of building trust and a sense of shared responsibility. While a risks (and needs) assessment may be necessary and reasonable in many cases from an organisational point of view, such assessment should not be done by the facilitators of the disengagement/ rehabilitation intervention but by other colleagues within the institution. However, what the facilitators may consider doing is engage in commonly working out self-assessments with the participants as part of the intervention.
5. ... are best facilitated by **external non-governmental facilitators** wherever a delineated statutory institution forms the context of the intervention – as prisons, schools, etc. These NGO facilitators may still be indirectly funded by the state but have licence to act independently within and across statutory institutions and may thus provide confidentiality and continuity of a long term intervention In more open contexts like street work and community youth work this independence often is already given.

However, the success of such interventions within closed statutory institutions relies heavily on a good rapport and **mutual understanding between external facilitators and statutory staff** of the institution. Such understanding regards the very nature of the intervention and the complementary roles of the different actors in and around the intervention. It may be promoted by shared training sessions. This will support the *embedding of expertise* in the institution and help to prevent *professional competition*/

jealousy which often emerge when statutory and non-governmental practitioners work side by side without any integrative measures being in place. The shared training and awareness raising will thus further mutual respect between external facilitators and internal staff which will then be noticeable in many ways to the participants themselves, signaling to them that an inside-outside border has been productively managed.

The Facilitators

6. ... are employed by *specialised facilitators* who are able to induce trust, convey personal credibility, and uphold the appropriate professional base attitude, hence maintain a *resilient work-relationship* and dispose of all relevant facilitation skills including the regard for the personal safety of the participants and the do-no-harm principle.

The work-relationship which the facilitators extend to their participants is intense and personal but is not a private relationship. Thereby facilitators convey a base habitus which combines being *accepting/ supportive and beingchallenging/ confrontational* in a way which is sensitively adjusted to the person and the situation. This means that the facilitators accept, respect and support their participants as *individual persons* in their particular development. Where necessary or feasible, however, the facilitators address opinions and behaviours which pertain to violent extremism and group hatred, signalling their personal stance as alternative attitudes, while not in any way insisting in them

In terms of opinions and views in the narrower sense, facilitators have a *non-partisan and balanced attitude* towards the various relevant discourses – and invite and listen to the participants' stance. At the same time, however, facilitators do not hesitate, when asked, to be transparent as to their personal views and, if appropriate, acknowledge duplicities within mainstream discourses in the face of populist and/or sensationalist media communication. Overall, however, their focus is not the discussion of opinions but the promotion of an understanding about how certain opinions came about in a personal and biographical perspective.

7. While the *practitioner's personal ability, competences, experience* can play a role (as for instance being a *former* of an extremist milieu, possibly also having being a *victim/ survivor* of acts of violent extremism and group hatred), they do not seem essential. Practitioner habitus and skills are complex and refined; however, they can be acquired and developed through "train-the-trainer" Hence, practitioners don't necessarily need to be formers.
8. ... provides first-line practitioners who facilitate the relationship-based and emotionally intense interventions support through settings of reflection and independent *practitioner supervision*. This independent supervision is also provided to the organisation for which the practitioners work. It does not report to any stakeholders. It solely aims at assuring *quality of work* and giving practitioners a space for *debriefing* processes as well as safeguarding them from *overextending* themselves and experiencing *secondary traumatisation and/or burn-out*.
9. assure *maximal personal safety of practitioners* by taking comprehensive security measures. First-line practitioners are sometimes threatened and are at risk of retribution by violent extremist organisations.

Good practice – methodology

10. ... are **open-process interventions** which do not primarily follow a fixed curriculum or session plan. Open-process methods attempt to be maximally *participatory*, *exploratory* and *self-directed* by the participants and require a large methodological flexibility on the part of the facilitators.
11. ... are **narrative – i.e. do not counter**. Hence, good practice interventions facilitate processes of personal self-expression which convey **personally lived-through experiences** and subjectively perceived actions and recount them to others. Narrative means, in the first instance, that one steers away from (counter-) arguments, ideological debates or religious discussions. If participants in their actions and thinking are very focused on a central text/ ideology (Coran, Bible, manifestos etc.) any given reference to specific contents of these texts will always try to explore the personal, subjective and experiential substance which motivates the person's reference and which could be considered as narrative.

Narrative interventions are based on a **non-countering mode** of interaction. While the general paradigm of counter violent extremism efforts (CVE) seems to follow the principle of 'countering', first-line practitioners have often found that good practice *doesn't counter*, it rather *builds*. Field work has shown abundantly that countering doesn't work because it is the violent extremists' main domain to counter (at all cost). Therefore, extremists or vulnerable persons can hardly be reached and influenced by countering. Conversely, face-to-face *narrative exchange* seems to be more effective in doing so. One of the key objectives of narrative interventions thus is to support the participants' capacities and *skills to narrate* individual experiences (be they of a personal, political or other order) – and to attentively listen to individual narratives.

12. ... seem to be most effective and sustainable in terms of disengagement and rehabilitation when intensely working on **personal and biographical issues** as well as on issues and **grievances** around the participant's perceived **social integration**. Practitioners of various Member States and different work fields have often observed: When interventions are successful - participants show significant personal development and begin to distance themselves from violent extremism and group hatred- the key factors of this could hardly be associated with work on ideological or religious issues in the narrow sense. Rather, *biographical issues and personal grievances* – which often overlap with *political/ social grievances* – loom large in the process.
13. ... generally lead up to working on personal issues of the **participants' actual living-conditions context**, *family*, also on experiences of *violence/ victimization*, *gender*, *power* and on exchange about *being recruited* and part of an extremist context. Such open-process and narrative (group) settings will also focus on and elaborate *personal resources* and capacities.
14. ... focus on **social skills and emotional intelligence** – in particular with regard to conflict related affects of anger/ aggression, shame, anxiety and hatred which have been found to be key in the *emotional motivation* for violent extremism. Therefore, some good-practice interventions prefer *group settings* as much as possible since social and emotional learning is most intense in groups – while flanking them by one-on-one sessions as needed, being fully aware that one-on-one interactions are more easily manipulated.

15. ... employ methods which address and work with *issues of gender identity*. It has been practitioners' experience throughout that there is hardly any violent extremist, terrorist, or hate crime offender who does not also hold sexist and homophobic attitudes – i.e. manifests *conflictive gender issues* which run counter human rights. Also empirical criminology has proven that areas of *gender/ honour based crime* coincided geographically with those areas which experience many offenses of violent extremism. Hence, working on attitudes and behaviours of '*being male*' or '*being female*' and executing '(family) honour' generally have a quite powerful and sustainable effect in prevention and rehabilitation interventions – often more powerful than ideological/ religious issues. This may in particular include working on concepts of being a family and/or on family roles, as for instance, the roles of mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers etc. which may be done in special settings (of fathers, mothers etc.), given that the motive of the 'absent father' seems to play a significant role in the biography of many violent extremist offenders.

... will also touch upon *political and religious issues* – after having achieved a stable work relationship among the participants and with the facilitators/ mentors. . In particular good practice interventions will allow for dealing with eminent *public, political and media discourses* on issues of violent extremism and group hatred, as they will deal with *social/ political and religious grievances* which the participants express with regard to such media discourses (and which often overlap with personal grievances). Particularly this concerns issues deriving from *geopolitical and military interventions*. What makes this especially important is the fact that religious and political discourses are often lead by populist and partisan (political) interests and thus tend to neglect, cover up, or manipulate the pertaining grievances. All the stronger may be the influence which these discourses may exert on the actual intervention.

16. However, political and religious issues will not be handled at a very early moment of the process. Nor is it envisaged that this aspect may foster much argumentative discussions or ideological debates – since these in general, are non-narrative interactions. Rather the personal and biographical aspects of these political, social and religious issues will be in the focus while not denying their societal and historical importance.

17. ... are coping with issues which derive from *geopolitical and military interventions* as well as from legislation on prevention and security. Especially *national security policies* may impact directly on and put at risk the sensitive processes of rehabilitation and disengagement interventions. For instance, if national legislation criminalizes certain ideologies (Salafism) or travel to certain regions (e.g. Ukraine, Syria) or compromise human rights in any other ways, this will then cause extra challenges for any prevent or disengagement intervention; since these interventions aim to persuade participants to take on a human rights based and non-extremist attitude – and hold up Western democracies as role models of such human rights based, non-extremist societies (also see point xx).⁶

18. ... include relevant **persons, significant others and stakeholders from** the participants' social background as the members of the *family* – in their particular roles as, for instance, the older brother, sister, the normally absent father etc.; suitable representatives from *community* and *civil society*, *formers*, *victims* and others who are invited into the intervention (in the school, prison etc.) in order to share their perspective and life experiences

⁶ More intensive cooperation between law enforcement and prevention (see point xx) may be able to provide solutions for the question of how to keep people (who have attained full age) from traveling to war zones without formally criminalizing the act of travel under terrorism legislation.

Use of media – creative/ cultural methods and sports

19. ... *cannot be done online*. First-line practitioners' experience overwhelmingly suggests that impactful interventions in disengagement and down-stream prevention primarily require *direct, face-to-face, and relationship-based* approaches in the offline domain.. Although the internet seems to play a significant role in inciting violent extremism and group hatred, the often implied reverse assumption is misleading: The internet, for intrinsic reasons, can hardly have a very important function in disengagement or distancing interventions with young people who are susceptible or already attached to violent extremism. First-line practitioners have often found that the typical individual in need of targeted interventions does not respond well when exposed to media based counter messages/ counter narratives or to victim testimonials. Sometimes such initiatives have even backfired in that they triggered reactions of cynicism and re-radicalisation with the main target group.

However, media production and providing alternative messages and narratives disseminated through the internet may be very valuable for the important purposes of general awareness raising and building societal resilience – as long as it is not confused with targeted prevention and disengagement work which needs to be primarily inter-personal.

20. ... will enable participants to express their feelings by producing media content themselves – and thus engage in narrative and creative *sub-cultural/ youth-cultural activity* (rather than mere receptive intake of videos). Moreover, creative activities – as in youth-cultural Rap, Graffiti, Song Making, Break Dance, Theatre Improvisation, Music/ Video Production etc. – can be quite successful in reaching out to target group individuals. They support trust building and commitment to the intervention – and, as creative activity, may naturally set off a process of reflection on personal identity and citizenship issues which can then be followed up and deepened in settings of a more direct verbal exchange with others. Moreover, once a stable and *trust based face-to-face work setting* is established among participants and between them and the facilitators, one may decide to cautiously feed in certain ready-made media products into this setting and facilitate the participants reactions to it. Even more effective than pre-produced counter narratives may be to consume those *fictional media narratives* (films, songs/lyrics, novels) which the participants feel are important to them personally and have an existential meaning in their process of identity building.
21. ... engaging in *common sports activities* may achieve similar functions. Sports in such settings is not only an attractive leisure activity but may serve as trigger for revisiting actual and past experiences around team sports as well as sports related identity issues and intercultural exchange and mediation. These experiences may then come within reach for any more in-depth reflection on personal identity and citizenship issues.