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PREPARE PROJECT

Preventing radicalisation through probation and release

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Sweden: a programme originally designed for the disengagement of gang members

There are only about 90 prisoners in custody for violent radicalism in Sweden. Authorities are using with these prisoners a programme originally developed to encourage gang members to disengage.

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Probation allows for individualised follow-up for prisoners leaving prison and mobilises many services (prison administration, justice services, etc.). As a result, it is a key moment to act against the violent radicalisation of these individuals, whether it took place in prison or on release. Local authorities have a key role to play in coordinating these different institutions. They can also use their knowledge and know-how in the field of prevention of reoffending and disengagement.

PREPARE contributes to the prevention of radicalisation through disengagement and rehabilitation programmes during release and probation, notably through multi-agency partnerships that include local authorities.

Efus coordinates this project from 2017 to 2019 with a broad partnership of local authorities and civil society organisation: City of Malaga and Generalitat of Catalonia (Spain), Rotterdam and The Hague (Netherlands), Bagnolet (France) and Vilvoorde (Belgium), Violence Prevention Network and Denkzeit (Germany), Fryshuset (Sweden), European Forum for Restorative Justice (Belgium) and Fondation Agir Contre l'Exclusion (France).

>>>> *National strategy*

There are about 90 individuals in custody in Sweden for violent extremism, the majority of whom are from an Islamist background and the rest from a neo-Nazi environment. The national strategy adopted by the Swedish authorities to deal with these offenders is based on four key principles:

- the correctional work seeks to encourage them to change their life, while at the same time maintaining a high security level and constantly assessing risks;
- detainees are monitored so as to identify any change in both individuals and groups;
- besides this permanent control, efforts are made to build trust with the prisoners in order to encourage them to change;
- the Entré programme, which was originally developed for gang members wishing to disengage, is also used for extremist offenders who are motivated to change their life and leave their extremist environment. Based on multi-agency cooperation, the programme works on values and shows there are alternatives to violence and crime.

Sweden has a 'dispersal strategy' regarding prisoners in custody for violent extremism whereby they are spread out throughout the system in order to prevent the formation of cliques and curb 'recruitment' among detainees. This is a well-established strategy to prevent the spread of destructive groups and gangs as well as negative influence. Furthermore, a central aspect of work in prison and probation consists in ensuring that ordinary, good correctional work is of a high standard and focuses on aspects that are important for other prisoners as well. In particular, efforts are made to build dialogue and trust between detainees and prison staff, to bring about change in beliefs and behaviours (for example through the STICS programme, see below), and to focus on and prepare for post-release situations and challenges.

An important part of this work thus consists in identifying among the general prison population individuals who are involved or at risk of becoming involved in violent extremist groups and to monitor them through checking their background, belongings, networks, contacts, friends and activities in prison. The purpose is to identify risk factors but also resources with which to work.

Another key aspect concerns prison staff, who is encouraged to work on their own values and to act as role models in terms of their behaviour, attitudes and values. Notably, this involves making sure they always treat prisoners fairly and well, while at the same time being alert on possible threats to security and changes in behaviour and attitudes.

>>>> *Entré – a Swedish programme to support desistance from gangs*

Entré is a probation-based programme involving a tailor made approach to support offenders during the post-release phase of their sentence. Based on the building of trust and alliance with the clients, it focuses on solutions to move forward in life and change values from violent, extremist beliefs towards more moderate and non-violent norms and values.

Interventions are geared towards building new experiences that will encourage the offender to change their values, attitude and norms.

Introduced a few years ago, the Entré programme has been successful in supporting people willing to leave organised criminal gangs. In theory, it should be equally successful with violent extremists given the

similarities between these two types of offenders and groups, in particular the way in which such groups isolate members from their former entourage, promote values based on “honour”, threaten individuals who leave the group, and consider society as the enemy and that violence is a valid method for changing it and influencing people.

The programme is currently (2019) being tested by the Swedish Prison and Probation service for inmates involved in violent extremism and so far, it looks promising. Evaluation will take some time prior to validation, in particular because of the limited number of participants categorised as violent extremists.

In addition, Entré provides support through multi-agency cooperation to help the individual find accommodation, a job, to study or to work with a non-governmental organisation (NGO). The objectives are to support the client in building a new life and to create a sustainable environment where the risk of reoffending and re-connecting with violent extremist groups is reduced.

Each case is followed individually and different types of intervention are offered depending on each offender's situation and needs. The fact that only a small number of extremist offenders are involved makes it easier to offer bespoke services.

A great deal of effort is given to matching as closely as possible the individual circumstances and needs of offenders participating in Entré with the probation staff in order to foster dialogue and trust leading to change.

>>>>> *The STICS programme on changing values and behavioural patterns*

Another programme that is often used is STICS (Strategic Training in Community Supervision), which was originally developed in Canada. Used as part of ordinary probation work, it focuses on working with the offender's values and thought patterns through cognitive behavioural therapy, with the objective of bringing about a change in lifestyle. The principle is that the probability of committing a crime is higher if the individual holds pro-crime attitudes and values and therefore that working on changing these will prevent the individual from committing a crime or reoffending.

>>>>> *Training of staff and multi-agency cooperation*

An important part of prison and probation work with extremist offenders relies on providing adequate training to prison staff, in particular on violent extremist environments and ideas, radicalisation processes, methods of intervention and working within a multi-agency partnership.

Indeed, one of the challenges of working with violent extremists, whether in prison or outside, is the fear they inspire among the personnel. Giving information on how the process of radicalisation operates and explaining the approach followed with extremist individuals helps alleviate such fears. Indeed, prison and probation authorities make it a priority that staff are feeling safe and secure when interacting and working with violent extremist inmates.

Another challenge is multi-agency cooperation. Prison and probation authorities must sometimes motivate local authorities and services, social or other, in supporting their client. Indeed, close cooperation with local partners is essential in order to deliver a proper service for offenders when they are released from prison. It has to be noted that approval from the clients is required in order to mobilise local authorities and other partners.

>>>>> *Target audience*

The Entré programme targets individuals who are motivated to leave criminal gangs and violent extremist groups. The population of violent extremists in Swedish prisons is relatively low, with approximately 90 individuals.

>>>> *Multi-Agency approach*

The Multi-Agency approach is central in the Swedish Prison and Probation work and permeates the work with inmates and clients.

>>>> *Role of local authorities*

The probation service works according to the specific needs of each client and situation. Probation is mandatory and doesn't require the consent of the client except when there is multi-agency work, in which case their consent is required.

>>>> *Involved practitioners*

Many practitioners are involved in this approach. Obviously, prison and probation services are first in line but depending on the needs of each, other services also intervene.

>>>> *Governance of these initiatives*

The governance of these initiatives varies depending on each individual case. For example, the case of someone involved in terrorism will be under the supervision of the national security service, whereas that of someone involved in less serious crime will be followed by the local probation authority.

Guidance on governance is provided by the central Prison and Probation Service.

>>>> *Evaluation*

A scientific evaluation of the Entré programme is yet to be released, in particular because there have not been enough cases so far to properly assess the programme. However, the programme has been closely followed by national and international professionals and is seen as promising.