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KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER THROUGH TRAINING ACTIVITIES FOR P/CVE FIRST- LINE PRACTITIONERS

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One of the main pillars in the search to **innovate** and **create new knowledge** is the development of the human resources through training courses. In the past, training courses have been classified as one of the most popular knowledge transfer methods (Brennenraedts, Bekkers & Verspagen, 2006). Even though **knowledge transfer** is an extremely popular topic and has been studied, some gaps must still be filled in order to fully understand knowledge transfer and how the influencing factors affect its results (Zhao & Anand, 2009). Specifically, through **training courses**, the knowledge transfer has now become a common activity in the planning and operations of all organisations and institutions, and something in which they have also invested a great deal of money (Perez-Soltero et al, 2019). Organisations and institutions have reached a consensus on the fact that the **human resources** play a vital role in their success. They invest huge amounts of money in training staff in the hope of improving their operational indicators (Raji & Khan, 2016). Training courses are expensive for organisations in terms of time and money. However, most of them simply calculate the impact and return of their investment by evaluating learning, without considering performance, even if the intention of a training programme is the improvement of organisational performance and not only the individual acquisition of knowledge (Griffin, 2012).

Over the past few years P/CVE training and materials have been increasing significantly, due to a higher awareness from European and national institutions, as well as stronger public opinion, concerning the importance of implementing a prevention strategy to tackle radicalism and terrorism. However, **progress** across Europe is **not uniform**, since some countries have suffered more from terrorist attacks while others, especially in Eastern Europe, barely experienced the threat. The difference in legislation between the European countries in terms of preventive measures, but also criminal law, determines a varying scenario in terms of tools and opportunities in P/CVE. As emerged from previous EU-projects and research (e.g. DERAD & TRAINING AID; H2020 Project MINDb4ACT), responses to radicalisation vary from country to country, depending on the national legislative framework, the diverse preventive practices and the different ways of implementing national and European laws and regulations, as part of the mandates of the agencies involved. In addition, it is important to design courses for a wide variety of practitioners, including welfare and educational agencies, ministries of justice, ministries of the interior, as well as the private sector,

according to the methodological framework of the European Security Agenda. For this reason, courses designed to be implemented on a European scale in the field of P/CVE require a **flexible and up-scalable methodological model**, capable of responding to all the different needs of users and the different jurisdictions.

The Council of the European Union last year approved the new 'Strategies on preventing and combating radicalisation in prisons and on the management of violent terrorists and extremists after release', according to which the top priority on the Council's agenda is the fight against terrorism and radicalisation (General Secretariat of the Council, 2019). A threat that poses continuous challenges and aims to achieve a multi-agency, public-private approach at European level and in cross-border regions. The counter-terrorism threat assessment has highlighted the urgent need to identify **effective enforcement measures** and reintegration projects in the light of the fact that many violent extremist detainees or those accused of terrorism will be released in the next two years. The conclusions of the European Council, where the Ministers of Justice of the 28 Member States sit, identified the P/CVE initiatives with the most impact, and therefore considered 'good practice', in various areas, including training.

The main lesson learned relate to the **difficulties of combining** the national competences on security and radicalisation with the obligation to comply with the implementation of the EU Decisions within the framework of a juridical area focused on prevention. The lack of a clear and shared definition of radicalisation, accompanied by a European legislative vacuum on 'prevention', have made it extremely difficult to provide a comprehensive solution valid for all Member States.

Agénfor International has developed **significant experience** in knowledge transfer/training activities targeting first-line practitioners in the field of P/CVE. The courses implemented over the years, in collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Justice (IT-MoJ), have aimed at preventing the escalation of radicalisation in the prison environment and have helped prisoners and probationers, who are often exposed to jihadist recruitment or self-radicalisation, to overcome the different problems and push factors usually exploited by recruiters, aspects that the DERAD project aimed to address. The courses have been implemented within two different EU-funded projects: DERAD and TRAINING AID, from DG Justice and DG Home respectively.

Another important objective was the formalisation of an inter-agency group, for cross-sectoral practitioners specialised in dealing with radicalised detainees. The specific project actions were directed to create original content for the training of 55 European trainers using e-learning modalities on the phenomenon of radicalisation and to organise cascade training activities in 26 countries. The course consisted of several modules: radicalisation in prison, evolution of prevention in Europe, evolution of policing models, juridical tools for disengagement, and exit strategies. For implementing the courses, a new European online e-learning platform - HERMES - was launched in collaboration with the Czech Technical University of Prague - CVUT, one of the partners involved in different EU-projects and collaborating with Agenfor International. The platform not only contains the content of the Training of the Trainers (ToT), but also the content of each of the associated national courses in Europe. The training was delivered through classroom lessons and online courses. Much of the training was **tailored** for prison and probation service personnel. This material is **currently available** on the HERMES platform both in English and in the national languages of the practitioners trained. Well-established and prestigious forums such as RAN were involved in the dissemination of the training opportunities offered by DERAD. The HERMES platform has already been adopted in the project J-SAFE (co-funded by DG Justice), guaranteeing the sustained use of the platform into 2021 and beyond. Moreover, HERMES has recently been updated and the improved site tested within the framework of the EU-funded project JP-COOPS (DG Justice). Similarly, the training activities implemented within the H2020 project MINDb4ACT were hosted by the platform. Today, HERMES has about **3,000 users** from across 26 countries. This online solution was built around the centrality of the trainer and the specific course: each trainer (or each Member State) has the possibility to customise its own training course, in line with the national plan on radicalisation and framed within the national legislation, who can refer to a common database of e-content (videos, real-life cases, best practices, legislation). Up-scalability, flexibility and centrality of the trainer are the key factors that allow HERMES to offer a practical learning solution.

The second key lesson learned relates to the **data management**: how to consider data produced from the observation of radical dynamics, who can manage it, and to what extent this information impacts on the rehabilitation programmes. In order to address all these issues in a comprehensive way, Agenfor International fixed a strategic

framework common to all courses: 1) compliance with the EU framework (mainly EU Decisions and Directives, but also ECJ and ECHR rulings); 2) complementarity between judicial and police activities. Based upon these fundamental principles, a free space for each trainer to adapt the practices to their national legislations was created.

The security of the established order of the Member States requires the development of a **single front**, which also moves from a homogeneous basic formation, in contrast to the concrete danger arising from the tragic consequences that violent radicalism can generate. With the DERAD project, for the first time in the history of the European Institutions, the Council of the EU finally recognises that the Department of the Italian Penitentiary Administration (with the fundamental support of Agenfor International) has a leading role in the project of legislative and training **homogenisation**.

Technological and **digital innovation** has also facilitated the creation of online platforms and databases able to collect useful information for the training and teaching material as well as to evaluate the results. In addition, the development of solutions involving the use of new technologies, such as the virtual and augmented reality, to serve security improves the trainees performances and their involvement in training. According to Agenfor's experience, this techniques seem to be particularly effective in the context of **prisons**. Being this a critical venue, through the re-creation of scenarios (e.g. riots, assaults, escapes, murders, and suicides) and real-environments (e.g. cells, courtyard, infirmary), the prison staff is able to achieve a high level of situational awareness by rehearsing the need to plan, according to the established procedures, the required interventions in order to deal with potential critical issues, thus avoiding the risk of ineffective action that can result from emergency contexts and the resulting emotional pressure.

Beyond the benefits of cost and time saving, virtual and augmented reality allow an assimilation of information that clearly exceeds regular training experiences. Furthermore, these solutions create new opportunities for working group collaboration, innovating collective planning activities, and, for example, turning a training room into an interactive three-dimensional map on which to study and analyse situations. It is also possible to engage other personnel from different professional fields, who seek enhanced decision-making

skills or specific abilities to act in stressful conditions. All in all, the virtual and augmented reality can contribute to a better management of preventive actions, enhancing practitioners' potential to detect risk indicators.

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