

Deradicalisation in Germany: preventing and countering violent extremism

La desradicalización en Alemania: prevenir y combatir el extremismo violento

Daniel Koehler

Director, German Institute on Radicalization and De-Radicalization Studies (GIRDS).
daniel.koehler@girds.org

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Abstract: This article examines the development of German policies aiming at the deradicalisation of extremists and terrorists which, originating in the late 1980s were initially focused on left-wing terrorists. In the 1990s, the German authorities extended their funding to civil society initiatives which, in the 2000s, has led to the widespread adoption of deradicalisation initiatives. From 2012 onwards, the German authorities extended funding to far-reaching programmes which, focused on the social setting of jihadist extremists, have eventually come to constitute one of the world's most diverse set of projects for preventing and combatting violent extremism (P/CVE). While analysing the basic features of the German P/CVE the article discusses essential lessons for other countries. The most salient German experiences are the diversity of the actors involved, the variety of sources of funding, and general standards of quality.

Key words: Germany, preventing violent extremism (PVE), combatting violent extremism (CVE), deradicalisation, diversity of programmes, fight against radicalisation, terrorism

Resumen: Este artículo examina el desarrollo de las políticas de desradicalización de extremistas y terroristas en Alemania que, en sus inicios a finales de la década de 1980, estuvo centrada en terroristas de izquierdas. En los años noventa, las autoridades alemanas extendieron su financiación a iniciativas de la sociedad civil, lo que conduciría a la adopción generalizada de programas de desradicalización desde la década de 2000. A partir de 2012, Alemania también empezó a introducir programas de gran alcance dirigidos al entorno social de los extremistas yihadistas, los cuales han ido evolucionado hacia uno de los contextos de programas para prevenir y combatir el extremismo violento (P/CEV) más diverso del mundo. Al analizar los rasgos fundamentales del enfoque P/CEV alemán, se discuten los aprendizajes clave para otros países. Las experiencias alemanas más destacadas son la diversidad de actores involucrados, la variedad de fuentes de financiación y los estándares de calidad globales.

Palabras clave: Alemania, prevenir del extremismo violento (PEV), combatir el extremismo violento (CEV), desradicalización, diversidad de programas, lucha contra la radicalización, terrorismo

On 29 November, 2019, 28-year-old Usman Khan attended an academic conference on prisoner rehabilitation in London. Later that day, Khan committed a terrorist attack near London Bridge using a knife to stab five people, two of whom later died. Khan, who was wearing a fake suicide vest, was shot and killed by a police officer after the attack. He was also wearing an electronic tag since he had recently been released from prison on licence conditions. Khan had been arrested in 2010 and convicted in 2012 of terrorism offences including a bomb plot. It was reported that he had completed a prison-based rehabilitation programme called the “Healthy Identity Intervention” and taken part in another initiative designed to facilitate long-term disengagement from terrorism (Shaw, 2019). One year later, two additional terrorist attacks were committed by individuals who were taking part in so-called preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) or deradicalisation

In the context of the ongoing global spread of P/CVE programmes as additional counterterrorism tools,[1] this article provides an overview of the experiences in Germany, where work with P/CVE projects is among the most long-standing and diverse in the world

programmes designed to mitigate the risk of violence. On 4 October, 2020, 20-year-old Syrian refugee Abdullah Al H. allegedly killed one victim during a knife attack in Dresden, Germany. The previous month he had been released from prison where he had been held for past extremist crimes and had already participated in a non-

governmental deradicalisation programme while still incarcerated. After his release, he met with his counsellors before and after the attack until the police investigation led to his arrest (Reinhard, 2020). One month later, on 2 November, 2020, the Austrian born 20-year-old Kujtim Fejzulaj killed four victims during a shooting rampage in Vienna, before being shot by police officers. He had been released from prison in December 2019 and ordered to undergo deradicalisation counselling as part of his parole conditions (ORF, 2020). All three incidents involved terrorist offenders who, after release from prison, had reverted to extremist actions despite monitoring by the authorities and counselling from deradicalisation programmes. Naturally, these (and many other comparable) cases intensified the public debate about the effectiveness, quality and success rates of such terrorist rehabilitation, disengagement, and deradicalisation initiatives. While, among academics, discussion of recidivism rates and success measurement dates back a long time (Horgan and Braddock, 2010)¹, the public and policy makers have more recently been made painfully aware that no intervention comes with a 100 percent success guarantee.

1. For a summary of the recidivism debate see also Renard 2020

In the context of the ongoing global spread of P/CVE programmes as additional counterterrorism tools,² this article provides an overview of the experiences in Germany, where work with P/CVE projects is among the most long-standing and diverse in the world. Key challenges and lessons learned regarding the impact and effectiveness (or lack of a solid evidence-base) on the one hand, as well as essential questions of funding, quality control, standards, and the inherent differences between P/CVE and CT on the other can be studied in detail using the German case. It must be noted, however, that Germany is certainly a European outlier of sorts, since its P/CVE infrastructure is both decentralised to a significant degree, and hybrid as it involves non-governmental and state actors. German federalism predetermines the high degree of responsibility of the Bundesländer (federal states) vis-à-vis the federal government in the P/CVE field, although funding for non-governmental P/CVE efforts, even on the municipality level, mostly comes from Berlin. Other European countries have typically either opted for a more centralised top-down approach (e.g., the United Kingdom or France) or they have left much of the decision making, coordination and agenda setting to local communities and NGOs (e.g., Sweden, Denmark, Norway, Austria). Nevertheless, Germany holds many important lessons for other countries.

About the terminology: P/CVE versus counterterrorism

Prevention or countering of violent extremism (P/CVE) as a term has firmly entered the counterterrorism discourse in most countries during the last decade. Countering violent extremism (CVE) is usually understood to be “an approach intended to preclude individuals from engaging in, or materially supporting, ideologically motivated violence” (Williams, 2017) or simply as “non-coercive attempts to reduce involvement in terrorism” (Harris-Hogan et al., 2015). The

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2. Many German non-governmental actors contest what they call “securitisation” of P/CVE. Even though this fear might be justified partially, since a domination of security authorities in this field might jeopardise strong public-private partnerships. However, it is important not to ignore the inherent hybrid nature of P/CVE, which always by definition includes security and non-security focused aspects. Furthermore, the global increase in support for P/CVE was predominantly driven within a larger CT agenda and framework.

term CVE is now widely used in international and national counterterrorism strategies and policies, even though it has been criticised as being a “catch-all category that lacks precision and focus” (Heydemann, 2014).

A common classification used for P/CVE activities is the “public health model” from Caplan (1964) rooted in clinical psychiatry. Primary prevention in this model aims to avert deviant behaviour in a “non-infected” system. This includes activities aimed, for example, at general awareness raising, resilience or other forms of community coherence. Primary prevention addresses societal issues and related individuals before violent extremist groups and ideologies are encountered and specific risk factors begin to form. Secondary prevention aims to deter solidification of risk factors or a radicalisation process in the early stages. Tertiary prevention aims to prevent recidivism to violent extremism or other

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risky behaviour, implying that an initial desistance or disengagement has been achieved. This term is therefore usually applied to intervention work with individuals who have radicalised to the point of committing crimes or serious acts of violence in the name of

an extremist ideology, or who have expressed intent to do so. Naturally, very different methods and programmes fit into these three categories, as working with long-term members of extremist groups to induce defection is a completely different task from teaching children about the risks posed by extremist groups. In practice, we find no clear-cut distinction between prevention-oriented or intervention-oriented methods and programmes, or between PVE and CVE, since radicalisation processes are not linear and, at the same time, they are dynamic. Hence, it remains futile and almost impossible to decide whether a person is not “radical enough” for an intervention yet, which is why most P/CVE practitioners in the German prevention scene do not differentiate among the different terms and concepts as clearly as the academic discourse might suggest. It would therefore be accurate to see CVE as the umbrella category under which *prevention oriented* initiatives (acting before a person radicalises towards using violence) and *intervention oriented* initiatives (i.e. deradicalisation and disengagement of persons who are already radicalised to the point of using violence) are subsumed. The first category of programmes and tools is commonly referred to as “counter-radicalisation” or as “preventing violent extremism” (PVE), while the latter is known as deradicalisation, rehabilitation or reintegration. Practitioners who are in touch with the client, participant, or beneficiary of any project have to decide on an individual case-by-case basis

which tools and methods to apply. Usually prevention-oriented and intervention-oriented tools are combined in order to achieve effects at all levels: a) preventing further radicalisation, b) decreasing physical and psychological commitment towards the radical milieu and/or thought pattern or ideology, c) preventing the return to violence and extremism, d) increasing resilience to extremist ideologies or groups, and e) helping to build a new self-sustained life and identity. In consequence, as radicalisation is a context bound phenomenon “par excellence” (Reinares *et al.*, 2008), so is preventing and countering it. Practitioners constantly have to adapt their methods and tools to each individual context of the client combined with the goal of achieving the best individual outcome possible (for an in-depth exploration of methods and programme types in the P/CVE field, see: Koehler, 2016).

Where and how does P/CVE usually fit into the overall counterterrorism frameworks in many countries? By definition, P/CVE targets individuals, groups, and processes, all of which involve at least some risk of posing a significant security threat (i.e. violent extremism and terrorism). Therefore, a major part of P/CVE addresses this risk through measures located in the pre-criminal space, ideally long before any illegal behaviour has appeared. However, there are also other types of P/CVE programmes that target terrorist offenders and fully radicalised members of extremist groups and milieus (i.e., deradicalisation programmes). When fighting extremism and terrorism, a country can apply methods and tools ranging across three levels or scales of impact as well as three overall classes of tools. Impact scales can be located on the macro-, meso- or micro-social levels. While the macro scale includes tools that impact on large, nationwide, or regional- and city-focused levels, tools applied at the meso-social level impact on affective and social environments such as work, family, school, community, or peer group. At the micro-social level, the impact is aimed at the individual person (sometimes including the closest social environment). These three impact levels can be targeted with roughly three categories of tools: prevention, repression (or containment), and intervention. When we cross-section tools with impact levels, we are able to identify certain methods and tools ideally working to complement each other in order to address, from every possible angle, a potential threat related to violent radicalisation.

Usually, repressive tools are easily recognised as they are most commonly associated with counterterrorism aiming to contain a given security threat. The relevant actors are law enforcement institutions and the judiciary tasked with arresting as well as punishing individual offenders (micro-social level), prohibiting, or arresting and punishing radical/militant groups (meso-social level), as well as providing intelligence and investigations on a broader movement-specific level, protecting borders, disrupting financial support mechanisms of

terrorism, and so on (macro-social). More positive aspects of repressive methods have been introduced in many states, these including “community policing” (meso-social level) or probation-based counterterrorism (micro-social).

Preventative tools are, by definition, designed to avert an extremist or terrorist threat before it emerges. This means that prevention includes those tools that work with a target group before any radicalisation processes have taken place, with the aim of reducing the attraction of terrorist narratives and ideologies as well as providing certain groups considered to be vulnerable or “at risk” of radicalisation with specific support that promises a positive effect against potential future involvement in extremism or terrorism. The latter measure is based on the premise that certain socio-biographical factors such as unemployment, lack of education, mental health problems, etcetera are driving factors of radicalisation. On the macro-social level, preventative tools are typically implemented in the nationwide educational system (with regard to human rights, embedding the civic standards in the society, obedience to the law and authorities etc.) as well as in civil society at large—if those concerned are allowed to participate in the national political system. Meso-social preventative tools can also be described as “community cohesion” programmes. It is assumed that strong, positive communities are more resilient against terrorist recruitment attempts. On the micro-social level, any tools that help to address and strengthen the individual perception of belonging and civic responsibility are part of the preventative cluster.

Prevention can be roughly divided into general and targeted prevention, depending on the level of strategic direction towards a specified extremist threat or ideology. While general prevention aims to educate broadly in favour of the established political system, targeted prevention aims to reduce attraction towards specific terrorist or extremist groups. It becomes clear that, here, P/CVE has a strong role in spreading awareness about and building resilience against violent extremism.

However, due to its hybrid nature, P/CVE also includes measures directly aimed at reducing an existing risk posed by radicalised extremists, for example convicted terrorist offenders. Hence, deradicalisation and disengagement (as a part of P/CVE) can best be understood as interventions while, of course, the related strategies of reintegration, rehabilitation, or deradicalisation remain closely connected to preventative efforts. On the macro-social level, interventions can be nationwide or international counter-narrative projects, which also aim to prevent involvement in extremism but, ideally, they also induce doubt and reconsideration among those in the early stages of radicalisation (Ashour, 2011; Braddock and Horgan, 2015; Briggs and Feve, 2013). Tools for intervening at the meso-social level are designed to target the family context or the social environment of radicalising or radicalised individuals, in order to stop or reduce their commitment to and involvement in terrorism and extremism,

as well as (ideally) to induce individual deradicalisation and disengagement. Finally, micro-social intervention tools are concerned with individuals and aim to assist them with leaving behind their radical milieus and/or ideologies (i.e. deradicalisation and disengagement).

All of these specific tools on every impact level complement each other and provide valuable resources as well as joint practical support. One illustrative example are former terrorists (as an “output” of a micro-social intervention) who give educational talks in schools or to the media, and advocate against extremism and violence (targeted prevention at all levels input). Another example might be the way law enforcement and the prison system are being structured (repression at all levels) and their enabling and support of prison-based rehabilitation and deradicalisation programmes (micro-social intervention). Law enforcement personnel and prison staff usually benefit from specialised training delivered by intervention experts who focus on recognition of the radicalisation process and methods of intervention. This training is also highly useful for systemic prevention providers, such as teachers, social workers, or mental health specialists. Knowledge about the different forms of extremist ideologies, group structures, motives for attraction, recruitment campaigns, and so on can be gained and shared with all actors in a prevention network in order to improve their effectiveness in their specific tasks.

P/CVE programmes and tools, however, also provide more specific counterterrorism effects, such as weakening of extremist milieus (reduction of manpower either through facilitating exits or by reducing recruitment), disturbance of internal hierarchies and balance of power (by forcing the milieu to fill gaps left by defectors), soft intelligence gathering (through learning about recruitment and radicalisation processes from former members) and, last but not least, the possibility of distinguishing high-risk cases from those on their way out. In short, P/CVE is a field notable for its hybrid nature and ambiguity towards classical counterterrorism, which becomes especially visible through the various public relations strategies used by those programmes and the way they are publicly perceived (Clubb, Koehler, Schewe & O’Connor, 2021). It brings together many different actors following different approaches and sometimes fearing securitisation of their work. On the other hand, any P/CVE work conducted and coordinated by law enforcement and intelligence agencies has become a well-established and widely accepted practice in many countries (e.g. Germany).

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The German P/CVE situation

After more than thirty years of P/CVE activities in Germany, one can now find there one of the world's most diverse and developed array of programmes. In addition to its long history, P/CVE in Germany is also notable for the high degree of involvement of both governmental and non-governmental actors, or, in other words, a "hybrid model of shared responsibility between CSOs and state actors [that] has led to the formation of a diverse and regionally differentiated landscape" (Baaken et al., 2020). The German P/CVE field "developed organically rather than having been designed through the support of academic research and advice" and is mostly built upon pre-existing practical experience from social work (ibid., 2020).

In 2018, the German Federal Criminal Police (Bundeskriminalamt – BKA) counted 1,642 active P/CVE projects and programmes, of which 60% were run by NGOs, which leaves a substantial role for governmental P/CVE (Lützing et al., 2020). The number of active

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projects and programmes has more than doubled in a short time as, just a couple of years earlier, in 2015, the BKA had counted 721 such initiatives (ibid., 2016). This sharp increase of non-governmental programmes³ in particular is indicative of the effects significantly increased funding can have in this milieu. According to the German government, federal funding (excluding state-level funding) for counter-radicalisation programmes increased from 42.8 million euros in 2015 to 147.7 million euros in 2019, after having reached a peak in 2018 with 151.3 million euros (Bundesregierung 2020a). Moreover, tripling of P/CVE funding was surpassed by the resources set aside for deradicalisation programmes in particular. From 300,000 Euros in 2015, this funding flow increased 25 times to 7.5 million Euros in 2020 (Bundesregierung, 2020a).

Far-right extremism clearly dominates the programme landscape as the main target ideology, accounting for 64% of all initiatives, while 32% focus on Islamist extremism (Lützing et al., 2020). Around 62% of the programmes also aim to counter extremism and radicalisation in general (non-exclusive categories in the study), without a specific ideological focus. Many programmes opt to offer a wide array of services, spanning the prevention triad (macro, meso, micro). Around 85% of German P/CVE programmes in 2018 were active in the primary

3. In 2015, the share of NGOs in the P/CVE field was 53.4%.

prevention field, which is to say they engaged in activities such as awareness raising, capacity building, and general youth work with adolescents, for example. Another 47% of the programmes engaged in secondary prevention, and 35% in tertiary prevention. This shows that around half of the projects in the German P/CVE field works with individuals, who are at least exposed to some form of at-risk situation or in an early stage of radicalisation, while the practitioners in the field might be engaged in several prevention areas at the same time. Deradicalisation programmes, in the strict sense, comprise only 6% of the programmes. This indicates the legal, professional, and public complexities involved in this kind of work (ibid., 2020). Most German P/CVE programmes (77%) address persons directly affected by radicalisation and extremism, in particular family members (25%), for the German approach of family counselling counts families of radicalized persons as being directly impacted by the process. In addition, 80% of the programmes also offer support to professionals (e.g., teachers, psychologists, municipality personnel) when they are confronted with cases of radicalisation. The main method of delivering support is training and education (48%) as well as producing information by means of material such as leaflets or brochures (27%). Summarising the most common types of programmes in Germany, Baaken et al. list “social environment support, counseling and support for those at risk of radicalization and the (partially) radicalized individuals, exit support and stabilization, and deradicalization in prisons” (ibid., 2020).

Clearly, this diversity has its advantages, since each programme run by NGOs or governmental actors has its own character and approach, providing a variety that allows a high level of flexibility for the counselling network and the ability to shift cases according to the best fit in regard to approach and counsellor. But the strength of the hybrid approach is also its main weakness, as it is difficult to achieve and maintain equal standards in counselling and to create the necessary internal transparency. But before revisiting the key challenges and lessons to be learned from the German case study, we briefly recount the most important steps that led to the current state of the P/CVE landscape we find here.

The history of P/CVE programmes in Germany

P/CVE in Germany can be dated back to the late 1980s, when the Federal Domestic Intelligence Service (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz – BfV) started a social re-entry programme for left-wing terrorists from Red Army Faction (RAF) circles who were still underground. The programme was active from 1989 to 2000 and, through it, the intelligence offered to former RAF terrorists to pass

on information to prosecutors and help facilitate return to a normal life outside of terrorism through a “drop out” scheme. While it is not known whether the programme actually included any attempt at ideological deradicalisation or rehabilitation assistance for extremists and terrorists in the context of so-called “exit” programmes, it became more widely appreciated in Europe in the mid- and late-1990s. Such initiatives targeting far-right extremists had been piloted in Norway and Sweden (Bjørge et al., 2009), before they were introduced in Germany in about 2000 as well. In fact, German authorities had discussed transferring the RAF dropout program to the extreme right context but had dismissed the idea because of feasibility issues (Seils, 2000). Nevertheless, following the establishment of a non-governmental exit program for neo-Nazis, the BfV set up its own version designed as a hotline in 2001. Since then, almost every German state has set up its

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own governmental deradicalisation programme for right-wing extremists. One study from 2014 counted eighteen identifiable exit programmes for neo-Nazis, of which twelve were run by governmental agencies, mostly criminal police and intelligence departments (Glaser et al., 2014). Even though the challenge of assessing the impact of these programmes is daunting, it can nonetheless be noted that, according

to publicly available information from the programmes’ own accounts, press reports, or the limited data provided by the ministries funding the programmes, these deradicalisation initiatives for neo-Nazis helped about 2,000 individuals to leave extreme right-wing groups between 2001 and 2016.⁴

The crucial step for the German P/CVE landscape came after the country’s reunification in 1989/90. An exponential uptick in far-right violence directed against refugees, asylum seeker homes, left-wing youths, and government institutions caught the authorities unprepared. As a strategic reaction, the Federal Government provided large amounts of funding for local civil society projects in violent hotspots across the new East German Bundesländer between 1992 and 1997. The goal was to counsel local community and municipality leaders on how to deal with right-wing violence and to offer large scale educational and

4. Data corrected for known or estimated rates of recidivism (Innenministerkonferenz, 2016).

social integration measures. The two main aims of the funding scheme were to reduce violence through targeted social integration (e.g. by offering alternative social networks) and, thereby, to pacify public spaces controlled by organised neo-Nazi groups, as well as to build more effective youth service structures in the former East (Bohn et al., 1993).

Only a few years later, on 2 October 2000, an arson attack against a synagogue in Düsseldorf caused the German Chancellor (Gerhard Schröder at the time) to publicly call for a “rebellion of the decent” (Aufstand der Anständigen) directly urging Germany’s population to actively engage against anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism. Even though the attack was later revealed to have been perpetrated by Islamic extremists, it triggered one of the largest funding programmes for civil society P/CVE projects, which were implemented between 2001 and 2007 on federal, state, and community levels in the form of multiple subsequent Action Plans by governmental and non-governmental actors across the country. With this holistic approach to P/CVE, encompassing not just primary and secondary prevention as well as deradicalisation programmes, but also a variety of initiatives aimed at strengthening tolerance, pluralism, and democratic culture, the Federal Government’s approach has always been twofold: to directly target specific forms of violent extremism, anti-Semitism, and racism as well as to positively build a diverse and resilient civil society.

Regarding P/CVE and deradicalisation programmes focusing on Islamic extremism, a small number of pilot projects had already been included in the funding schemes of the early 2000s. However, the first significant governmental and non-governmental programmes targeting this form of extremism did not start before 2010. That year, the BfV initiated a nationwide exit hotline for Islamic extremists called “HATIF”, which was unfortunately discontinued in 2014 due to a lack of calls. Meanwhile, the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge - BAMF) had also started, in January 2012, an additional nationwide counselling hotline for relatives of Islamic extremists, as a public-private-partnership with non-governmental counsellors.

This counselling concept in which initial contact is made between a family member of the targeted radical person and a government employee is widely assumed to be highly successful, at least in terms of the stable demand and high number of case referrals. Between January 2012 and September 2020, the hotline received 4,544 calls resulting in 3,061 counselling cases (Bundesregierung, 2020a). Although these numbers alone are not necessarily significant regarding the quality of the provided counselling, or the overall impact on the radical Jihadist milieu in Germany, they do show that government-led public-private-partnerships in P/CVE can be seen as trustworthy and credible support-providers for families and communities.

Since the establishment of the BAMF hotline, other German states have followed suit and created their own versions of that approach, often called “prevention networks”. Currently, we see some form of public-private-partnerships in twelve out of sixteen German states. They are usually interlinked with the nationwide BAMF programme and include a hotline and a counselling approach directed against Salafist radicalisation. Exchange and coordination between these different networks and programmes attempt to advance joint standards and definitions but, once again, the nature of German federalism sets strict barriers for responsibilities and coordinating institutions run by Federal agencies.

It is characteristic of these government-driven prevention networks against Salafist radicalization that they typically include a wide array of functions and components carried out by very few (often just one or two) non-governmental partners, e.g. including providers of educational talks in schools, prison-based counselling of inmates, training of teachers to recognise radicalization, individual deradicalisation projects, or family counselling. In most cases, the German states applying this model have outsourced and subcontracted one or two non-governmental partners tasked with these components and with running the P/CVE programme. Many states have built coordination centres in order to establish some strategic guidance for the wider civil society prevention field beyond the few directly subcontracted NGOs.

Another development in the German P/CVE field came in 2016, when the Federal Government released the first National Strategy for fighting extremism and supporting democracy as a joint product of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (Bundesregierung 2016). This National Strategy identified, in a unique step—unusual for the German federalism—six “operational fields” (namely, (1) political education, intercultural learning and building democracy; (2) civil society engagement; (3) counselling, intervention, and monitoring; (4) the press and internet; (5) research; (6) and international cooperation) and eighteen strategic partners in the overall P/CVE field, which include local and religious communities, police, victim support organisations, counselling services, intelligence, governmental institutions, national networks, associations, prisons, universities, media and internet actors, youth services, families, job environment, friends of at-risk individuals, military, and schools. As sustainability is a key goal of the National Strategy, several levels of activity have been identified by the Federal Government. On the community level for example, the National Strategy aims to establish the so-called “partnerships for democracy” with a heavy focus on building coordination centres to guide the ground practitioners’ work. On the state level, larger “democracy centres” are tasked with coordinating victim support, exit, and counselling service providers while, on the national

level, a few NGOs have been selected to fulfil an essential role for the overall P/CVE field and are therefore designated for extended quasi-structural funding. Additionally, special pilot projects in the field of preventing radicalisation aim to test new methods and approaches.

A special characteristic of this first German national P/CVE strategy is that it tries to balance financial support for local communities and municipalities with subsidising specialised NGOs as additional service providers. Special interest groups, e.g. women and children, are represented in the National Strategy and the P/CVE project landscape by giving key importance to approaches like family counselling networks and programmes or political education for adolescents. In addition, many non-governmental initiatives have specialised in specific methods, for example, peer-to-peer counselling or approaching adolescents through subcultural elements (e.g. music and sports). While some scholars see this National Strategy and several subsequent state level strategies as “very promising” (Bob, 2018), they have also called for more strategic coordination by the Federal Government. However, the nature of Germany’s federalist structure makes a stronger guidance role of the Federal Government difficult.

Another major step forward was taken in response to a series of racist and right-wing terrorist attacks in 2019 and 2020. The German government approved an 89-point Action Plan targeting the extreme right in November 2020. It includes over one billion euros of extra funding for various initiatives between 2021 and 2024 and opens spaces for key measures such as the establishment of an independent evaluation institute for P/CVE programmes and the creation of a legal basis for long-term funding in the non-governmental space (Bundesregierung 2020b).

Key challenges and lessons learned

Based on what is known about the German P/CVE landscape from the two BKA landmark studies published in 2016 and 2020 (Lützing et al., 2020; Lützing et al., 2016), there has been significant improvement regarding some key issues in these four years. Some structural weaknesses do remain and are subject to ongoing debate among German practitioners and P/CVE experts. One of the most pressing deficiencies of the German P/CVE field is the substantial lack of an evidence-based and systematic monitoring and evaluation of those programme. Furthermore, procedure and quality measurements and standards also need to be improved (Lützing, Gruber and Hedayat 2020). However, some progress has been made as, in the first BKA-report, the state of evaluation

and evidence base was described as “extremely poor”⁵ (Lützinger *et al.*, 2016). In a detailed assessment of available evaluations for P/CVE programmes targeting Islamist extremism in Germany, Kober (2017) identified only eleven evaluations for seven programmes, and these were of a generally low methodological quality and did not provide conclusive evidence about positive or negative effects of the assessed initiatives.

Focusing on a different aspect of the German P/CVE landscape, educational talks given by former extremists are widely considered to be effective prevention tools but here, too, almost no scientific evidence exists. One of the few evaluation studies involving a comparison group found no long-term impact on the students’ attitudes (Walsh and Gansewig, 2019). In addition, other training and awareness raising workshops (one of the main outputs by German P/CVE programmes)

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have so rarely been evaluated that it is simply impossible to identify effects or to assess their quality (Lützinger *et al.*, 2020). At the same time, recent studies have pointed out the need to be more vigilant when it comes to the motivations and qualifications of former extremists who want to be involved in P/CVE measures

(Schewe & Koehler, 2021; Walsh & Gansewig, 2021). To some degree, the lack of a national coordinating body that could establish standards and oversee the strategic development of the overall P/CVE has contributed to this situation, resulting in repeated calls to rectify this problem (Said and Fouad, 2018). Another effect of this structurally determined lack of strategic guidance, which exists due to German federalism, is the problem of identifying and addressing key gaps in the P/CVE landscape. Since 2018, for example, online based and interactive projects have made up only 4% of all P/CVE programmes. Furthermore, left-wing extremism as a target milieu for P/CVE is underrepresented (only 7% of programmes) and mostly addressed by governmental actors (87%). Finally, gender sensitive P/CVE programmes for girls or women can only be found in 2% of these initiatives (Lützinger *et al.*, 2020).

A second challenge in the German P/CVE field comes from the traditionally strong involvement of security agencies (police and intelligence), which have pioneered this activity and pushed major improvements in the field over the

5. In German, „äußerst dürftig“.

decades (Said and Fouad 2018). The fact that it was the BfV that initiated the first German exit programme in the late 1980s and used highly innovative methods to reach the radical target group (including publication of their offers in left-wing extremist magazines) is indicative of their important role in this field. Furthermore, as the target group of P/CVE measures (at least for secondary and tertiary prevention programmes) poses, by definition, a potential threat by being (or becoming) violent extremists or even terrorists, the involvement of security agencies should not be surprising. Nevertheless, widespread fear of “securitisation” of the P/CVE field among non-governmental actors has led to partially “dysfunctional multi-agency cooperation” resulting in conflicts between security and civil society actors (Baaken et al., 2020). Conflicts are sometimes intensified by a lack of long-term and structural funding for non-governmental P/CVE actors, which suffer from high rates of staff turnover and the impossibility of strategic planning or development (in contrast to governmental programmes and security institutions).

A third key issue is the lack of professionalisation and coherent expert training among German P/CVE practitioners. More precisely, stark disparities regarding the level of training and expertise exist among different programmes and personnel, which is the result of an absence of high quality, standardised qualification courses. However, this seems to be a phenomenon in the global P/CVE field in general (RAN, 2017; Fiebig and Koehler, 2019). In most cases, German programmes in this field have been designing and conducting their own personnel training as they regard as inadequate a procedure that can obviously create significant friction between or even within programmes. The BAMF was the first national institution to pick up this issue in 2019, after some states and civil society actors had begun to implement training courses of their own (Fiebig and Köhler, 2018; Ostwaldt, 2018). In 2021, qualification courses for personnel in tertiary prevention programmes are now being implemented and may become a milestone in professionalisation of the German P/CVE landscape.

Another set of challenges faced by German P/CVE practitioners, mostly on the non-governmental side, is the nature of German federalism and the exceptionally strong legislation on data protection, as well as barriers to information sharing. These challenges are widely seen as an impediment to strategic guidance of the P/CVE field in general and to more effective collaboration between governmental and non-governmental actors on the practical level specifically. German federalism has traditionally placed state sovereignty over various issues that lie at the core of effective P/CVE, such as policing, education, and public health. This means that, almost automatically, states need to develop their own local P/CVE strategies and that the Federal Government is usually forced to take the backseat in any practical decisions. However, the Federal

Government can significantly influence the process by providing funding for non-governmental actors and their projects, as well as hosting networking and exchange platforms. Information sharing and data protection is another field which, in some situations, impedes quick and effective collaboration, especially when non-governmental actors need to share personal information about their clients with other institutions. Although these challenges are highly Germany-specific, confronting issues of information sharing and potential barriers set by federalist structures is an important takeaway lesson for countries with similar political and legal situations.

Summing up the selected key challenges and lessons learned from the German case study, quality standards and scientific evaluations would seem to be essential for guiding the development of any P/CVE landscape. The analysis

The analysis of German P/CVE shows that a hybrid multi-agency model involving governmental and non-governmental actors appears to be a key in pushing forward innovations and securing the most adaptable network for reaching the largest possible target group.

of the German P/CVE landscape also shows a hybrid multi-agency model involving governmental and non-governmental actors appears to be a key in pushing forward innovations and securing the most adaptable network for reaching the largest possible target group. Such diverse programme

landscapes automatically come with risks, for example potential conflicts and mistrust between security agencies and civil society actors, but public-private-partnerships based on clearly formulated responsibilities and professionalisation through standardised training lay the groundwork for the most promising route forward. Neither governmental nor civil society actors are alone sufficiently capable or willing to tackle on their own all the complexities and substantial dangers involved in violent extremist radicalisation.

Conclusions

Although P/CVE has become a cornerstone of counterterrorism around the world, the field still largely remains in its infancy. The creation and launching of programmes have outpaced the scientific development of an evidence-base, necessary long-term evaluations, and the establishment of a coherently well-trained group of experts. The field is still mostly filled by practitioners accredited with relevant practical experience (e.g., social workers, psychologists, and religious scholars) but typically without specific training in the complexities

of P/CVE work. Sometimes, former extremists run such programmes, giving preventative talks and conducting case management even though here, too, the evidence base for their efficiency is slim, and the risk of unintended counter-effects is high (Walsh and Gansewig, 2019).

However, P/CVE should not only be seen as a field of work that is automatically and inseparably linked to counterterrorism. The German example, in particular, shows how broad and diverse P/CVE activities can be. Primary, and even parts of secondary prevention programme designs are well placed in the hands of non-governmental and civil society actors who are usually more flexible and adaptable to local needs, and alert to potential doubts against security agencies. If successful, such early intervention or general prevention initiatives can avert a radicalisation process long before security agencies have to step in. Germany shows the considerable potential of a diverse, large-scale P/CVE landscape based on multiple funding sources and hybrid involvement of governmental and non-governmental actors. The risks of such diversity are rooted in the lack of overarching quality standards, strategic guidance, and conflicts between programmes. As a result of recent terrorist attacks in Germany and Europe, the German government has taken significant steps to address these issues, for example with the decision to create an independent evaluation institute for P/CVE programmes, a standardised qualification course for personnel in the field, and creating the legal basis for long-term NGO funding. In this regard, Germany provides many valuable lessons and experiences for other European and non-European countries when it comes to establishing or expanding P/CVE fields.

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