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**Adapting the Good Practices of Offline De-
radicalisation and Disengagement Programmes
Online: a New Approach to Online Prevent and
Counter Violent Extremism (P/CVE)**

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Abstract

This research studies three de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes implemented in Western Europe in order to establish a list of good practices and analyse the extent to which these practices could be turned into online prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) measures. Drawing from brochures, official reports and research about the British Healthy Identity Intervention, the German de-radicalisation programme implemented by EXIT-Deutschland, and the French Recherche et Intervention sur les Violences Extrémistes (RIVE) programme, this study establishes a list of 10 offline good practices. This research demonstrates that it is theoretically possible to adapt most of these good practices into online P/CVE measures, mainly through the use of social media and instant messaging and videocall platforms. Some of these measures have already been implemented as part of pilot studies or campaigns from civil society organisations and governments. Their encouraging results lead to think that such measures could have a positive outcome on the online prevention and countering of violent extremism.

Keywords: de-radicalisation; disengagement; online P/CVE; de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes; EXIT-Deutschland; HII; RIVE.

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“The internet is a tool. Social media is a tool. At the end of the day, tools don’t control us. We control them. And we can remake them. It’s up to each of us to decide what we value and then use the tools we’ve been given to advance those values”

(Obama, 2022 in De Witte et al., 2022)

Introduction

In 2019, Brenton Tarrant shot dead 51 people in a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand after publishing his manifesto online – the same way Anders Breivik did in 2011 before killing 77 people. *The Great Replacement* – as Tarrant entitled his manifesto, in reference to Renaud Camus’ theory – aims at propagating his ideology and calls on other people to conduct similar attacks. The Christchurch attack is considered to be the first “Internet-native” terrorist attack as Tarrant announced his attack online before committing it (Wegener, 2020). The attacker refers to Breivik as a role model, and several copycat attacks followed, inspired one by the other. The most recent example of this *modus operandi* is the shooting in Buffalo on 14 May 2022 in which 10 people were killed and three other wounded. The shooter had posted a manifesto online before the shooting and was livestreaming his attack on an online platform (Bolaños Somoano and McNeil-Willson, 2022).

All these examples show the potential disastrous consequences of the availability of extremist content online, and the importance the Internet can play in extremist propaganda and radicalisation. They also raise the issue of online content moderation, and the role the Internet – and online platforms in particular – can and should play in countering violent extremism, on- and offline. Between October and December 2021, Meta took actions against 7.7 million pieces of terrorist content on its platforms (Meta, 2022). This shows

the tremendous amount of extremist content that is available online, and this is only one among many other companies. Measures such as content takedown policies have been taken by companies to try and fight the amount of violent extremist content online. Laws were also enacted for that purpose, such as the one passed by the European Parliament in April 2021 requiring flagged content to be removed by the hosting platform within an hour (European Parliament, 2021). Some initiatives have also been taken by private groups. Two major examples of this are the Counter Extremism Project (CEP) which raises awareness among tech companies of the importance to fight the misuse of online tools by extremists (Counter Extremism Project, 2022) and Tech Against Terrorism which aim is “to support the tech industry in building capacity to tackle the use of the internet for terrorist purposes whilst respecting human rights” (Tech Against Terrorism, 2021). However, these measures and initiatives are still not sufficient. Indeed, some researchers claim that the current approach to online prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) does not work (Lakomy, 2022), which is illustrated by the abundance of jihadist propaganda still easily available online. This can be explained by the focus being put on certain big organisations, therefore leaving the door open for other smaller groups to disseminate violent extremist content. Besides, extremists’ ability to use alternative means of propaganda when one is shut down (Lakomy, 2022, p. 2) only confirms the insufficiency and inefficiency of current P/CVE measures. This therefore calls for a new approach of online P/CVE and new ways of designing and implementing measures.

If online P/CVE is still young and not deemed very successful yet, offline de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes as we know them nowadays have been implemented for about 50 years now (Köhler, 2015a, p.424). These programmes have been assessed by governments, researchers and other stakeholders and these evaluations offer an insight on which practices are efficient – or not – in de-radicalisation and disengagement processes. What this dissertation aims to do is to draw on the results and assessments of three

European offline exit programmes to see how these programmes could inspire a new approach to online P/CVE policies. For that purpose, there are two different objectives that will need to be fulfilled. The first one is to determine the good practices of the programmes studied, drawing on brochures, research papers and official reports about these programmes. The second objective is to adapt these offline measures into online ones. To do so, for each “good practice” established in the previous section, this dissertation will focus on the actors involved, the relationship between them, and the actions taken. This will serve as a starting point to assess whether similar sets of actors, relationships and actions can be implemented online and, if so, how.

A chapter will be dedicated to an in-depth explanation of the methodology used in this research. However, some essential points can already be addressed here. First, this dissertation will rely on a comparison between three different Western European programmes. The choice of these programmes was deliberate in order to cover a wide range of approaches to disengagement and de-radicalisation. The countries chosen purposefully cover a relatively small geographical area of study. Indeed, since radicalisation, disengagement, and de-radicalisation processes are context-bound as will be demonstrated below, it seemed essential to cover only a small area. However, a transnational comparison is still relevant as the Internet is borderless, and this dissertation studies how to turn offline practices into online measures. Second, a good practice can be understood in this dissertation as a measure implemented in two or more of the programmes studied and which is therefore deemed to be successful or helpful in helping programmes’ participants disengage from extremist groups and/or de-radicalise. Finally, as the core of this study relies on an adaptation of offline practices into online measures, a methodology will have to be established to do so. Indeed, there is no existing research aiming at doing something similar, and there is therefore no existing method to do so that has been approved by other researchers. This method focuses on the actors involved, the relationship between them, and the actions taken offline, and how to keep these criteria

similar online. This method will be described in more details in the methodology chapter.

In this dissertation, the three disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes studied are the British ‘Health Identity Intervention’ (HIII), the French ‘Recherches et Intervention sur les Violences Extrémistes’ (RIVE), and the German EXIT-Deutschland programme.

The first de-radicalisation and disengagement programme studied in this dissertation is the British Healthy Identity Intervention (HII), implemented in England and Wales (Dean *et al.*, 2018). It was developed by Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS), formerly known as the National Offender Management System (NOMS) and piloted in 2010 and 2011. HII was the first programme of this kind to be offered to convicted offenders in England and Wales (Dean *et al.*, 2018). The main goal of this programme is to “promote disengagement and reduce an individual’s willingness to offence on behalf of an extremist group, cause or ideology (i.e. desistance)” (Dean, 2013, p.98). The HII is delivered on a one-to-one basis, or sometimes with two facilitators for one participant (Dean, 2013, p.100), and not as a group programme. This was a deliberate choice to ensure that programme participants reflect on their own trajectory and are not influenced by others taking part in the programme (Dean, 2013). This pilot programme was facilitated by psychologists and probation officers and offered to 33 convicted offenders. It is worth noting that it was conducted regardless of their ideological background (Dean *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, offenders influenced by several types of extremism – including but not limited to jihadism, right wing extremism or even animal rights extremism – took part in this programme. A central point of the programme was to work on identity issues encountered by the programme participants as extremists turning their backs on the extremist group they used to be part of implies an identity change (Dean *et al.*, 2018) and therefore identity issues. HII aims at addressing the reasons of offenders’ engagement and also the “attitudes,

beliefs and perceptions that enable them to offend” (Dean, 2013, p.100). To do so, the programme has five sub-categories of objectives to reach its main goal of desistance and disengagement. It aims at helping participants to fulfil their needs legitimately, reduce their offence-supportive attitudes, beliefs and thinking, increase their emotional tolerance and acceptance, increase their personal agency, and finally express their values and pursue their goals legitimately (Dean, 2013, pp. 98-100). Since the pilot, HII has been modified and adapted (Dean, 2013) according to the results of this pilot experiment. However, this dissertation focuses on this pilot project only, as the literature available focuses on this pilot study and not its current adaptation and therefore offers more insights on the measures implemented by HII and their results. However, if the current adaptation is highly similar to HII, it is extremely likely that the result of this research would have been similar if the new version of HII had been studied.

The second programme studied was implemented between 2016 and 2018. The French *Recherche et Intervention sur les Violences Extrémistes*¹ (RIVE) was imagined by the Directorate of Penitentiary Administration and implemented by the *Association de politique criminelle appliquée et de réinsertion sociale*² (APCARS). The name of the programme, besides being an acronym, also symbolises the change aimed for by this programme as ‘rive’ means ‘shore’ and therefore illustrates the idea of crossing the bridge between extremist and mainstream ideology. This programme was created to face the rise of criminal cases linked to terrorism and the growing number of radicalisation referrals in France (Lauféron, 2018). Radicalisation was therefore perceived by authorities as something that needed to be stopped and overturned. This programme was designed for people on parole or on probation and was made compulsory for participants via a court decision. Participants were either convicted for

¹ Research and Intervention on Extremist Violence (translated by the dissertation’s author).

² Association for Applied Criminal Policy and Social Reintegration (translated by the dissertation’s author).

terrorism-related charges or for non-terrorism-related charges but identified by the penitentiary administration as on the path to radicalisation. The programme was designed to have a maximum of 50 participants simultaneously and focused on a general approach of radicalisation and the individual and not just the ideology (Lauféron, 2018). It therefore was not only designed for jihadists but for extremists no matter which ideology they believed in (APCARS, 2019). It aimed at helping participants find a job and fully reintegrate themselves in society through a one-to-one mentorship-like relationship with the programme dispensers (Lauféron, 2018). This programme was replaced in 2018 by the *Programme d'accueil individualisé de ré-affiliation sociale*³ (PAIRS) (RAN, 2022). Despite the rebranding and the change of organisation in charge of implementing the programme, both programmes are very similar. Because of the literature available, this dissertation focuses on the RIVE programme. However, the results of this research regarding best practices could be extended to the PAIRS programme to a great extent considering its similarity with RIVE. Finally, the third programme this dissertation will focus on is the disengagement and de-radicalisation programme provided by EXIT-Deutschland, implemented in Germany. EXIT-Deutschland was created in 2000 by a criminologist and former policeman, Bernd Wagner, in association with a former neo-Nazi leader, Ingo Hasselbach (EXIT-Deutschland, 2014). This initiative was created to help right-wing extremists leave their organisation behind. This organisation runs radicalisation prevention and awareness programmes, and also has a de-radicalisation purpose. Indeed, it provides support to current radicals wanting to disengage from right wing extremist groups. Unlike the two other programmes studied in this dissertation, the programme run by EXIT is not compulsory and cannot be part of a court sanction. On the contrary, it makes the voluntary aspect of the programme a central point (EXIT-Deutschland, 2014). Indeed, a de-radicalisation accompaniment project with this organisation can only start if a

³ Individualised Support and Social Reaffiliation Programme (translated by the author)

radical reaches out to EXIT as it is considered to be the first step toward a successful exit by the structure. Germany being a federal state and issues such as de-radicalisation usually being addressed within each state and not by the federal government, EXIT is one of only two disengagement and de-radicalisation programmes that are implemented nationwide (EXIT-Deutschland, 2014). Since 2000, this organisation worked on 800 exit cases with a recidivism rate of three percent (EXIT-Deutschland, 2014). Exit from extremism is defined by this organisation as more than just a behavioural change. Indeed, for the project managers to consider an exit successful, the former radical not only has to have left the group they were involved in, but also having undergone a reflection regarding the ideology and causes of initial radicalisation. As they put it, an exit can be considered successful “when the fundamental ideologies and purposes of the previous actions have been resolved” (EXIT-Deutschland, 2014, p. 9). To reach this success, EXIT provides radicals wanting to de-radicalise with psychological assistance, social support, and practical help (EXIT-Deutschland, 2014, pp.10-11). This global approach is similar to what can be found in the two other programmes studied, and therefore justifies the relevance of their comparison.

By studying these three programmes, this dissertation aims at answering the following question: to what extent and how can we adapt the good practices of the British HII, French RIVE, and German EXIT-Deutschland offline exit programmes into online P/CVE policies?

To answer this question, this dissertation is divided in four chapters. First, a literature review will give an overview of the state of the art of the research in radicalisation and de-radicalisation studies and discuss the main debates and concepts related to this topic. The second chapter will describe in depth the research design and methodology used in this dissertation, namely by justifying the choice of the programmes studied and by describing the process followed to adapt offline measures into online practices. A specific attention will also be

given to the changes in methodology that were required during the research. It will also address the limitations of this study. The third and fourth chapter will be the core of the research and findings. Chapter three will focus on the list of good practices that was established by comparing the three programmes studied and the measures that they implemented and will describe and discuss each of these practices. Chapter four will address the online adaptation of the good practices highlighted in chapter three by focusing on the actors involved, the relationship between them and the actions taken. This chapter will also discuss the potential challenges inherent to an adaptation from offline practices to online measures. A concluding chapter will then summarise the results and discuss them in a wider context.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Many scholars agree to say that radicalisation and de-radicalisation are two major concepts that lack a clear definition (Whittaker, 2022; Schmid, 2013). Yet, these concepts are widely used in academia and in everyday life by policymakers and in the media. Radicalisation is perceived as a root cause for terrorism (Schmid, 2013) and therefore as a major issue in the public debate. Because of this, and even though this is not necessarily true as will be shown later in this chapter, radicalisation is perceived as a serious problem that needs to be addressed to prevent and counter terrorism. However, despite a wide agreement on the necessity to understand radicalisation processes and how to prevent or stop them, ways to address them – such as P/CVE and de-radicalisation programmes – are still widely discussed and there is little agreement on these topics. This literature review therefore aims at depicting the state of the art in academia on topics relevant to this dissertation and establishing a theoretical framework on which this research will be based.

This literature review will address the main issues and theoretical debates regarding radicalisation models and definitions and the role the Internet can play in radicalisation processes. This chapter will also discuss theories and debates in de-radicalisation studies and address the challenge of defining key concepts related to de-radicalisation programmes and online P/CVE measures.

Defining radicalisation

As Schmid points out, “the literature on (de-) radicalisation is young” (2013, p. 1) as these topics became of interest to academics and governments in the last couple of decades. Researchers are still to agree on a definition of radicalisation, and so are governments. The difficulty to agree on a unique definition of radicalisation can be explained by the variety of

radicalisation processes that can be observed and by the fact that it is a “context-bound phenomenon” (Schmid, 2013, p. 5).

The different definitions of radicalisation set out by different governments, even within Europe, are a good illustration of this. The official definitions of radicalisation adopted by the governments of the three countries studied in this research (France, Germany and the United Kingdom) are listed in the table below.

Table 1: Official definitions of radicalisation in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany.

United Kingdom	“‘Radicalisation’ refers to the process by which a person comes to support terrorism and extremist ideologies associated with terrorist groups” (Home Office, 2021)
France	“Radicalisation is a behavioural change which can lead some individuals to extremism and terrorism” (Ministère de l’Intérieur, 2019) ⁴
Germany	“Radicalisation is the increasing tendency of individuals or groups to think and act in an extremist manner and the growing willingness to advocate, support and/or use illegitimate means, up to and including the use of violence, to achieve their goals” (Bundeskriminalamt, 2022) ⁵

⁴ Original quote: “La radicalisation est un changement de comportement qui peut conduire certaines personnes à l’extrémisme et au terrorisme” (translated by the dissertation’s author).

⁵ Original quote: “Radikalisierung ist die zunehmende Hinwendung von Personen oder Gruppen zu einer extremistischen Denk- und Handlungsweise und die wachsende Bereitschaft, zur Durchsetzung ihrer Ziele illegitime Mittel, bis hin zur Anwendung von Gewalt, zu befürworten, zu unterstützen und/oder einzusetzen.” (translated by the dissertation’s author using a translation software).

Some similarities can be found between them, but slight differences show a different understanding of the process and concept from one country to another. For example, the French government has a definition similar to the British one as they both link radicalisation to extremism and terrorism. However, the main difference is that the French definition depicts terrorism and extremism as a possible outcome of radicalisation when the British definition presents terrorism and extremism as the necessary consequence of a radicalisation process. The German definition differentiates itself from the French and British ones as it does not explicitly link radicalisation to terrorism but only links it to extremism. Yet, it agrees with the British one on the fact that extremism is a necessary outcome of radicalisation and not just a possibility. These differences between the definitions given by governments reflect the numerous academic debates on radicalisation definition and theories.

Modeling radicalisation

Dzhekova *et al.* (2017) state that scholars try to answer two main questions when it comes to radicalisation studies: how radicalisation happens and why it happens. Both these questions can be answered by the creation of models depicting the radicalisation process, but the answers differ from one model to another. Indeed, the only point on which most researchers agree is that radicalisation is a process (Schmid, 2013, p. 1). However, more common characteristics can be found in the main models and theories. According to Hafez and Mullins, there is a consensus in academia on three key elements which characterise radicalisation. These elements are that radicalisation “is usually a (1) gradual “process” that entails socialization into an (2) extremist belief system that sets the stage for (3) violence even if it does not make it inevitable” (2015, p. 960). One of the main radicalisation models which abides by these key characteristics is Moghaddam’s staircase to terrorism (2005). According to him, radicalisation could be represented by a staircase with a

ground floor and five following steps, each of them bringing the radicalised individual closer to the fifth floor, which is the metaphor for the terrorist act. Radicalisation is therefore the process of climbing these metaphorical steps. However, this model is criticised by other academics as radicalisation is not a linear process and the staircase metaphor tends to represent it as straightforward.

The radicalisation puzzle developed by Hafez and Mullins (2015) represents a good alternative metaphor to avoid any misconception about radicalisation being a linear process. Hafez and Mullins even define radicalisation without using the idea of a process by stating that radicalisation “involves adopting an extremist worldview, one that is rejected by mainstream society and one that deems legitimate the use of violence as a method to effect societal or political change” (2015, p. 960). The authors explain that the radicalisation puzzle is made of four pieces which are “personal and collective grievances, networks and interpersonal ties, political and religious ideologies, and enabling environments and support structures” (2015, p. 958). These four elements can happen at the same time or not and interact with each other, therefore not implying the idea of a process, and even less so of a linear process. However, despite knowing what the pieces of the puzzle are, “we lack the representative image that informs us how best to put them together” (Hafez and Mullins, 2015, p. 959). Each piece can take several shapes depending on the level of analysis, which is why it is essential to not only focus on the individual level in radicalisation models but also on a wider scale. Many scholars (Schmid, 2013; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008) agree on the fact that radicalisation should be analysed on the micro, meso and macro levels, *i.e.*, on the individual, group, and society levels. For instance, McCauley’s and Moskalenko’s model categorises the 12 mechanisms leading to radicalisation they identified into these three levels of analysis (2008). The three levels interact with each other and self-reinforce the radicalisation process, which is why it is essential to analyse them together and not only focus on the individual level the way Moghaddam’s staircase to terrorism (2005) does for example. As summed up

by Dzhekova *et al.*, “radicalisation is a dynamic, multi-stage and multifaceted phenomenon that occurs at the intersection of individual push factors (biographical exposure and personal trajectory, intrinsic motivations, grievances) with pull factors (such as exposure to ideologies and recruiters) and occurring in an enabling environment, conducive radicalisation setting or in the presence of favourable external influences” (2017, p. 29).

Many scholars modelling radicalisation also insist upon the need for a distinction between violent (or behavioural) radicalisation and non-violent (or cognitive) radicalisation. Violent radicalisation “involves participating in a range of radical activities, whether legal or clandestine, which could culminate in terrorism” when non-violent radicalisation “involves acquiring values, attitudes, and political beliefs that deviate sharply from those of mainstream society” (Hafez and Mullins, 2015, p. 961). Since radicalisation is often perceived as a root cause for terrorism, this distinction is even more so important as it shows that the use of violence does not necessarily come with radicalisation. Researchers and policymakers recently started to use the term “radicalisation into violent extremism and terrorism”, violent extremism being understood as consisting of “promoting, supporting or committing acts which may lead to terrorism and which are aimed at defending an ideology advocating racial, national, ethnic or religious supremacy and opposing core democratic principles and values” (Dzhekova *et al.*, 2017, p. 24). The use of this extensive term highlights the evolving nature of the phenomenon and the need for the terminology to represent it.

The role of ideology in radicalisation is also vigorously debated among scholars. Ideology is a piece of the radicalisation puzzle (Hafez and Mullins, 2015) and one of the three key elements in the model theorised by Kruglanski *et al.* in their 2014 article. However, ideology is not part of Moghaddam’s Staircase to terrorism (2005) and does not play a major role in McCauley’s and

Moskalenko's model (2008). This debate has not been settled yet in academia, which shows the need for new research to fill the existing gaps in knowledge.

Online radicalisation

There are a few examples of individuals who self-radicalised online with no extremist ties offline and the term online radicalisation is widely used by policymakers and the media. However, Whittaker argues that online radicalisation is a "nebulous and ill-defined concept" (2022, p. 15) because the empirical evidence proving the existence of online radicalisation is "less clear" (2022, p. 16). If solely online radicalisation seems to be an extremely rare event, the role the Internet can play in an individual's radicalisation process has been widely demonstrated by many scholars. It is therefore important to keep in mind that the Internet can play a sometimes-major role in radicalisation processes, but often interacts with other offline factors.

The Internet is perceived as one of several "enabling environment and support structures" of radicalisation (Hafez and Mullins, 2015) because of the wide amount of propaganda and communication tools available online. Extremist and terrorist organisations use the Internet for propaganda purposes, which encompasses recruitment, incitement, and radicalisation (Schmid, 2020, pp. 597-598). Spreading an ideology through propaganda might not be a successful way for extremists to recruit new members as ideology does not necessarily play an important role in radicalisation (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008). However, the instant and tailored communication tools available online can be used by extremist organisations to leverage local grievances in order to radicalise individuals and recruit new members. Extremist organisations are "continuously adapting to the evolving technologies and are particularly adept at using social media and the internet for radicalization and recruitment purposes" (Schmid, 2020, p. 378). The use of the Internet for radicalisation purposes is a continuing threat, which most likely will grow even bigger in the

next few years. Some researchers already warn about the potential of the yet-to-be-created metaverse – or web3 – for radicalisation purposes (Elson *et al.*, 2022). The communication and meeting possibilities that the metaverse will offer will increase extremists' ability to recruit new members as they will be able to reach more people more easily and with new methods.

Because of the anonymity the Internet can offer (Benson, 2014, p. 298), online recruitment and radicalisation is hard to tackle. The Internet is by definition an international network, and therefore requires multinational cooperation to halt online radicalisation. International organisations such as the UN and Europol acknowledge the need to stop the exploitation of the Internet by extremists for recruitment and radicalisation purposes (Whittaker, 2022, pp. 16-17). On a more local level, Germany recognises the role of modern communication tools on the Internet such as social media for propaganda purposes (Bundeskriminalamt, 2022). The United Kingdom and France announced in 2017 a joint initiative to tackle online radicalisation (Prime Minister's Office, 10 Downing Street, 2017), showing a shared concern over the topic.

As radicalisation processes occur both online and offline, measures have been implemented online and offline to prevent and counter radicalisation. These measures rely on theories showing that de-radicalisation and disengagement from extremist and terrorist organisations can happen, even though there is still a lot of debates regarding the triggers of such processes.

De-radicalisation and disengagement theories

If radicalisation scholarship is already limited, research on de-radicalisation lacks even more proper theorisation of the concepts and explanations on how and why de-radicalisation happens. As Köhler puts it “deradicalization as a field of research and as a practical counter-terrorism and anti-extremism tool is still in its infancy” (2015a, p. 427). However, there is already a wide agreement on

the distinction between de-radicalisation and disengagement, and to a lesser extent between de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation even though there is no agreed-upon definition of these notions.

De-radicalisation can be defined as a process of thought change from extremist to moderate world views (Köhler, 2015a; Horgan and Braddock, 2010) or as the measures implemented with the aim of individuals following this process (Schmid, 2013; Horgan and Braddock, 2010). Two major researchers in the field, Daniel Köhler and Alex Schmid, define this concept with two different definitions. According to Köhler, de-radicalisation is a “process of individual or collective cognitive change from criminal, radical or extremist identities to a non-criminal or moderate psychological state” (2015a, p. 420). However, for Schmid, de-radicalisation is “programmes that are generally focusing on radicalised individuals or groups of suspected or convicted terrorists with the aim of rehabilitating them and re-integrating them into society or at least dissuading them from further use of political violence” (2013, p.50). De-radicalisation theories tend to understand de-radicalisation as a process and not as the measures taken for this process to happen. This can be explained by the fact that they are aiming to demonstrate what triggers this process and how the process itself can happen. To follow the lead of this scholarship, this chapter – and more generally this dissertation – will therefore refer to de-radicalisation as a process and not as a programme. When talking about measures implemented for de-radicalisation purposes, it will be explicitly mentioned.

A distinction can also be found in academia between de-radicalisation and counter-radicalisation. Researchers consider that counter-radicalisation has a preventive aspect (Schmid, 2013; Gielen, 2019) and therefore does not target extremists but aims at “the strengthening and empowering of the community from which [terrorists] might emerge and which might, if neglected, be deemed potentially supportive of them” (Schmid, 2013, p.50).

It is also essential to distinguish between de-radicalisation and disengagement. As explained above, de-radicalisation is understood as a cognitive process during which an individual reduces their involvement in extremist ideology. Disengagement on the other hand focuses on a “behavioural role change” (Köhler, 2015a, p.420) and leaves aside the psychological aspect. Disengagement is a “process whereby an individual experiences a change in role or function that is usually associated with a reduction of violent participation” (Horgan and Braddock, 2010, p. 280). Disengagement can happen at the individual or collective level. At the collective level, it depends on external factors such as being defeated by an enemy for instance (Souleimanov & Huseyn, 2014, p. 16). At the individual level however, it is a “complex multi-causal and multi-layered process where no single motivation prevails” (Souleimanov & Huseyn, 2014, p. 19). This individual disengagement can happen on a “self-imposed basis” (Souleimanov & Huseyn, 2014, p. 20) and therefore be voluntary, or be imposed and therefore involuntary like in case of an imprisonment or death (Souleimanov & Huseyn, 2014, p. 20). Voluntary disengagement depends on a set of push and pull factors which varies from one individual to another (Souleimanov & Huseyn, 2014; Köhler, 2015a). Push factors can be understood as internal factors pushing towards disengagement such as disagreement with the organisation. Pull factors are external factors pulling individuals out of their engagement such as a marriage or the birth of a child. Disengagement can lead to de-radicalisation, but it is not always and necessarily the case. The distinction between de-radicalisation and disengagement is essential as it enables researchers and policymakers to focus on the risk of violence that some individuals pose. When focusing only on disengagement, stakeholders do not have to tackle the psychological aspect of de-radicalisation which might be more difficult to address for legal and political reasons.

The definitions of de-radicalisation used by the governments of the three countries studied in this research are close to the academic definitions

mentioned above and reflect the academic debates. For example, the UK government refers to de-radicalisation as the actions taken when France and Germany refer to the cognitive change that it implies (see Table 2), echoing the debate mentioned at the very beginning of this section.

Table 2. Official definitions of de-radicalisation in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany.

United Kingdom	“De-radicalisation usually refers to activity aimed at a person who supports terrorism and in some cases has engaged in terrorist related activity, which is intended to effect cognitive and/or behavioural change leading to a new outlook on terrorism and/or disengagement from it.” (HM Government, 2011)
France	“de-radicalisation [implies] a change of beliefs and way of thinking of the person” (Comité interministériel pour la prévention de la délinquance et de la radicalisation, n.d.) ⁶
Germany	“de-radicalisation [is also] a very individual process: It depends heavily on personal circumstances. During the de-radicalisation process, the radicalised person not only gives up their commitment to extremist positions, but often also the previous social environment within the extremist scene. In contrast to prevention in general, de-radicalisation refers to already radicalised individuals who have at least partially adopted an extremist worldview” ⁷ (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, 2022)

⁶ Original quote: “[la] déradicalisation [implique] une modification des convictions et de la façon de penser de la personne” (translated by the dissertation’s author).

⁷ Original quote: “die Deradikalisierung [ist auch] ein sehr individueller Prozess: Sie ist stark von persönlichen Umständen abhängig. Während des Deradikalisierungsprozesses gibt die radikalisierte Person nicht nur ihr Bekenntnis zu und ihr Engagement für extremistische Positionen auf, sondern oft auch das bisherige soziale Umfeld innerhalb der extremistischen

As Daniel Köhler puts it, “deradicalization is neither a singular moment, nor a linear evolution” (2015a, p. 421) and is influenced by a lot of different factors. On that point, it echoes to radicalisation processes and the variety of aspects that can have an impact on an individual’s radicalisation. However, it does not mean that individuals going through a de-radicalisation or disengagement process are simply going backward through the same steps they did during their radicalisation process. Experts point out the lack of academic de-radicalisation and disengagement models (Köhler, 2017). This can be explained both by the lack of data available because of the small amount of people who go through these processes, and the many differences that can be observed from one individual to another because of the highly individualised aspect of such processes. However, Kate Barrelle theorised a pioneer disengagement model in 2015. According to this “Pro-Integration Model”, disengagement happens through changes in five domains: “Social Relations, Coping, Identity, Ideology and Action Orientation” (Barrelle, 2015, p. 133). Significant changes in these five domains enable an extremist to be reintegrated in mainstream society and be considered as a former extremist and therefore disengaged from extremist activity. Individuals can decide to change in these five areas by themselves or be helped and guided through this process by de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes.

De-radicalisation and disengagement programmes (DDPs)

De-radicalisation and disengagement programmes have been created to answer two challenges that states are facing. First, captured extremists cannot be detained forever, namely because of the lack of resources. The growing number of detained extremists is an exponentially rising threat because extremist

Szene. Im Unterschied zu Prävention im Allgemeinen bezieht sich Deradikalisierung auf bereits radikalisierte Personen, die zumindest teilweise ein extremistisches Weltbild angenommen haben” (translated by a translation software).

inmates can radicalise other inmates. Besides, imprisoning lots of extremists is a challenge considering the problem of carceral overpopulation. In particular, the three countries studied in this research – France, Germany, and the UK – have been facing a problem of carceral overpopulation for several years (Observatoire International des Prisons, 2022; UK Parliament, 2015; Flade, Stukenberg, 2018) and therefore need to be able to release extremist offenders. The second reason for creating DDPs is linked to the first one. Indeed, since prisons are a breeding ground for radicalisation and recruitment, it is essential to tackle radicalisation issues in prisons (Rabasa *et al.*, 2010, p. 50). De-radicalisation and disengagement programmes are not necessarily limited to prison settings but can be implemented in lots of different contexts. Programmes similar to the de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes we see nowadays can be dated back to the 1970s (Köhler, 2015a, p. 424). These programmes can take several forms and vary a lot from one country to another, even in Europe (Rabasa *et al.*, 2010, p. 118). First, they can be provided to voluntary participants or be part of a judiciary sanction and therefore be compulsory. Secondly, they can focus solely on ideology – which is usually not the case in Europe – or have a wider approach and focus on several aspects of the life of extremists to enable their disengagement.

Three main areas of focus have been identified by Daniel Köhler to maximise the efficiency of de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes: “the affective, pragmatic and ideological levels” (2015a, p. 423). These programmes should help radicals on the affective level by enabling participants to create alternative networks and social relations outside of the radical group. They should focus on more pragmatic issues such as finding a job and an accommodation to ensure participants’ reintegration in mainstream society. Finally, the ideological aspect should be addressed to help programme participants distance themselves from radical ideologies and prevent recidivism. This is something seconded by Rabasa *et al.* in their study of de-radicalisation programmes for Islamist extremists. According to them, “deradicalization

programs need to help ex-militants and their families find alternative sources of income, housing, health care, and education” (2010, p. 55). Their focus on the families of the radical is explained by the fact that radical groups tend to support the everyday life of radicals but also of their families. Therefore, to lower the cost of exit for a militant, de-radicalisation programmes need to ensure that their families will also receive the support needed. However, even if these three main areas of focus have been identified as a way towards programmes’ positive results, a major challenge in de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes remains to assess their efficiency.

A major problem regarding de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes is their evaluation (Rabasa *et al.*, 2010; Köhler, 2015a). One of the main reasons for that is the challenge posed by the definition of a programme’s success. A way to define success could be that “the majority of the ex-militants should remain disengaged” (Rabasa *et al.*, 2010, p. 49). However, disengaged does not mean de-radicalised, and disengagement without de-radicalisation might not be considered a success in some programmes. The three programmes studied in this dissertation are a good example of this. As will be shown in the next chapters, the British and French programmes aim for a disengagement and a lowered risk posed by the programmes’ participants to society, when the German one aims for a more important cognitive and behavioural shift to consider an exit to have been completed. However, it is worth noting that every exit of a group has a strategic value for anti-terrorism and counter-extremism strategies because it requires the group to explain this exit and might also weaken the hierarchy (Köhler, 2015a, p. 423). Therefore, even if only one programme participant completely exits a terrorist group, it could still be considered a success.

Prevent / Counter Violent Extremism (P/CVE)

As researchers point out (Davies *et al.*, 2016; Schmid, 2020; Harris-Hogan *et al.*, 2016), preventing violent extremism (PVE), countering violent extremism (CVE), or preventing / countering violent extremism (P/CVE) is ill defined and can refer to a broad range of measures. The blurred distinction between CVE and de-radicalisation is also confusing. Davies *et al.* argue that there are “subtle differences” between these two concepts lying in the respective focus on “prevention or intervention” (2016, p. 57). However, Harris-Hogan *et al.* distinguish between primary, secondary, and tertiary CVE, with tertiary CVE referring to programmes “designed to work with radicalisation ‘after the fact’”, once it is too late for preventive and targeted interventions (2016, pp. 9-10). Therefore, what Davies *et al.* consider to be de-radicalisation, Harris-Hogan *et al.* call tertiary CVE. To add to the confusion, “the terms *preventing* and *countering* are often used interchangeably” according to Schmid (2020, p. 421). A definition is nonetheless needed, and Davies *et al.*’s one seems to offer the wider consensus because of its broadness. The authors explain that CVE “is a broad umbrella phrase that covers a wide array of possible approaches to dealing with radicalization to extremist violence” (2016, p. 57).

A growing area of interest in CVE research is the role of the Internet, “both as a forum through which narratives are transmitted and as an avenue for delivering CVE programs” (Davies *et al.*, 2016, p. 51). Online P/CVE is also an ill-defined concept, but Davies *et al.*’s definition of CVE mentioned just above seems broad enough to offer a consensus and is therefore the one that will be used in this dissertation. Online CVE will therefore refer to these “possible approaches to dealing with radicalization to extremist violence” (2016, p.57) when they are conducted online. Since Schmid explains that “the terms *preventing* and *countering* are often used interchangeably” (2020, p. 421), this dissertation will use Davies *et al.*’s definition of CVE more generally as a way to define P/CVE. However, there is little agreement on “the most appropriate means” (Davies *et*

al., 2016, p. 51) to design and implement online P/CVE measures. As pointed out above in this chapter, the Internet can play a role in the radicalisation process of individuals. It is therefore essential to also focus on the role the Internet can play in the prevention and the countering of the radicalisation process through the implementation of online P/CVE measures. This is what this dissertation aims at doing by drawing on the results of three offline de-radicalisation programmes and demonstrating how their good practices could be used to inform a new approach to online P/CVE measures.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Research design

This dissertation aims at determining how the good practices of the British HII, the French RIVE, and the German EXIT-Deutschland offline exit programmes can be adapted into online P/CVE policies. The main objectives of this dissertation are therefore to establish a set of good practices, and then to adapt them into online measures. To do so, this research uses a qualitative approach to the question by studying existing research and evaluation of three pre-determined de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes. Drawing from these, the goal is to induct the good practices that can be seen in DDPs. From these inducted results, this research will deduct online P/CVE measures that could be inspired by the DDPs' good practices.

Philosophical approach

Defining what knowledge is and how we gain it is a challenging task in every research, even more so in social sciences as the criteria of falsifiability are less obvious than in experimental sciences. As explained above, this research adopts both an inductive and a deductive approach as there are two objectives to be fulfilled to answer the research question addressed in this dissertation. An inductive approach “involves the search for pattern from observation and the development of explanations [...] for those patterns” (Russell Bernard, p.7), which is what this dissertation does by observing the results of the practices in DDPs to determine the good practices. A deductive approach is defined as “start[ing] with theories [...] and hypotheses derived from theories, and then moves on to observations” (Russell Bernard, p.7). The hypothesis here is that online P/CVE measures can be inspired by offline DDPs practices. To demonstrate it, this dissertation will use the good practices observed in the first

part to adapt them into online measures and see the extent and the means through which they could be implemented. If such a double inductive and deductive approach might seem confusing, the clear distinction between the two steps in the research process – first, the determination of the good practices and second, the adaptation of these practices in online measures – justifies this choice.

As (online) radicalisation and P/CVE are highly context-bound (including but not limited to the socio-economic, political, geographic context); it is essential for this dissertation to acknowledge this and take it into consideration when conducting the research. Therefore, this research will adopt a constructivist approach and will admit that “reality is a product of human intelligence interacting with experience in the real world” (Elkind, 2005, p.334). For this reason and because radicalisation and extremism are extremely dependent on the context in which they are observed and addressed, the findings of this research might not be true and applicable to other contexts and might be influenced by the researcher’s set of beliefs, namely when it comes to defining highly disputed terms such as extremism.

Methods of data collection and analysis

The question of the methods used to collect and analyse data in this research must be addressed in two times. First, the collection and analysis of the data to establish the good practices of the DDPs studied; and then the collection and analysis of the data to adapt these offline practices into online measures.

To establish the good practices of the DDPs, this research will compare three case studies: the British HII, the French RIVE, and the German EXIT-Deutschland programmes. These case studies have already been presented in the introduction of this dissertation, and this chapter will therefore not describe them again. However, it seems essential to justify the choice to focus on these three specific programmes. The first criterion used to choose these programmes

was the countries in which they are – or were – implemented. Radicalisation and extremism are highly context-bound, but the Internet is borderless by definition. Therefore, it seemed essential to study programmes in different countries which share common values, standards and – to a certain extent – culture. This is the reason why the three countries studied – France, Germany, and the United Kingdom – have been chosen. As Western European countries, they fulfil the criterion of sharing values, standards, and culture. Another decisive aspect in the choice of these three specific Western European countries was a language issue. In order to be able to access as much and as precise data as possible, the author chose to focus on countries from which they have at least a basic understanding of the official language. This is therefore in part a convenience sampling but is however justified by research purposes and an aim for accuracy. Besides, the programmes studied cover a wide range of disengagement and de-radicalisation approaches, which therefore gives a better understanding of what offline disengagement and de-radicalisation good practices are. More generally, using case studies in this research is justified by the qualitative approach chosen by the researcher, and by the fact that it enables a more context-dependent understanding of the measures implemented, which seems essential to understand what the good practices are. In this research, a good practice is defined as a measure implemented in at least two of the DDPs studied and is therefore deemed to be successful or helpful in helping programme participants disengage from extremist groups and/or de-radicalise them.

Initially, this research was aiming at gathering data on the case studies in two different ways in order to enable a triangulation of results, and therefore be as accurate as possible. The first method of data collection envisioned was to focus on programmes' brochures as well as academic and governmental publications addressing and evaluating the programmes studied. The goal of this method was to establish what these authors highlight in terms of practices implemented in de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes. In order to confirm (or not)

these findings, the aim was to conduct semi-structured interviews with security practitioners who work or used to work in these programmes. The interviewees would have provided an insider view on the measures implemented in the programmes they worked for. However, these interviews did not happen because of the lack of response from the organisations that were contacted. This can potentially be explained by the fact that the only way for the researcher to get in touch with these organisations was via email, which is not a very engaging way to establish a first contact. Besides, because the names and contact details of the staff members in each programme studied are not publicly available, the contact could only be established through the general contact email addresses of the organisations. This could also probably explain the lack of responses. However, despite this change in the envisioned methods, it was still possible to gather enough data through publicly available documents, and this research is therefore still relevant.

Once a final set of good offline practices was established, this dissertation focused on how to adapt these in online P/CVE measures. As this part is where the innovative aspect of this research lies, there is no pre-existing methodology to do such a thing. Therefore, a rigorous attention was given to respecting the method described below in order to ensure the viability of the results. To adapt offline practices into online measure, each practice was analysed to determine the actors involved and the relation between them, and what the actions taken are. Drawing from this categorisation, the research then focused on how the actors involved can be present online, how a similar type of relationship can be recreated on the Internet and how the actions can be implemented online.

Ethical considerations

An essential point of reflection when designing this research was the ethical implications. De-radicalisation is a highly sensitive subject, and it was essential to ensure the safety of the researcher and of the people potentially involved in

the research, and last but not least to consider the ethical implications of the results of this research.

As this dissertation was supposed to involve interviews as a method of research, the human interaction that this would have implied required an even more important focus on ethical questions. It seems essential to point out that an ethics application form was submitted and approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Glasgow to conduct these interviews. If the interviews had taken place, each interviewee would have signed a consent form and would have been given a plain language statement explaining the goal of the research and the interviews. The researcher would also have provided them with a summary of the results of the research. As the interviewees would all have been security professionals who worked or used to work in DDPs and the interviews would have focused on their work, it was assumed that there should not be any potential disruption or negative consequences for them as a result of these interviews. However, the researcher would have made sure that the interviewees were aware that they could withdraw their consent to take part in this research at any point, and that they could choose to not answer some questions. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the physical security of the researcher and the interviewees would have been ensured by conducting the interviews through online platforms in order to prevent risks of transmission of the disease.

The final ethical consideration to address is the outcome of this research. This dissertation focuses on existing good practices and how to adapt them from the physical world in the online world. Online P/CVE measures are already implemented in the countries studied, and if the ethics of such practices can be questioned, it is assumed that the democracies studied – to which the results will apply – design and implement P/CVE measures with ethical implications in mind. Therefore, there does not seem to be potential damageable consequences as a result of this research being done. If anything, this dissertation could help

design online P/CVE measures in the future, and therefore help reduce the amount of online violent extremism.

Limitations

This research has three main limitations. The first one lies in the fact that the interviews that were initially planned were not conducted, and therefore the initial data gathering was not triangulated. If it did not prevent the research from being done, it necessarily implies that the data on which this study relies is weaker than initially expected. The second limitation is that this dissertation aims at adapting offline practices into online measures. There is no research demonstrating that extremist behaviour is similar online and offline, and that similar measures taken offline and online to prevent and counter violent extremism have similar effects. Therefore, this dissertation would benefit from other research focusing on these questions. Finally, the third limitation is that the online P/CVE measures that are adapted from offline practices in this research are only theoretical. Some of them are already implemented as part of an online P/CVE programme, but this is not the case for all of them. Therefore, further research to implement a pilot programme with these measures would be needed to validate the hypothesis that they would indeed be efficient to prevent and counter violent extremism online. This third limitation is deeply linked to the second one, as research demonstrating that these measures have a similar effect online and offline would be a first step towards showing a similarity between offline and online behaviours when it comes to extremism.

Chapter 3: Offline Good Practices

In order to fulfil the aim of this dissertation – *i.e.*, turning offline disengagement and de-radicalisation practices into online P/CVE measures – this chapter aims at analysing the practices implemented in the three de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes studied. The aim is to establish a list of practices implemented in two or more of the programmes studied, which will be considered good practices. The documents studied to establish this list of practices are research papers, books, and chapters, official reports, and official brochures from these programmes. First, a list of practices was established for each programme thanks to these documents. Then, by comparing the practices of each programme, a list of the practices that can be found in two or more of the programmes studied was established and will be described and discussed in this chapter. As the three programmes studied are inspired by the same other de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes and by each other, the number of similar practices found when researching and writing this chapter is not surprising. However, it is worth noting that despite targeting different audiences and having a different approach and understanding of disengagement and de-radicalisation, these programmes still have similar practices.

This chapter will address each practice after the other, starting with the practices implemented by all programmes and then by only two of them, in no particular order within these categories. This chapter will discuss how each of these practices is implemented by EXIT-Deutschland, in the Healthy Identity Intervention (HII), and in the *Recherche et Intervention sur les Violences Extrémistes* (RIVE) programmes. It will also discuss the link between these practices and the literature addressed in the literature review above to demonstrate the strong links between the academic scholarship and the measures implemented.

The importance of mentorship and a strong personal relationship

Both RIVE and the HII focus on the personal relationship existing between a participant and the facilitator(s) assigned to them. This form of mentorship is crucial to the success of both programmes and is one of the key aspects of the programme implementation in both instances.

In *Les Surgissants. Ces terroristes qui viennent de nulle part*, David Puaud (2022) mentions several times the importance of a close relationship between the programme participants and the facilitators in RIVE. Most of the time, the facilitator is an educator. It is essential for them to develop a close relationship with the participants in order to build trust and therefore be able to discuss the topics that need to be addressed with them. Puaud writes “we perceive [...] the necessity for professionals [...] to develop what they call ‘mentorship’, i.e. the fact of being present to create a secure environment between the person under care and the professional”⁸ (Puaud, 2022, p.60). Puaud also adds later on in his book that “RIVE professionals used mentorship, defining it as a sense of listening and developing reflective skills to help the mentee analyse their own problems”⁹ (Puaud, 2022, p.207). Marc Hecker adds more details about this form of mentorship developed in RIVE. If the programme director referred to “team mentoring”, it was actually more of a relationship between the participant and their educator as they are the professionals with whom participants spent most of their time (Hecker, 2021, p.32). According to Frédéric Lauféron, director of the APCARS – the association in charge of implementing RIVE – the mentoring has two advantages, “reducing the attrition rate, *i.e.* of loss or

⁸ Original quote: “on perçoit [...] la nécessité pour les professionnels de [...] développer ce qu’ils nomment « mentorat », c’est-à-dire le fait ‘être présent pour créer un environnement sécurisant entre la personne prise en charge et le professionnel” (translated by the dissertation’s author).

⁹ Original quote: “Les professionnels de RIVE utilisèrent le mentorat définissant celui-ci comme un sens de l’écoute et du développement de qualités de réflexion pour aider le *mentee* à analyser ses propres problèmes” (translated by the dissertation’s author).

failure, and to contribute to the emergence [...] of a motivation to change”¹⁰ (Lauféron, 2018, p.135) for the participant.

The Healthy Identity Intervention also gives a huge importance to the mentoring. Indeed, it is even considered to be a “crucial” point in several publications about the HII. Christopher Dean in his chapter entitled “The Healthy Identity Intervention” states that “the relationship between the facilitator/s and the participant is viewed as crucial to facilitating change and disengagement” (2013, p. 101). This is also pointed out by a report published by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), which once again highlights how “crucial” (2013, p. 3) the relationship between the facilitator and the participant is.

The central role given to the mentoring relationship can be explained by the need for trust from the participants and the facilitators in order to have meaningful interactions and expect positive results. A form of commitment on both sides might also prevent the participants from facing a sentiment of abandonment if the programme provider is not fully involved and available – which could become a grievance and lead back the participants to a new process of radicalisation or the continuity of the one that was fought by the programme.

A flexible accompaniment

A common point among all three programmes is the necessity to have a flexible accompaniment and to be able to tailor each programme to each participant.

EXIT-Deutschland states that “Every case is specifically tailored to the individual, but follows [...] general guidelines [...]” (2014, p.10). The general guidelines include “making the decision”, “leaving the scene”, “restructuring” the dropout’s life and “family counselling” (EXIT-Deutschland,

¹⁰ Original quote: “réduire le taux d'attrition, c'est-à-dire de perte ou d'échecs, et de participer à l'émergence [...] d'une motivation au changement” (translated by the dissertation’s author).

2014, pp.10-11). It is a fairly broad framework and gives the team of facilitators room for manoeuvre.

A similar idea can be found in the way the HII was designed. Indeed, if a set of sessions has been created and precise goals are aimed for, facilitators are free to “work at their own pace” and “select the sessions that are most suited to the individual” (Bennett, 2012, p.32). This is also confirmed by the Analytical Summary of the pilot study conducted by Chris Dean, Monica Lloyd, Carys Keane, Beverly Powis and Kiran Randhawa. Indeed, one of the key findings they highlight in their study is that “the interventions were responsive and flexible in sequencing, pace and material” (Dean *et al.*, 2018, p.1). As NOMS puts it, HII is “a flexible intervention” (2013, p.8), which enable the programme to be “tailored to fit” (Nazwan, 2020, p.52) one’s need.

Finally, this flexibility can also be found in RIVE when it comes to the way of dispensing the programme. Indeed, educators are free to and even encouraged to have meetings with the participants outside of their offices and in the participant’s everyday life environment. André Dumoulin explains that “interviews [are] conducted at RIVE’s offices as well as in the person under care’s neighbourhood or home”¹¹ (2019, p.52). This enables the creation of a trustful and more personal relationship and opens the floor to more varied discussions in more relaxed settings. RIVE’s educators can also organise meetings and field trips with participants in order to address specific questions or issues. For instance, several participants met with researchers specialised in geopolitics of the Middle East at Sciences Po – a prestigious higher education institution – after discussing the topic with their educators and expressing the will to learn more about the ongoing conflicts there (Puaud, 2022).

The fact that these three programmes give so much importance to the flexibility and the possibility to make the programme fit one’s need can be explained by

¹¹ Original quote: “les entretiens [sont] réalisés aussi bien dans les locaux de Rive que dans le quartier ou au domicile de la personne prise en charge” (translated by the dissertation’s author).

the highly personal processes that radicalisation, disengagement and de-radicalisation are. As there is no obvious path to (de-)radicalisation and both of them as well as disengagement are highly context-bound, it would be unrealistic to expect a programme to fit everyone's needs without any adaptation needed. However, a general framework of action can be established thanks to past experiences and academic literature. These three programmes have a general framework adapted to the public they target and bound to their local and national context. However, the three of them still give space to adaptation in order to best answer the needs of the participants and therefore give higher chances of success to the programme and reduce the risk participants represent for the society.

Education to critical thinking

Another essential point in the three programmes studied is the focus on critical thinking, and how to help participants distance themselves from extremism not by forcing them to believe a counter-narrative – which most likely would not work – but by teaching them how to think critically, and therefore question their beliefs and actions. As David Puaud sums it up for RIVE, “it consists in working on the education of an autonomous way of thinking, and not offering a ready-made counter-narrative or behaviour”¹² (2022, p.64) and “it was not about suppressing those beliefs [linked to the violent ideology], but trying to shift the person's point of view”¹³ (2022, p.207).

The Healthy Identity Intervention refers to this education to critical thinking as a “cognitive restructuring (changing thinking)” (NOMS, 2013, p.8). The

¹² Original quote: “Il s'agit de travailler à l'éducation d'une pensée autonome, et non de proposer un contre-discours ou un savoir-être clés en main.” (translated by the dissertation's author).

¹³ Original quote: “Il ne s'agissait pas de supprimer ces croyances-là [liées à l'idéologie violente], mais de tenter de décaler le point de vue de la personne.” (translated by the dissertation's author).

concept is however pretty similar, as the idea is to encourage offenders to change their way of thinking in order to adopt a non-extremist world view.

Finally, EXIT-Deutschland focuses a lot on this aspect, as the ideology is at the core of their disengagement and de-radicalisation work. According to Daniel Köhler, EXIT-Deutschland “explicitly puts the ‘critical reflection’ of the participant’s past and ideology at the very core of their work” (2015b, p.133). Indeed, as the organisation explains it itself, “personal reflection is of great importance” and it aims at showing “an alternative world view” (EXIT-Deutschland, 2014, p.4) to the dropouts.

The notion of critical thinking is essential when it comes to de-radicalisation and disengagement as it enables the participant to challenge their own way of thinking. Radical people usually have extreme world views which rely on inaccurate beliefs and statements, and on a confusion between correlation and causality. Therefore, educating participants to give them the tools to discuss and question their beliefs will ultimately help them distance themselves from extremist point of views. Programmes also probably anticipate that trying to force a counter-narrative into participants’ minds could backfire, and lead to a harder de-radicalisation and disengagement process. Besides, the fact that these programmes focus on education to a critical way of thinking rather than a counter narrative also helps preventing a future radicalisation process. This hypothetical new radicalisation process could happen within the same spectrum of ideology, or in a completely different one. By teaching and educating participants to think critically, these programmes empower them as individuals in their day to day lives and therefore give them the tools to distance themselves from their current extremist beliefs in the first place, but also prevent future extremist engagements.

Providing practical help to exit

Members of extremist or radical groups usually have a lot to lose by leaving the group they belong to, even more so if they have high-ranked roles. Indeed, most of their social network is usually part of the group, they might fear for their safety, or even struggle to find a new job or accommodation – especially if they were convicted. Therefore, the three programmes studied also address the practical aspect of disengagement and help participants with practical issues. EXIT-Germany is a great example of this practical help, as the organisation has been dealing with disengagement for decades now and has experience with the kind of help that might be needed by dropouts, in particular if they had lots of responsibility in the group they are exiting from. According to their brochure, EXIT-Deutschland “provide[s] practical help” but does “not provide any financial help” (2014, p.4). More precisely, they can help a dropout with psychological assistance and more practical issues (2014, p.11). They also attempt at providing “security and safety to the dropout” (2014, p.4). This is done in order to protect the dropout from potential revenge from members of the group they are leaving (EXIT-Deutschland, 2014, p.11). All of this is essential to ensure a successful disengagement, as leaving an extremist group behind is not only about ideology but also about everything else that has to be left behind in order to exit a group.

The Healthy Identity Intervention also addresses practical aspects of disengagement, but to a lesser extent as this programme mainly focuses on issues related to identity. However, it still encourages participants to find what they used to find in extremism through “alternative ways and through different commitments, *e.g.* relationships, interests, employment and values” (Dean, 2013, p.100). Therefore, they encourage and help participants to create new social networks or find a new job in order to help them fulfil their needs and develop a new form of identity away from extremist networks.

Finally, RIVE also focuses on practical help, and educators tend to leverage this help with practical issues to bond with participants and create a trustful relationship. As Frédéric Lauféron puts it, “the individual under care often has to cut themselves off from the network that contributed to their radicalisation and it is therefore necessary to help them reintegrate, including in relational terms”¹⁴ (2018, p.135). David Puaud also gives several examples of situations in which the educator helped the participant with paperwork and bureaucracy, which gave them the opportunity to bond over something. As he explains, the programme has to go “beyond a strictly judiciary care” (2022, p.62).

Overall, whether the help with practical issues is thought as a part of the programme in its own right, or whether it is leveraged by facilitators as a mean to bond with participants, it still constitutes an essential part of all the programmes studied.

A one-on-one delivery of the programme

As mentioned above, essential features of the programmes studied include a flexible accompaniment and an important place given to mentorship. Both of these practices echo with a one-on-one delivery of the programme. Indeed, none of these programmes are conducted in group settings. If sometimes the programme is not conducted in a one-one-one setting, it is because there are several facilitators, not because there are several participants. If the programmes obviously take care of several participants at the same time, participants do not interact between themselves. Keeping participants away from each other prevents a form of group thinking which would threaten the positive evolution of the participants’ way of thinking. It also enables the participants to really think for themselves and share their true opinions with the programme

¹⁴ Original quote: “l’individu pris en charge doit souvent se couper du réseau qui a participé à sa radicalisation et il convient donc de l’aider à se réinsérer, y compris en termes relationnels.” (translated by the dissertation’s author).

facilitators, therefore giving the facilitators the information they need to truly help the participant.

EXIT-Deutschland requires that the dropout reach out to them in order to help them (*i.e.* they do not seek participants and it is not part of a judiciary sanction) and from there creates a highly personal accompaniment to help them leave extremism behind. Every part of the process is discussed with the individual and “extremely dependent on the specific case” (EXIT-Deutschland, 2014, p.10).

HII also dispenses the intervention in a “one-to-one (or two facilitators to one offender)” (Bennett, 2012, p.32) setting. This enables a “motivational and engaging approach” (Dean *et al.*, 2018, p.1), and therefore participates in the success of the programme. It also encourages participants to show a form of self-reflection. As they are only interacting with the facilitator(s), they cannot hide behind the thoughts and talks of someone else and are not “overly influenced by [the personal values and beliefs] of their associates” (Dean, 2013, p.100). This is also extremely linked to HII’s use of pro-social modelling (NOMS, 2013, p.8). Indeed, if the worker needs to be a model for the offender, they need to have a personal relationship in which the offender gets to interact personally with the programme facilitator in order to see, experience and understand their way of interacting and be inspired by it.

Finally, RIVE also delivers its programme in an individual setting. As André Dumoulin explains, the programme is delivered in an individual setting, and consists in meetings and outings of “at least six hours per week for the first months”¹⁵ (2019, p.52). This is deeply linked to the idea of a mentorship which requires time one-on-one in order to create a trustful relationship between the facilitator(s) and the participant.

¹⁵ Original quote: “au moins six heures par semaine les premiers mois” (translated by the dissertation’s author).

Tackling attitudes and beliefs used to justify harmful behaviours

Participants in the programmes studied are on their way to disengage from violent extremist groups. Therefore, it is essential to address the attitudes and beliefs these people use to justify harmful behaviours in order to help them distance themselves from these attitudes and beliefs, and therefore prevent these offending and harmful behaviours.

The Healthy Identity Intervention focuses on issues related to identity, and therefore might come to addressing issues such as beliefs used to justify harmful behaviours. Dean explains that HII “seeks to address both the reasons why people are motivated to engage and offend and also those attitudes, beliefs and perceptions that enable them to offend” (2013, p.100). Once identified, these reasons, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions are dealt with by equipping participants “with strategies to facilitate their desistance” (Dean *et al.*, 2018, p.3). Facilitators also empower participants by enabling them to “express, tolerate and cope with powerful emotions without denigrating or harming others” (Bennett, 2012, p.32). This aspect is one of the main goals of HII, and therefore essential to the success of the programme.

RIVE also addresses the attitudes and beliefs used to justify harmful behaviour, especially when it is religiously justified. Indeed, there is a religious advisor in the team of facilitators and his role is to engage with participants and discuss religion with them in order to help them distance themselves from extremist understandings of religious texts (Puaud, 2022) while safeguarding their religious beliefs. Addressing the religious aspect of radicalisation when it is relevant to do so was a requirement from the government which designed the specifics of the programme before choosing an organisation to run it. Indeed, the specific requirements state that “when the radicalisation is linked to religion, the care and support given should include this dimension”¹⁶ (Lauféron, 2018,

¹⁶ Original quote: “lorsque la radicalisation est en lien avec la religion, la prise en charge devra inclure cette dimension” (translated by the dissertation’s author).

p.135). Other attitudes and beliefs justifying harmful behaviours are also addressed, but more generally by the psychologist or the educator rather than by the religious advisor. Educators often try to address these touchy questions by using some kind of tricks to avoid a confrontation leading to hostile reactions and enable a fruitful dialogue (Puaud, 2022, p.63).

Finally, EXIT-Deutschland puts ideology at the core of its work and is therefore extremely focused on beliefs justifying harmful behaviours. Indeed, according to Köhler, they put “‘critical reflection’ of the participant’s past and ideology at the very core of their work” (2015b, p.133). EXIT-Deutschland also addresses the issue of ideology on the three levels that are the micro, meso and macro levels (*i.e.*, individual, group and society levels) (Köhler, 2015b, p.138). EXIT-Deutschland mainly addresses beliefs and not attitudes justifying harmful behaviour as ideology is seen as the “main driving force behind behaviour” (Köhler, 2015b, p.137).

As demonstrated, addressing attitudes and beliefs that justify harmful behaviour is therefore a common practice among the three programmes studied, and it is deeply linked to the idea of educating participants to critical thinking. Indeed, critical thinking should lead to a self-reflection on one’s beliefs and attitudes, and the fact that facilitators question participants’ beliefs and attitudes should trigger critical thinking from the participants who is asked to question their ideologies, beliefs and actions.

A multi-disciplinary team

The delivery of the programme by a multi-disciplinary team is another key feature of the three programmes studied in this research. Indeed, each programme has facilitators coming from different professional milieus and can reach out to other experts and professionals when needed.

The first example of this is EXIT-Deutschland. The organisation itself was created by a former neo-Nazi leader and a criminologist policeman (EXIT-Deutschland, 2014, p.1). The organisation can reach out to a wide range of professionals depending on the dropout's needs. This range goes from psychologists to employers and is more generally referred to as "a large range of institutional and practical contacts" (EXIT-Deutschland, 2014, p.4).

RIVE also has a fairly diverse team to deliver the programme. Indeed, the director is a doctor in law, there is a religious referent, social workers, psychologists, a psychiatrist, and a secretary (Puaud, 2022, p. 206). To this list can be added the range of experts that can be contacted to discuss specific issues with the participants, and the constant involvement of probation services following the participants (Lauféron, 2018, p.135).

Finally, HII is also delivered by a varied team. Christopher Dean explains that the team in charge of HII is "multi-disciplinary" (2013, p.90). More precisely, the programme is delivered by psychologists and probation officers (Nazwan, 2020, p.52). If the central role of probation officers might seem surprising at first, it is essential to remember that HII is run by HM Prison and Probation Service, therefore explaining the importance of probation officers in this programme.

The three programmes studied have diverse and multi-disciplinary team, which seems to be a key feature in order to deliver the programmes. This echoes the academic scholarship. Indeed, if disengagement processes are not completely understood yet, it is however admitted that a wide range of push and pull factors impact on these processes but that they change from one individual to another (Souleimanov & Huseyn, 2014; Köhler, 2015a). Therefore, having a wide range of professionals delivering an exit programme enable an impact on more factors, and most likely better chances at a successful disengagement.

Aiming for a lowered risk rather than a total disengagement

De-radicalisation and disengagement processes are long, complex, highly context-bound and difficult to assess. Therefore, it is difficult for de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes to aim for a complete disengagement or de-radicalisation. It is also important to keep in mind that participants could always be lying about their beliefs to get out of a compulsory programme when in reality they are still convinced that the extremist ideology is worth following. That being said, some programmes still aim for a complete disengagement, but two of the programmes studied here consider a lowered risk of harmful behaviour a success. Indeed, as will be demonstrated below, RIVE and HII are not necessarily aiming for a complete disengagement but are satisfied if a participant represents a less important risk for society when they finish the programme.

However, it is worth noting first that EXIT-Deutschland has a way more precise requirement to consider their accompaniment successful. According to the organisation, an exit “is considered completed [...] when a critical reflection reassessment as well as successful challenge of the old ideology have taken place. Thus, ‘exit’ to us means more than simply leaving a party or group” (EXIT-Deutschland, 2014, p.9). Therefore, the organisation aims for a complete disengagement with people exiting the group they used to be part of but is also aiming for a form of de-radicalisation by expecting a cognitive change regarding the ideology besides the behavioural change.

On the other hand, Dean *et al.* recognise that “disengagement may not be realistic for some individuals” (2018, p.3) when analysing HII and explain that “it was also developed with the specific aim of helping participants to become less willing or prepared to harm others, or to offend, regardless of their engagement with an extremist group, cause and/or ideology” (2018, p.3). Rather than aiming for a complete de-radicalisation and disengagement, HII focuses on the behavioural shift from violent to non-violent and not a complete cognitive

shift on ideology. This might be explained by the fact that this programme was run and designed by the government for convicted offenders and was therefore thought with national security concerns in mind. If a non-violent radical person is not good news for national security, it is still a lesser problem than a violent radical person.

Similarly, RIVE is also considered to be successful even when participants are not fully de-radicalised and disengaged. As long as the risk participants represent is smaller when they leave the programme than when they started it and the participants do not commit any offence, it is considered a success. David Puaud illustrates the success of the programme by giving the example of several participants who were deemed “medium- to high-risk”¹⁷ at the beginning of the programme and are “low risk”¹⁸ after two years of accompaniment (2022, p.208). Here again, this could be explained by the fact that this programme was designed in part by the government with national security concerns in mind. Therefore, as long as participants do not commit any offence after leaving the programme, it can be considered a success as the threat to society was eliminated.

This difference of goals echoes the academic debates regarding definition of de-radicalisation and disengagement, and more broadly the debates on how to define (violent) extremism and extremists. It is therefore not surprising to see similar differences in the practical implementation of de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes.

A continuous mid- to long-term involvement

Another essential point in the delivery of de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes is the mid- to long-term involvement from participants and staff.

¹⁷ Original quote: “à risque moyen à élevé” (translated by the dissertation’s author).

¹⁸ Original quote: “risque faible” (translated by the dissertation’s author).

Research on EXIT-Deutschland and RIVE highlight the need for the programme facilitators to be involved and committed to the participants for a mid- to long-term period. RIVE was stopped after two years and participants were therefore part of the programme for a maximum of two years. However, through the example of one of the participants who complains that he was starting to open up and is put aside again, David Puaud points out the problem with this unexpected shutdown of the programme (2022, p.55). Indeed, the trust issues that some participants might face when told that the programmes wouldn't be running anymore might compromise the success of future programmes they could attend.

EXIT-Deutschland also points out the necessity of a long-term commitment because of the time it takes to fully disengage from an extremist group. On average, the dropout process with EXIT-Deutschland takes two to three years (EXIT-Deutschland, 2014, p.10). This length is explained by the number of issues that needs to be addressed to fully disengage from a group, from personal safety and a successful reinsertion in society to a personal reflection about the reasons of the engagement and the ideology that was at the core of the extremist behaviour.

Therefore, because of the time it takes to build trust and to address the variety of issues that needs to be addressed when disengaging from a group, it is essential for the programmes to be mid- to long-term and continuous.

Finally, it is worth noting that the documents studied to analyse HII practices do not refer to the role of the length of the intervention. However, it does not necessarily mean that a continuous mid- to long-term involvement is not a feature of HII. It might be a blind spot of this study because of the limitations in the access to other documents and sources to confirm or deny the role played by the length of the intervention. Drawing from academic research and the examples of RIVE and EXIT-Deutschland, de-radicalisation and disengagement processes take a lot of time. It would therefore seem like a fair

and safe assumption to say that HII might also give importance to the mid- to long-term commitment of its participants and staff.

Considering and involving the family in the process

The final practice implemented by at least two of the programmes studied in this research is to take into account and involve the family in the exit process. As mentioned before, disengagement happens through a set of push and pull factors (Souleimanov & Huseyn, 2014; Köhler, 2015a), and family can be one of these factors.

It is worth noting that the documents studied about HII do not mention the role of families in the disengagement programme. However, as mentioned before for the length of involvement, this does not necessarily mean that it is not a feature of HII. It simply means that it is not possible to assess the role given to families within HII with the documents available.

RIVE evaluates the family context of the participants at the beginning of the programme through interviews and visits at the participant's accommodation (Lauféron, 2018, p.135). This gives the facilitators the opportunity to assess whether the participants' family environment can be leveraged to facilitate the disengagement process. Indeed, the programme also consists in helping participants "rebuild or keep good family relationships in order to reinforce the social environment when it is favourable to disengagement"¹⁹ (Lauféron, 2018, p.135).

EXIT-Deutschland also focuses on the dropouts' families. Indeed, EXIT-Deutschland is considered to be "the inventor of family counselling as an intervention tool in Germany" (Köhler, 2013 in Hardy, 2019). It is essential to

¹⁹ Original quote: "reconstruire ou maintenir de bonnes relations familiales dans le but de renforcer l'environnement social quand celui-ci est propice au désengagement" (translated by the dissertation's author).

take family into account during an exit process as disengagement involves a whole life restructuring, and families can play an important role to help dropouts reintegrate in society.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed at describing and discussing the practices implemented by the three offline de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes studied – *i.e.*, EXIT-Deutschland, HII and RIVE. The three programmes implement similar measures, which explains why most of the good practices discussed in this chapter are implemented in the three programmes studied, even if the forms they take might vary slightly from one programme to another.

As described in this chapter, all the programmes give a strong importance to a system of mentorship and the creation of a strong personal relationship between the dropout and the facilitator(s). Programmes also implement a flexible accompaniment, which encompass an education to critical thinking and the provision of practical help to leave extremism behind. The programmes studied also tackle the attitudes and beliefs used by the (expectedly) soon-to-be former extremists to justify harmful behaviours. These three programmes are delivered by multi-disciplinary teams in a one-on-one setting or with one dropout and several facilitators.

Some other practices have only been identified in two of the three programmes studied. This does not necessarily mean that these practices are not implemented in all the programmes, but that the sources used to conduct this research do not mention them, unless stated otherwise. Some programmes do not aim for a complete de-radicalisation and disengagement but rather for a lowered risk of harmful behaviour from the participants. Some programmes consider the mid-to long-term involvement in the process (from the staff and the participants) a key feature of the programmes, which echoes the need for trustful and personal

relationships in the mentoring. Finally, some programmes consider and involve the dropout's family in the exit process.

This chapter also discussed the link between the practices identified and the academic research addressed in the literature review, highlighting a relation between (de)radicalisation and disengagement theories and the practical implementation of measures in exit programmes.

Overall, ten offline good practices have been identified in this chapter. This list will be used in the next chapter to analyse if, and how, these practices could be turned into online P/CVE measures.

Chapter 4: Turning Offline Good Practices into Online Measures

As the general aim of this dissertation is to analyse how practices implemented in offline de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes can be turned into online P/CVE measures, this chapter is at the core of this dissertation. Indeed, this chapter will aim at demonstrating how each practice identified in ‘Chapter 3: Offline Good Practices’ could be implemented online.

As a reminder, the list of practices discussed in Chapter 3 was established thanks to the study of different documents including research papers, brochures and official reports about the three programmes studied. Drawing from these documents, a list of practices was established for each programme. Then, a comparison between the measures implemented in all these programmes enabled the creation of a list of the good practices that were implemented in two or more of the programmes studied. The ten items of this list were defined, described, and discussed in Chapter 3, and will be the basis of the analysis in this chapter – which aims at demonstrating how these good practices can be turned into online P/CVE measures.

As discussed in the literature review, P/CVE is an ill-defined concept, and researchers are yet to agree on a definition. It is therefore essential to clarify how online P/CVE is understood in this study. Drawing from Davies *et al.*'s definition of CVE and Schmid's argument that PVE and CVE are interchangeable terms, this dissertation defines online P/CVE as the “possible approaches to dealing with radicalization to extremist violence” (Davies *et al.*, 2016, p. 57) which are implemented and conducted online.

Even if it was addressed above in the methodology chapter, it seems essential to remind the process that will be followed in this chapter to study how the offline practices can be turned into online measures. Each practice will be analysed to determine who the offline actors involved in this practice are, what the relation between them is (*e.g.*, is there a form of authority and superiority,

is there an unequal number of people on both sides, what kind of setting are they in and does this impact the dynamic of the relation) and what the actions taken are. Once this has been identified for the offline practice, it will be necessary to question how the actors involved can be present online and how a similar relation between the actors can be implemented. Finally, the way to implement the online equivalent of the actions taken offline will be addressed. This process will give a fair idea of how each offline good practice could be turned into an online P/CVE measure, and how realistic it would be to envision implementing such practices. Some of them might already exist as part of (pilot) programmes to counter and prevent online extremism. If so, the implementation and results of such measures will be discussed.

The importance of mentorship and a strong personal relationship

As explained in Chapter 3, an essential feature of de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes is the concept of mentorship and the creation of a strong personal relationship between the participant and the facilitators.

Therefore, the actors involved in this practice are the dropout and the facilitator. If a form of domination can be assumed from the setting, the idea of this practice is to build a horizontal relationship between the actors and prevent a form of authority from appearing in order to facilitate communication and build a trustful personal relationship.

Both actors can be present online, for instance through accounts created on social media or any type of platforms enabling a private discussion to take place. However, in order to ensure the creation of a trustful and personal relationship, a form of authentication and security would most likely be necessary. Indeed, it would be essential to make sure that the same participant is always exchanging with the same facilitator(s), and that they all know it is the same person as usual. If requiring a proof of identity might be problematic for several reasons

including but not limited to fearing for data privacy and participants' safety, a unique identifier or a personal social media account protected by a password only the account holder knows could be a solution. Exchanging via videocalls might also be very efficient to create a trustful personal relationship as it would eliminate the uncertainty of the identity of the person on the opposite side of the call. It would be obvious for the participants and the facilitators that they are always talking to the same person, and they could recognise each other.

Such a measure implemented online could take the form of a recurring chat on social media between the facilitator and the participant. Indeed, using a mainstream social media to interact with a participant would enable the facilitator to know – or at least assume – that they are always interacting with the same person and try to bond and connect with the participant on a deeper level. For the participant, this would also be a way to trust that the facilitator they are interacting with are always the same people, and therefore encourage them to open up. Social media profiles could even be a way for facilitators to identify potential participants by spotting extremist opinions or connections with people known to be extremists or recruiting for extremist groups.

This type of measures has been designed and implemented in a pilot study run by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD). The study, entitled Counter Conversations, consists in direct online interaction between providers from ISD and radicals (Davey *et al.*, 2018). After identifying individuals showing signs of radicalisation thanks to an algorithm, one of ISD's facilitators engages a private conversation with these individuals through Messenger – Facebook's private chat system (Davey *et al.*, 2018, p.6). The overall results of this pilot study are encouraging, and the researchers called for “the need for further exploration into how this model can be deployed in a responsible, effective and scaled fashion, as part of a suite of online risk reduction methodologies” (Davey *et al.*, 2018, p.5).

As this example shows, online P/CVE measures inspired from offline practices – in this case direct engagement and a trustful personal relationship – can have encouraging results when implemented.

A flexible accompaniment

The second offline good practice that was identified is the possibility to have a flexible accompaniment. Whether it is flexibility in the topics addressed, the kind of help provided, or the places where the programme is delivered, a certain flexibility is essential to tailor the programme to the needs of the participant.

The actors involved in this practice are once again the participant and the programme facilitator. Here again, the relationship between the participant and the facilitator is horizontal. However, there is a form of domination from the facilitator as they are the ones deciding how to run the intervention depending on their assessment of the participant. If the participant can obviously raise a concern over specific issue or ask to address a specific topic, the final decision on whether this topic will indeed be addressed – and if so, how – belongs to the programme facilitator.

Both actors can be present online quite easily through personal accounts on social media or on any kind of chat services. In this case, the authentication of who the person is does not seem as essential as it was in the practice addressed above. Indeed, this practice only consists in adapting the programme to the participant's need. Ideally, it would be done in a context where the facilitator can identify the participant's needs, but the participant could also be the one raising a concern over an issue they identified as a need.

Therefore, if such a practice were to be implemented online, it could take several forms. The first one could be through a programme in which the facilitator addresses the needs of the participant the way they would do in a face-to-face setting. The facilitator could therefore adapt the programme to the participant

when identifying an issue during a conversation with the participant or if the participant raises a concern with the facilitator. The advantage of such an implementation would be to keep the potential trust that has been built thanks to a personal and sustained conversation, making it easier for the participant to open up about potential concerns.

Another form that this measure could take would be a form of instant chat or email service where the participant could raise a concern over an issue related to extremism (*e.g.*, if they have the impression that they could be getting into a rabbit hole of radicalisation and seek help before it being too late, if they want to disengage from an extremist group they belong to but do not know where to start, if they question an extremist ideology they used to believe in, etc). Then, a facilitator would be on the other end of the exchange and answer the individuals' concerns.

Education to critical thinking

The three programmes studied used the education to critical thinking as a way to help participants disengage from the extremist groups they were part of and ideologies they used to believe in. The main reason for this to be such an important feature is that it empowers participants in the long term and will help them get into the habit of questioning what they think and believe in.

Here again, the actors involved are the participant and the facilitators. However, outside actors could be involved, such as experts on a topic. As this consists in “educating” the participant, there is a form of teacher/student relationship, and therefore a form of authority coming from it. However, if this education is done in a non-frontal way, the authority implied by the measure does not have to be obvious and diminishing for the participant.

As in the previous practices, all actors can be present online. In this case, the interaction does not even have to be direct, and the facilitator or outside actor

could take the form of a website, a video, or (targeted) ads online, among other things. For instance, online ads could target a certain public (e.g., young people, people in a certain geographic area, etc) and raise awareness on the fact that the truth and reality might be more complicated than what it seems at first glance and then redirect them to a website with resources on critical thinking, fact checking, and other related topics. They could also not have a precise target and be a form of general prevention of radicalisation. Indeed, ensuring that the general public knows how to think critically ensures lesser risks of radicalisation, no matter what the ideology behind is. Therefore, it might be beneficial to have the widest possible audience to prevent the widest range of radicalisation.

Another example of an online measure that could be implemented would be to directly challenge what we know to be commonly admitted among certain extremist groups to trigger a reflection among people. This is what was done by the French government in their video “#Stopdjihadisme: Ils te disent...” (GouvernementFR, 2015) published on its social media account. By using propaganda images and catchphrases from the Islamic State (IS) and challenging the truth of these statements, the government aimed at triggering critical thinking among people who might be tempted to leave the country in order to become foreign fighters. It is almost impossible to know if this kind of campaigns actually has an impact and prevented radicalised people from joining IS. However, it still shows that measures can be implemented online to trigger critical thinking among people on the path of radicalisation or already radicalised.

Providing practical help to exit

Another essential feature of offline de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes is the provision of practical help to exit extremism. Indeed, dropouts might be afraid of revenge and physical harm, find it difficult to get

employed or find an accommodation, or even simply lose lots of social relations. This is even more true for dropouts who had lots of responsibilities and/or were involved in an extremist group for a long time. Therefore, practical help to tackle all these issues is an essential feature of programmes aiming at helping radicals exit extremist groups.

The actors involved here are the programme facilitators and the participant. Besides them, other outside actors such as employers, landlords, or public administrations could also be involved to help dropouts reintegrate in society. Once again, the facilitators and participants can easily be represented online. This is also the case for outside actors. Indeed, most of them are usually already present online, for instance because they have websites (*e.g.*, online job offers, letting agencies' websites, government websites about bureaucratic procedures, etc). Some of these websites might even have chat systems providing personalised help to people using their services.

Implementing practical help to exit extremism online can take several forms, depending on the type of help. A first example of this would be for the facilitators to create content with tutorials on how to deal with practical concerns such as looking for a job (*e.g.*, how to write a CV and a cover letter, how to succeed in interviews, or even more specifically how to address the fact that there is a gap in the dropout's life because they were involved in an extremist group). These tutorials could also be made for other practical concerns such as how to find housing, or how to deal with bureaucratic paperwork. However, all these would lack the social aspect that was present offline through direct interactions to address those issues. Therefore, here again a form of chat, videocall or any direct interaction between a dropout and a facilitator could be the closest solution to what the offline practice is.

Another essential aspect of the need for practical help is the question of physical and psychological safety of the dropout. This point is extremely sensitive to address online, and data protection and privacy must be taken very seriously to

ensure people's safety and security. Therefore, a highly secured and encrypted platform would be essential for the interactions between the facilitator and the participant when it comes to such issues. If the risks for the dropout's or the facilitator's safety are high, it might even not be possible to address such issues and provide practical help on this online.

A one-on-one delivery of the programme

The programmes studied in this research all deliver their intervention in a one-to-one setting, or with one participant and several facilitators. This is deeply linked to the importance given to the creation of a personal relationship between the participant and the facilitator. It also helps preventing a form of group thinking and encourages participants to share their own opinions and beliefs with the programme dispenser.

This practice also involves the participant and the facilitator and, by definition, only them if it is a one-on-one setting. As mentioned several times above, these actors can be present online quite easily by using accounts on any kind of social media or messaging platforms. However, the key aspect here is that there is only the participant and the facilitator involved in order to ensure trust and privacy. Therefore, such a practice implemented online should encounter for this aspect and acknowledge the need for a form of authentication and privacy. Indeed, even if technically only one participant is logged into an account and discussing with a facilitator, it cannot be considered a one-on-one setting if they are in a crowded room with others listening to them. Similarly, if the facilitator is in a room full of people, the conversation they are having with the participants might not be private. The challenge represented by the adaptation of this offline practice into an online measure is the fact that it requires a higher level of trust. Indeed, in an offline setting the facilitator and the participant can physically see or hear if there are other people around. In the case of an online interaction, they have to trust each other when they say they are on their own.

A way of overcoming this issue could be for the participant and the facilitator to interact via videocalls, therefore ensuring a form of verification on both sides that the person they are interacting with seems to be on their own. Another solution could be the use of surveillance software usually used by universities to prevent cheating during online exams. However, this raises other issues regarding privacy and data protection, and might be a safety hazard if not properly secured.

The pilot study One2One run by ISD in partnership with Curtin University could be another way of implementing a one-on-one setting online. Indeed, in this programme, a facilitator directly private messages users openly posting extremist content online to try and convince them to not go further on their radicalisation path (Frenett and Dow, 2015). By definition, this direct interaction in a private messaging app is a way to create a one-on-one interaction between a programme facilitator and a participant, but still requires the participant and the facilitator to trust that the other is who they say they are, even when logged into their personal account.

Overall, it is challenging to ensure that a one-on-one chat or conversation in an online setting is actually private, and that makes it problematic to truly implement this practice online.

Tackling attitudes and beliefs used to justify harmful behaviours

Another key feature of the programmes studied is to tackle the attitudes and beliefs used by radicals and extremists to justify harmful behaviours. This is an essential point in the cognitive and behavioural shift needed from the participants to disengage from extremist groups and de-radicalise themselves. However, it might also easily backfire if the opposition is too frontal or if the people the participant is interacting with are not perceived as trustworthy and relevant sources of knowledge on these topics.

To do so, facilitators help participants to cope with their emotions, religious advisors discuss beliefs when the participant's radicalisation is linked to religion, or lead participants to a form of critical reflection on their past beliefs and actions. The actors involved are therefore programme facilitators (whether educators or religious advisors) and the participant. It is thought as a discussion between equal individuals. Therefore, even if there might be a form of authority coming from the facilitators, it is erased as much as possible to enable a fruitful discussion.

The conversations needed to tackle attitudes and beliefs can be a live discussion through a form of messaging app or videocall software, but it could also be public and/or asynchronous. This is for instance the case of the campaign “Et toi, le jihad?”²⁰, created and run by citizens to tackle islamist radicalisation in France (Campaign Toolkit, n.d.). The public targeted by this campaign is “those who could be seduced, or are already partly convinced, by radical Islamism”²¹ (Campaign Toolkit, n.d). This campaign consists in publishing satirical drawings on Facebook with a caption thought to spark the discussion and then interacting with people in the comments. It creates an interactive discussion between members in charge of the campaign – facilitators – and the public targeted – the participants.

It therefore seems feasible to design and implement online P/CVE measures in order to tackle the beliefs used to justify harmful behaviours. Nevertheless, tackling attitudes justifying harmful behaviours appears to be more challenging as attitudes are harder to identify online.

²⁰ “Et toi, le jihad?” means “And you, the jihad?” (translated by the dissertation's author).

²¹ Original quote: “ceux qui pourraient être séduits, ou sont déjà partiellement convaincus, par l'islamisme radical” (translated by the dissertation's author).

A multi-disciplinary team

The last key feature identified in all the offline de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes studied is the fact that these programmes are led and implemented by a multi-disciplinary team. The wide range of professionals involved in these teams includes but is not limited to psychologists and psychiatrists, educators, probation workers, religious advisors, and experts on specific topics. As de-radicalisation and disengagement processes depend on a wide range of factors, it seems essential to have staff members from a wide range of professional backgrounds in order to address the widest range of factors possible.

Therefore, the actors involved in this practice are all the people who have a say in the design and implementation of the programmes. The online implementation of such a measure does not differ from its offline implementation. The change that might incur from a use of the Internet to implement P/CVE measures is the need to involve experts on cyber stakes in these multi-disciplinary teams. Indeed, it might be essential to associate experts on topics such as online data protection and privacy in the design and implementation of measures, or even web designers and developers if new websites and platforms need to be created in order to implement some of the measures.

Turning this offline good practice into an online measure is thus not a complicated thing to do, as it does not involve an actual implementation of a P/CVE measure, but rather to consider the digital aspect of the measures that will be implemented when designing, creating and running them.

Aiming for a lowered risk rather than a total disengagement

Some of the offline de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes studied only aim for diminishing the risk posed by the participants to the society, and

not for a complete disengagement and de-radicalisation. Assessing the risk an individual represents requires a form of evaluation and therefore a form of interaction and dialogue between the (soon to be) dropout and the evaluator – a programme facilitator.

The actors involved are therefore here again the participant and the facilitator. As mentioned before, it is feasible to find a way to have these actors interact online. Digital interaction tools such as messaging applications, videocalls or even emails could be used by them to communicate in order for the facilitator to evaluate the participant's involvement in extremism and the risk posed by the participant to society. The initial evaluation of the risk might be more challenging online as the exchanges might not be as interactive and trustworthy as they would be offline. However, the Internet might offer other key information in evaluating the risk posed by an individual which could be used by the evaluator. Indeed, public interaction of the participant with known extremists or extremist content on social media can be a good indicator of someone's involvement in extremism. Therefore, the voluntary limited disclosure of information by the participant themselves might be compensated by a study of their online profiles.

Besides, if a participant commits to a series of online P/CVE measures, future evaluations of the risk they represent might be easier as they will be more willing to share information with the facilitators.

A continuous mid- to long-term involvement

Another key feature that was identified in the documents studied for two of the programmes is the need for a continuous mid- to long-term involvement. The length of de-radicalisation and disengagement processes varies from one person to another, but it is usually a long-term process and therefore requires an involvement for this whole length of time from the participant, and also from

the staff. Indeed, if the processes require a personal and trustful relationship with staff members in the form of a mentoring, it is essential to keep this relationship for as long as possible during the de-radicalisation and disengagement journey.

The actors involved in this are therefore the participant and the facilitators. It is essential for both of them to know that they are always communicating with the same people. Therefore, a form of identification and authentication is essential, and a private account on social media or communication platforms might once again be a solution to implement this practice in an online environment. The involvement could also be entertained in the mid- to long-term by varying the types of interactions and making them more personal as time goes. For instance, the exchanges could start via emails, then evolve to instant chats, before becoming videocalls. Such an evolution would progressively deepen the trust and the relationship between the participant and the facilitator, therefore enabling a longer involvement.

Considering and involving the family in the process

The final practice identified in the offline de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes studied is the consideration and involvement of the participant's family in the disengagement and de-radicalisation processes. Indeed, family can be an important factor enabling an exit from extremist group and an easier reinsertion in society. It is therefore worth trying to leverage when helping dropouts.

The actors involved in this practice are obviously the participant and their family, but also the facilitators trying to interact with all of them. However, the implication of the family requires the help of the participant in order to connect their family and the facilitators. It also implies that the family members of the

participant are willing to get in touch with the facilitator, and that they are computer literate enough to conduct such interaction.

A way to overcome the potential computer literacy challenge could be to do a videocall between the facilitator and the dropout and family members willing to be involved in the process. However, this means that there could not be an interaction between the relatives and the facilitator without the dropout being there. If the relatives' computer literacy is not an obstacle to the online implementation of this measure, then the facilitator would only need the relatives' contact details in order to reach out to them and plan a form of discussion, either through instant messaging or another format (*e.g.*, emails, videocalls, etc).

A less direct way to involve the family would be to create websites or online forums dealing with the issues linked to having a family relative in the process of exiting an extremist group. These could have advice on how to cope with challenges linked to such an experience, how to help the dropout fulfilling their exit process and how to leverage the role of family in this process.

Conclusion

This chapter aimed at demonstrating how each practice identified in Chapter 3 could be implemented online. To do so, each practice was analysed to determine what kind of actors were involved, what kind of relations existed between them, and how all of these could exist in an online setting. Then, examples of the concrete form such adaptations could take were taken. For some of the practices, similar measures were already implemented or tried out by organisations, governments, or civil society. When this was the case, the implementation of such measures was explained and discussed.

As described in this chapter, most practices can be implemented online. Indeed, the only practice that was seen as truly problematic to turn into an online

measure was the practical help to ensure dropouts' safety and security, as this would involve an extremely high level of data protection and privacy which might not necessarily be reached through mainstream online means. However, the other practices were deemed to be theoretically implementable via online tools. This chapter demonstrated that most of the good practices are linked to the ability of the participant and the facilitator to build a personal and trustful relationship. Indeed, the ability to identify and answer to participants' needs, to provide practical help, and to tackle attitudes and beliefs used to justify harmful behaviours relies on the direct interaction between the facilitator and the participant.

Therefore, most of the online measures envisioned in this chapter involved the use of social media, messaging applications or videocalls. This also explains why the real-life examples of measures that have been implemented or tried out in pilot studies mentioned in this chapter imply the use of social media, more specifically Facebook. This is indeed the case for the Counter Conversation pilot study run by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, for the pilot programme One2One, and for the "Et toi, le Jihad?" campaign run by a civil society organisation. The first two ones used Facebook to contact potential radicals via Messenger – Facebook messaging app. The last project uses Facebook to publish satirical drawings sparking conversations to teach critical thinking and tackle beliefs justifying extremist beliefs. This can probably be explained by the fact that social media were designed to enable online the types of interactions that people can have offline. Therefore, leveraging them to create online situations and interactions that resemble offline behaviours seems quite intuitive.

Conclusion

This dissertation studied three de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes in Western Europe in order to identify some good practices and see the extent to which they could be implemented online. It demonstrated that most of the identified practices can be implemented online, but that some challenges arise from such an adaptation from offline to online measures.

Before getting into more details about the results of this research and how they can be understood, it seems essential to remind the limitations of this study as they have an impact on how the concluding thoughts on this study can be interpreted. The first limitation is the impossibility to run the interviews initially planned to gather data. Therefore, all of the data used to do the analysis is publicly available and might be biased in a way showing the good aspects of the programmes and not necessarily how some practices may have failed. The second limitation lies in the fact that there is no research in (de-)radicalisation studies demonstrating a similar radical behaviour online and offline, and there is no research showing that if similar measures were to be implemented online and offline, they would have the same result. However, since it has been demonstrated that the internet plays a role in radicalisation processes, preventing and countering online extremism seems relevant nonetheless. Therefore, identifying potential new approaches to online P/CVE is still important. The third and last identified limitation is linked to the one just mentioned, as the online measures proposed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation are only theoretical and it would therefore be necessary to try and implement them in pilot studies to see the results they could have. However, doing so would have been out of the scope of this research.

This study aimed at answering the following research question: to what extent and how can we adapt the good practices of the British HII, French RIVE, and German EXIT-Deutschland offline exit programmes into online P/CVE

policies? To do so, the programmes this research focused on were the British Healthy Identity Intervention (HII), the French *Recherche et Intervention sur les Violences Extrémistes* (RIVE) and the German EXIT-Deutschland programme.

All three programmes have their particularities, but the practices implemented are overall usually similar, which enabled this research to establish a list of 10 good practices that were implemented in at least two of the programmes studied. After these 10 offline practices had been identified, this study demonstrated how and the extent to which they could be used to inform the creation of online P/CVE measures.

The first practice identified was the importance of the creation of a trustful and personal relationship between the participant and the facilitator in the form of a mentorship. Secondly, having a flexible accompaniment (*e.g.*, in terms of topics addressed, places where the programme was delivered, facilitators involved, etc) was a feature of all three programmes. An education of the participant to critical thinking, the provision of practical help to exit, the delivery of the programme in a one-to-one setting, the creation and implementation of the programme by a multi-disciplinary team and the tackling of the attitudes and beliefs used to justify harmful behaviours were also key practices in the three programmes studied. Two of the programmes also aimed for a lower risk of harmful behaviour from the participants rather than a total disengagement. A continuous mid- to long-term involvement and the consideration and involvement of the participant's family in the process was also a key feature in two of the three programmes studied. For these last two practices identified, the fact that they are known to be implemented by only two of the programmes does not necessarily mean that they are not a feature of the third programme as well. It might indeed just reflect a gap in the knowledge available in the publicly accessible documents studied. It is not because the materials studied to establish

the good practices do not mention these practices that they are not in fact implemented.

There is an obvious link between some of these practices. In particular, the central role of the relationship between the participant and their mentor is deeply linked to other measures, namely the ones involving trust and self-reflection from the participant. This connection between some of the practices became even more obvious in the fourth chapter as some of the practices involved the same actors in similar situations and therefore led to online measures being very much alike.

Most of the online measures proposed involved an interaction between the participant and the facilitator, and therefore the use of social media, videocalls, emails or other similar means of online communication was often part of the solution to adapt offline good practices to an online environment. This shows the essential role social media could play in the fight against online extremism and radicalisation if properly leveraged. Indeed, they enable the closest we have to offline interaction online through instant messaging applications and the possibility of having videocalls. As they were designed in order to resemble offline interaction, leveraging them to create online situations and interactions inspired from offline ones seems easily justifiable.

Overall, it always seemed possible to turn offline practices into online measures. However, new challenges arise when using an online environment, namely the question of data protection and privacy. This is essential when it comes to topics as sensitive as de-radicalisation and disengagement and might even be absolutely vital when it comes to issues regarding safety and security. Indeed, if private information about a dropout were to be leaked, this would endanger them. People identifying to the ideology the dropout rejected or members of the group the dropout left could use these data to plan a revenge or any form of retaliation. If such data protection failures were to happen, it could also have damaging consequences for the online P/CVE measures created, as potential

dropouts could not trust the programme because of a history of data leaks for instance. It could also lead to threats and violence against the programme facilitators, which has to be avoided at all costs for obvious ethical reasons. It is therefore essential to take this into account when designing online measures, as this is a major difference between an offline and an online setting. It is worth pointing out that if the necessary data protection and privacy standards cannot be attained when implementing an online P/CVE measure, it might be better not to implement it at all. Sticking with offline measures while figuring out a way to ensure the level of data protection needed to ensure dropouts' and facilitators' safety is reached might be the best decision – ethically and to ensure the programme's future success.

For some of the practices studied, similar measures had already been implemented online as part of pilot studies or campaign to fight online extremism. If some of these can mostly be seen as political communications, some other have been thoroughly assessed and evaluated, and the results are encouraging.

If this study demonstrated that offline de-radicalisation and disengagement practices can be turned into online P/CVE measures and that such measures when already implemented have encouraging results, it is however essential to keep in mind two essential points.

First, as obvious a statement as it may be, implementing online P/CVE measures imply that the target population of these measures is able to access them. This requires having a device connected to the internet, an internet connection, but also some basic computer literacy in order to navigate the web to find these resources, and maybe even to protect their data and privacy. If it can be assumed that most people nowadays – in particular in the three Western European countries studied – have access to an internet connection, a device connected to it and know how to use them, it is important to consider that it might not always be the case. The existence of this challenge was addressed when it came to

involving the dropout's family members in the disengagement process as they might not be as familiar with the internet as the dropout, but it is essential to consider the fact that the dropout themselves might not be very familiar or not have the physical possibility to benefit from online measures. For instance, it could be physically impossible for inmates to access such online measures. Online P/CVE measures can be a good addition to what already exists offline but are therefore not meant to replace physical world programmes and measures – at least in the short- to mid-term.

Second, for online P/CVE as much as for offline de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes, context matters a lot. This is therefore essential to keep in mind that, as always with de-radicalisation and disengagement actions, there is no one size fits all solution. Each process and journey of disengagement and de-radicalisation is different, and each individual requires a specific adaptation of the general framework of action. The measures that can be taken and implemented are highly context-bound and might be limited by infrastructural limitations such as the access to an internet connection and a device connected to it. They can also be limited by other factors such as social pressure to identify to an extremist ideology, or even cultural differences preventing certain measures from being implemented. If the measures discussed here are inspired from practices implemented in several Western European countries, it does not necessarily mean that they could be implemented in all Western European countries, or even everywhere in the countries studied. The specificity of each country, of the public targeted and of the extremist ideology involved all need to be taken into consideration before envisioning to generalise the findings of this dissertation to a wider context.

In a nutshell, this dissertation demonstrated that it is possible to identify good practices from offline de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes, and to adapt them into online P/CVE measures. What appears to be a recurring way of doing so is to leverage social media in order to recreate online interactions as

close as possible to what they could be offline. Some measures might be more challenging to implement online because of matters of safety and security of the dropouts and the facilitators. It is therefore essential to keep in mind the importance of data protection and privacy when designing and implementing online P/CVE measures. However, overall, it appears to be possible to use offline practices to inspire online measures, and the results of such measures tried out in pilot studies are encouraging. This is therefore a sub-domain of de-radicalisation and disengagement studies which seems worth being further explored.

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