

International Tour d'Horizon of Tertiary Prevention of Islamist Extremism: InFoEx Workshop, Berlin, March 26-27, 2019

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DGAPreport

May 2019

InFoEx Workshop, Berlin, March 26-27, 2019
**International Tour d'Horizon of Tertiary
Prevention of Islamist Extremism**

by Sofia Koller

About the Project International Forum for Expert Exchange on Countering Islamist Extremism (InFoEx)

InFoEx is a joint project of the Migration, Integration, and Asylum Research Centre of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) and the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP). Over the course of 2019-2020, InFoEx is collecting inspiring practices from practitioners working in tertiary prevention in Germany and abroad, as well as insights from academics conducting research in this field.

It is the project's objective to identify and generate empirical findings on processes of (de)radicalization, with a focus on their practical applicability for deradicalization efforts. To this end, the BAMF Research Centre initiated a consortium of research fellows who are embedded at local advice centers that work together with the BAMF Advice Centre on Radicalisation and various research institutions partnering with the BAMF Research Centre. These research fellows, along with the counselors working at the local advice centers, constitute the core stakeholders of InFoEx.

About the workshop in Berlin, March 26-27, 2019

Among the 35 participants were network partners of the BAMF Advice Centre on Radicalisation from civil society and government institutions, as well as practitioners and academics from Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. To base the workshop on the needs of its stakeholders, research fellows embedded at local advice centers in Germany shared – in agreement with practitioners at their local advice centers – specific information needs and questions regarding counseling work in tertiary prevention prior to the workshop.

Contact

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InFoEx Workshop, Berlin, March 26-27, 2019

International Tour d’Horizon of Tertiary Prevention of Islamist Extremism

by Sofia Koller

Based on the InFoEx workshop “International Tour d’Horizon of Tertiary Prevention”, March 26-27, 2019, Berlin

Key findings:

- As the threat of Islamist extremism and terrorism continues to grow, so does the importance of preventing and countering it. Especially in the still young and complex area of tertiary prevention, international, targeted exchange on “what works for whom, when, and how” is necessary to learn from experiences made elsewhere and to sustain lasting impact of programs and projects. This requires continuous exchange among practitioners and researchers alike, as well as structured knowledge transfer from research to practice, and vice versa.
- State institutions should avoid creating and financing parallel structures and programs but align different approaches and perspectives in a coordinated and coherent strategy.
- Personal ties can be the basis for trustful working relationships between different stakeholders, but the responsible actors in every country should set clear guidelines about which information can, should, or must be shared regarding specific aspects of the work among involved agencies in their country.
- Despite a lack of knowledge in some cases on how and where to obtain information before the return of male and female IS affiliates and their children, thorough preparations should include the wider family as well as the broader social environment such as schools and kindergarten.
- For a substantial analysis of the role of psychological factors and mental health, more data needs to be collected and relevant findings need to be disseminated.
- Different stakeholders should pro-actively communicate their methods and goals, provide feedback on the effectiveness and acceptance of their programs in the target group, and share successful examples of their efforts while simultaneously outlining the limits of their work.

This Issue Paper summarizes the main findings of the first workshop of the **International Forum for Expert Exchange on Countering Islamist Extremism (InFoEx)** workshop series. The workshop’s goal was to **facilitate the exchange of lessons learned, inspiring practices, and knowledge gaps from programs and measures** on countering Islamist extremism that are implemented in Denmark, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands.

This Issue Paper explores (common) challenges as discussed in the workshop. Furthermore, it provides three “flashlight” cases from Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands. They serve as examples of specific approaches discussed during the workshop.

The workshop was based on a needs-based approach and focused on the following five main topics:

1. Planning, financing, implementing, and evaluating tertiary prevention programs
2. Multi-agency cooperation and clarity about roles between different actors and stakeholders
3. Returning foreign fighters, focus on women and children
4. Role of mental health and psychological factors in (de-)radicalization
5. Effectively communicating tertiary prevention to the public and stakeholders

Workshop Results

Cell 1: Planning, financing, implementing, and evaluating tertiary prevention programs

In the last years, a multitude of projects and programs have been developed in tertiary prevention. The – at times – rapid evolvement of projects and initiatives in some cases can result in the development of parallel structures that compete for financing.

State institutions should avoid creating and financing parallel structures and programs. The responsible state actors should instead **align different approaches and perspectives in a coordinated and coherent strategy.** Approaches should complement each other.

To coordinate prevention work purposefully, it is necessary to continuously communicate with each other about what is being done, when, with whom, and how. Shared goals should be discussed in a trustful atmosphere. Existing programs, projects, and measures need to be flexible enough to **adjust to emerging trends.** It is important

to take this into account in both planning and financing, and while implementing and evaluating alike.

Transparency to other relevant stakeholders about the work being done is the basis for fruitful exchange. It also helps to identify what “works” with whom, when, and in which context, as well as implementing a “**positive evaluation culture.**” Such exchanges and assessments are a precondition for enhancing and maintaining the quality of the programs and projects. This way, it is easier to **consider already existing local projects and structures** when planning and implementing new programs.

Programs and projects run by state institutions or civil society organizations both have their advantages and disadvantages. They should not be played out against each other or compete, but a culture of mutual respect should be fostered. Securing long-term funding is often a challenge for civil society organizations. Their operating based on yearly or bi-yearly contracts affects not only the sustainability of the programs, but also the opportunity to generate a long-lasting impact. Thus, the creation and maintenance of sustainable structures for PVE work is

Germany

BAMF Advice Centre on Radicalisation & BAMF Migration, Integration, and Asylum Research Centre

In 2012, the Advice Centre on Radicalisation was set up within the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). With its telephone hotline and email service, the Advice Centre’s specially-trained staff offers support, guidance, and counseling for anyone concerned about a potentially radicalized person. In case the counselor has reason to believe that the individual concerned is at risk of potentially being radicalized or is in fact already radicalized, they refer the caller to a local BAMF partner. These partners provide tailored, in-person counseling with qualified and specially-trained personnel. The Advice Centre serves also as a central coordination and information hub within its German-wide network of civil society partners and relevant public authorities in

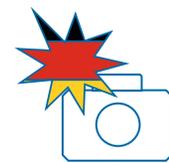
the field of tertiary prevention. With the tasks of assessing both counseling work and cooperation as well as identifying areas for potential optimization, the BAMF Migration, Integration, and Asylum Research Centre carried out an evaluation of the BAMF Advice Centre and four of its local partners.

Based on the outcome of this study, several projects providing scientific accompaniment for the BAMF Advice Centre have been initiated by the BAMF Research Centre. For example, “embedded” research fellows have been employed with local BAMF partners and a two-semester qualification course is currently being developed to train counselors on radicalization-specific issues and good practices in tertiary prevention. Moreover, cooperation with different academic institutions and research institutes are aimed at enabling knowledge transfer between practice and academia and vice versa, and at enhancing the work being done in tertiary prevention.

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The volume of calls to the Advice Centre’s hotline has steadily grown and the structure of local partners has proved to be helpful in dealing with potentially radicalized individuals.

vital. Developing a strategy to move from temporary project financing to long-term institutional support could, for example, avoid “brain drain” of PVE professionals when the financial focus of policy-makers moves to other pressing issues.

Cell 2: Multi-agency cooperation and clarity of roles between different actors and stakeholders

Many different actors are involved in tertiary prevention efforts. Among them are social workers, counselors, psychologists, political and religious scientists, researchers, security agents, and policy-makers. These actors have different tasks, mandates, and objectives that can pose a challenge to cooperation and the clarification of their different roles.

In order to establish a well-functioning multi-agency approach, it is important to base information-sharing and local-level cooperation among the different stakeholders on a relationship of trust. Long-term cooperation can help **establish personal ties that are the basis for trustful working relationships**. A variety of existing exchange and debate formats on generalities as well as specifics of prevention exists. However, the complexity and volatility of tertiary prevention calls for regular, structured exchange between all actors working on tertiary prevention. This holds true for the exchange within state institutions, among practitioners, and among researchers as well as in between these groups.

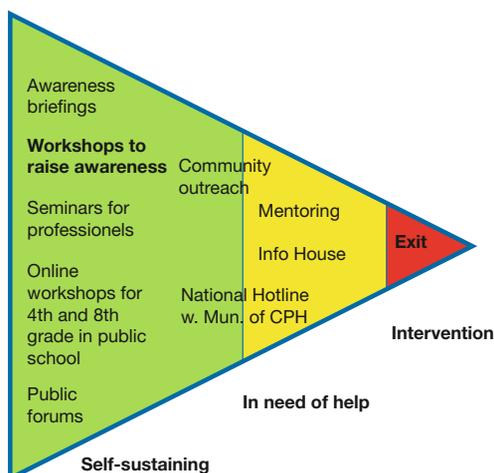
Different approaches and professional cultures result from different tasks, mandates, and goals. Thus, stakeholders working in tertiary prevention should engage

Denmark

The Info House in Aarhus

Since 2010, the Info House (Infohuset) in Aarhus brings together a multi-agency group working on cases related to radicalization and discrimination. It is jointly run by the East Jutland Police and the Aarhus Municipality. A trustful working relationship has been established, and the Info House has now been meeting every second week for almost a decade.

The Info House’s goal is to assess individual cases and find out whether there is a criminal offence, whether to continue to monitor or to intervene, and if yes, how. Possible measures range from social counseling to social service interventions, mentoring, and psychological counseling. To evaluate the case, the case workers use a standardized assessment measure that uses color-coding (green/yellow/red – see illustration) to sort indicators in terms of social relations and socio-economic indicators.



While several factors contribute to the success of this model, political support has been the foundation of the model’s success, and all social service interventions have municipal or other public funding. The Info House is a cross-sector approach: since all representatives of the various departments have the mandate to make decisions on the cases – there is no need for further top-down permission – decisions and their implementation can be made more quickly. All stakeholders are considered equally important. Furthermore, the model is connecting anti-discrimination work with prevention efforts.

Currently, efforts are being made to build a similar approach in communities in other cities in Denmark. It is, however, challenging to transfer the Aarhus model – both in a national and international context – because, for example, of a historically different role of the police, the difficulty of establishing a trustful working relationship, or a lack of political support.

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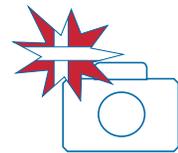
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in continuous dialogue with each other. They should **outline common grounds of their work, and develop an empathetic understanding** for the respective perspectives, goals, and strategies. One possibility to achieve or improve such mutual understanding is to promote joint trainings and public-private partnerships. At the same time, multi-agency cooperation must not solely rely on personal relations or networks: responsibilities, personnel, and relationships among staff might change over time. The responsible actors in every country should set **clear guidelines about which information can, should, or must be shared** among involved agencies in their country.

At the same time, stakeholders should **reflect on the side effects or unintended consequences** of multi-agency cooperation regarding information-sharing. It must be clear not only to all stakeholders, but also to persons being counseled in advice centers, which kind of information is shared, when, with whom, and for which reason, and in which kind of cases security agencies must be involved. Transparent presentation of the mandates, obligations, goals, spheres of competences, and limits of the different organizations' work needs to be standard procedure. Transparency regarding obligations and limits of information-sharing is a necessary basis for trust-building between all involved actors. This holds true especially in cases where a client is worried about the protection of personal information that he or she revealed to a counselor. By proactively informing the client about the mentioned obligations and limits, concerns and misconceptions regarding sharing of data can be addressed and dissolved.

For example, a client might lose trust in the counselor if he or she has the impression that detailed information is shared with security agencies and will possibly be held against him or her. At the same time, security agencies getting in touch with an individual without speaking to the responsible counselor first might destroy years of trust-building.

In addition to improving cooperation and information-sharing by building trust and setting clear guidelines, another key challenge for tertiary prevention actors is to communicate these efforts strategically to the target group or client to prevent any backfiring. Finally, tertiary prevention approaches should **balance security and human rights perspectives**. They should focus both on addressing challenges such as discrimination, marginalization, and deprivation, as well as initiating criminal prosecution when necessary.

Cell 3: Returning foreign fighters, focus on women and children

Several hundred supporters of the "Islamic State" terrorist group (IS) as well as their families have returned or will be returning to their home countries from the territory formerly controlled by IS in Iraq and Syria. The limited numbers of individuals that have returned so far make it difficult to make conclusions about inspiring practices on how to deal with this heterogeneous group. In some cases, there is a **lack of knowledge on how and where to obtain information before the return** of an individual. Cooperation should be improved among relevant stakeholders to facilitate information-sharing.

Even where little information is available, **thorough preparations** should be made before a return. Procedures should determine in advance who should and must be informed prior to the return (relatives, kindergarten, school, etc.) and to identify which legal limitations exist, such as data protection. With regard to returning children, it can be more beneficial to also **involve more distant relatives** than the immediate family to facilitate reintegration into the family. Furthermore, it is important to apply **different reintegration strategies depending on the children's age**. For instance, compared to toddlers, young adults who have potentially received military training and have been exposed to intense Islamist indoctrination might respond differently to deradicalization and reintegration efforts upon their return to Europe. This is also of high importance when communicating the actual, case-specific risk emanating from returning children to the public, aiming to minimize misconceptions and hostility toward these children.

Upon their return, reintegration efforts could include rituals to help children with the transition into a different societal setting, based on experiences with former child soldiers in Rwanda.

It should be stressed that the risk that emanates from male as well as female radicalized and traumatized returnees needs to be assessed for each case individually. Risk assessment is an important aspect of tertiary prevention work on and with returnees: several assessment tools are designed to assess risk of future violence. Furthermore, multi-agency cooperation is crucial, combining the knowledge and experiences of political, social, religious science, and traumatology, among others.

The Netherlands

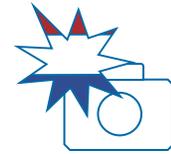
Child Protection Board

The Child Protection Board at the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice is currently setting up individual return and risk assessment plans for children who are still in Syria or Iraq and who are likely to return to the Netherlands.

Prior to their return, the board reaches out to their families and schools or kindergartens to retrieve first-hand information about the social environment – such as family, school, kindergarten – into which the child will be reintroduced and if this environment might be detrimental to prevention efforts. A coherent approach can provide a framework where measures are implemented in such a way that a sense of belonging is generated for the children and can thus help returnees to adapt to their new environment. Experts on Islamic sciences and culture are brought in as well, for example, to identify possible radical tendencies in the environment and wider family. Based on these results, each plan addresses questions concerning who will take care of the child, which types of psychological assistance the child may need, which school the child might attend, and what security measures should be taken to provide safety to the child as well as to the communities. These return plans are transferred to the municipality, which ensures that the

(financial) conditions are created to implement the plans on the child's return.

Besides this, the Netherlands has set up a pool of national experts that will screen the children on traumas and indoctrination as soon as possible after their actual return. The expert pool consists of trauma psychologists, doctors, psychiatrists, infant mental health specialists, and Islamic scientists. In addition, follow-up monitoring is provided until several years after a child's return.



70 percent of child returnees are currently under the age of five, and it is unlikely for children of this age to have received military training or substantial ideological indoctrination.

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Cell 4: Role of mental health and psychological factors in tertiary prevention

Like radicalization, deradicalization can be understood as part of a psycho-social process. There is a **lack of clarity and consensus on the role of mental health as a potential cofactor** influencing the complex processes of radicalization and deradicalization. Extremists' manifold personality profiles should be considered in line with other possible factors such as individual challenges, struggles, and motivations, to do justice to the complexity of the radicalization process. However, a phase of depression has been detected in numerous cases before a person committed a terrorist act. This observation should be scrutinized further. For a more substantial analysis, more data needs to be collected.

Family bonds and the micro-social environment are considered important factors in processes of radicalization, such as the father's, mother's, and siblings' roles. Growing up in a **dysfunctional family** seems to be critical.

A radicalized individual might also show signs of an **'addiction' to the group**, be it online or offline. As extremist groups offer **'toxic benefits'** – such as absolute truth or supremacy – to individuals, two questions arise: how to deal with these 'toxic benefits' and how to interest the person in the virtues of a pluralistic and democratic society. Counseling of radicalized individuals should **help the client to find alternatives** to what the radical group offers. It should support them, for example, in **developing a sense of belonging and purpose in life beyond extremism** and in offering incentives to change their behavior. At the same time, the **individual must be willing to enter a counseling process**. Some (potential) clients might not be open either to counseling or to psychological treatment. **(Cultural) sensitivity** is thus important for building trust before offering any support service. To this end, it can be beneficial to include cultural facilitators before and during the therapy or counseling sessions. Attention should also be paid to the **special vulnerability of women and girls**, for example, regarding possible

experiences of sexual abuse and its consequences, such as traumas. Another challenge is the **general a lack of psychologists in certain, mostly rural, areas.**

Furthermore, there is a certain degree of danger involved when psychotherapists are working directly with (former) Islamists. While this is not a feature unique to this situation – since working with violent criminals or right-/left-wing extremists poses a similar possible threat – this might diminish the willingness of professionals in this field to work in tertiary prevention.

In addition to this, talking about mental health can have a political impact. There is a risk emanated by putting too much emphasis on (presumably existing) mental health issues: the extremist might hide his or her true state of mind to either mislead the assessment of his or her motivation to engage in extremist thought and/or behavior, or because he or she expects the psychologist to help diminish the sentence in case of a trial.

In general, there is a need for careful evaluation as to whether and **how to adapt existing mental health definitions** to the specific context of extremism. This could allow, for instance, a distinction between active and passive supporters of extremist groups. However, psychotherapists possess relevant expertise and can bring added value to the design of tools in tertiary prevention. Their knowledge can and should be used to further assess the importance of social environments and their impact on the psychological condition of individuals. At the same time, it is important to provide psychotherapists with practical guidance and knowledge that will help them to understand and assess the behavior of radicalized persons and of statements that they make.



Cell 5: Effectively communicating tertiary prevention to the public and stakeholders

Violent extremism and its prevention have been receiving intensified attention in public debates. At the same time, state funding of prevention programs has increased. Resulting from this is a need for an effective communication strategy to explain how prevention programs operate and about their goals. Such strategies could help promote a better understanding and (more) acceptance of tertiary prevention programs. The different stakeholders should pro-actively communicate their methods and goals, provide feedback on the effectiveness and acceptance of their programs in the target group, and share successful examples of their efforts, as well as outlining the limits of their work. This communication strategy should also include tools on how to reach parts of the public sphere that hold strong reservations or a dismissive attitude towards this work.

At the same time, programs should avoid stigmatization. Programs should focus on content, such as radicalization, Islamism, and marginalization, rather than on specific communities.

The Way Ahead

The workshop's outcomes as summarized in this Issue Paper show that there are further efforts needed to identify inspiring practices and lessons learned that can be practically adapted in local contexts. Some of these key topics will thus be addressed in more detail in the workshops to follow: the second workshop of this year (May 23-24, 2019) will focus on psychological aspects and mental health, the third workshop (September 19-20, 2019) on evaluation of tertiary prevention, and the fourth (December 5-6, 2019) on returnees.

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