

# **An International Handbook of Good Practices for Building Resilience Against Violent Religiously-Inspired Radicalisation**

Royal United Services Institute for the GREASE Consortium

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This handbook of best practices is based on a series of in-depth reports on religiously motivated violent radicalisation - and resilience to it - in 13 countries. The series examined periods in which religious radicalisation and violence has escalated and analyses relevant policy and political discourses surrounding them. The series was produced by GREASE, an EU-funded research project investigating religious diversity, secularism and religiously inspired radicalisation.

**Countries covered in the series:**

Australia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Morocco, Russia, Tunisia and the United Kingdom.

<http://grease.eui.eu>



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## I. Acknowledgements

This handbook would not have been possible without the sterling work of the GREASE consortium partners, the details of which can be found on [www.grease.eui.eu](http://www.grease.eui.eu) .

Additionally, the Royal United Services Institute team, which managed the compiling of this handbook, was ably assisted by an excellent South African attorney, who prefers to remain anonymous.

## II. Research Methodology

For further information about individual countries and their research methodology in gathering the information relating to the practices mentioned in this handbook, we advise the reader consult the individual country reports that are included at the GREASE consortium website, [www.grease.eui.eu](http://www.grease.eui.eu) .

### Important Note

It is not within the scope of this project to assess the quality, implementation, and/or effectiveness of any resilience programme/initiative, and we have accordingly not sought to do so. As such, **the inclusion of these practices is not meant to indicate a validation of these practices in their entirety or partially**; rather, that such practices raise interesting models and questions for further discussion by interested parties.

The country-specific examples referred to in this handbook demonstrate the types of resilience programmes/initiatives relevant to a good practice at hand, which have been implemented by such countries. Their purpose is illustrative only, and **their inclusion in this handbook does not amount to an endorsement of any such resilience programme/initiative. Indeed, there are wider considerations around how radicalization takes place within societies, particularly those authoritarian societies that have a less than enviable relationship with the rule of law; we do not delve into that here, and we direct the reader to our other output in this regard.**

A pragmatic approach was adopted when identifying the good practices detailed in this handbook; one based on shared practices, themes, and commonalities across a range of countries. In doing so, we have selected some of the more tangible and/or established practices (and resilience programmes/initiatives illustrating such practices), for inclusion in this handbook. For the rest, these may be expanded upon in future texts as they develop in time to come.

In this regard, as has been made clear by the GREASE consortium elsewhere, 'religiously-inspired' extremism includes those extremist discourses that problematise religious communities, such as far-right extremism, as well as those discourses that incorrectly claim to speak on behalf of religious communities.

### III. Good Practices at a Glance

Good Practice #1		Good Practice #2		Good Practice #3	
<i>Be aware of essential do's and don'ts when building resilience initiatives.</i>	Fundamental Principles as the Bedrock of Resilience Initiatives	<i>All relevant stakeholders should be involved in the resilience strategy, and genuine collaboration is key.</i>	A 'Whole of Society' Approach should be Adopted	<i>Get the right people to do the job.</i>	Suitably Skilled and Experienced Practitioners should Drive Implementation of Resilience Initiatives
Good Practice #4		Good Practice #5		Good Practice #6	
<i>Learn to recognise triggers of violent extremism in order to intervene before it takes root.</i>	Identifying Early Warning Signs of Radicalisation to Violence and Early Intervention	<i>Engage directly, openly, and deliberately when countering violent radicalisation narratives.</i>	Challenging Ideologically-Based Extremism	<i>For effective and meaningful dialogue, people should feel comfortable 'having their say' in a structured environment.</i>	Creating Safe Spaces for Open, Honest & Constructive Dialogue
Good Practice #7		Good Practice #8		Good Practice #9	
<i>Recognise the crucial role that young people play in building effective resilience against violent religious radicalisation.</i>	Specific and Focused Youth Engagement & Resilience Initiatives are Key	<i>Regular and in-depth assessments of violent extremism strengths and weaknesses are significant for an effective resilience strategy.</i>	Evaluating Resilience to Violent Religious Radicalisation	<i>Check whether your resilience programmes/initiatives are effective.</i>	Evaluating the Success of Resilience Initiatives

## 1. Fundamental Principles as the Bedrock of Resilience Initiatives

There is no panacea to violent religiously-inspired radicalisation, nor can a ‘quick-fix’ solution be effectively employed to combat it. Rather, a strategic and well-integrated approach, with a long-term vision, is required.

**GOOD PRACTICE #1:** *Be aware of essential do's and don'ts when building resilience initiatives.*

Some important considerations for an effective resilience programme follow below:

- A resilience programme should have as its primary purpose the eradication of violent religiously-inspired radicalisation from the community. Any purpose or consequential measure at odds with this will affect the integrity of the programme, rendering it meaningless, and should therefore be disallowed.
- An initiative should be visible to the community, and its workings must be transparent. It should embrace a collaborative approach which seeks to build trust and positive relationships between parties, instead of adopting a punitive approach which may fuel radicalisation.
- A programme should aim to develop a ‘genuine pluralism’ and facilitate constructive and democratic engagement on difficult issues, fostering a culture where people can disagree better. To give effect to this, the programme should also look to developing critical-thinking abilities and equipping participants with the necessary skills to discuss difficult issues constructively, as well as instilling confidence in identity and belonging.
- A customised approach should be adopted, and the programme, and all its components, should be carefully designed to address the specific needs. What works for some, may not work for others, and an important question is whether a particular programme will be effective in the relevant circumstances.
- Governments should allocate sufficient funds to resilience initiatives, and careful costing analyses should be conducted to ensure the sustainability of resilience programmes.

## 2. A ‘Whole of Society’ Approach Should be Adopted

An effective resilience strategy will engage all the relevant stakeholders to achieve its aim of combatting violent religiously-inspired radicalisation. This means tapping into the existing knowledge and

**GOOD PRACTICE #2:** *All relevant stakeholders should be involved in the resilience strategy, and genuine collaboration is key.*

expertise held by all spheres of government and by civil society groups, including religious leaders and local communities, to build resilience. Engagement across all levels contributes to the collective understanding of the issues, which, in turn, will assist with identifying suitable mechanisms to address such issues effectively.

Sincere and collaborative partnerships should be established between the government and other stakeholders, including the involvement of local communities (and those affected by radicalisation specifically) in the conceptualisation of programmes, the involvement of religious leaders in relaying the counter-radicalisation message, and the involvement of youth in youth empowerment and youth education programmes.

There is also room for horizontal collaborative partnerships, for instance, between major religious communities which come together with the intent of collaborating on issues of contention, aimed at reducing tensions that can fuel violence.

Collaborative efforts and interventions to assist with countering violent extremism may go a long way towards building trust and unifying communities.

*Examples:*

- **Australia:** A ‘whole of society’ approach is adopted by harnessing knowledge and expertise across multiple government and civil society agencies and groups, and between local, regional and national levels.

A large part of Australia’s resilience strategy involves recognising the assets that civil society already possesses in relation to helping prevent and counter radicalisation to violence.

Where religiously-inspired sentiments or beliefs emerge as features of violent radicalisation pathways, there is no substitute for drawing on the knowledge and



expertise of religious leaders and communities who can help re-frame religiously-inspired ideas and meaning away from violent extremist narratives. But to do this, these religious leaders and communities must feel valued, respected, trusted and heard. They are not there to serve the state, but to serve their faith and the broader society in which this is practised.

There are Australian programmes that reflect genuine partnerships between religious civil society groups and government. These include:

- prevention programmes designed to offer religious and social mentorship and guidance to young people,
  - intervention programmes designed to help those already partway down the path to violent radicalisation to rethink their relationship to their faith and find alternative ways of creating meaningful lives and achievements that do not involve violence, and
  - programmes focussed on reintegrating prisoners convicted of terrorism offences once they are released into the community.
- **Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH):** The importance of a ‘whole of society’ approach is recognised, and programmes bring together a multitude of actors to achieve the common goal of countering radicalisation and violent extremism. Initiatives/activities incorporating any of the following elements could contribute to effective prevention and resilience-building:
    - engaging a multitude of stakeholders in prevention and resilience efforts,
    - developing programmes at local and regional level with people from those communities, and
    - involving of religious leaders in relaying the counter-extremism message.

Legislative actions taken by the BiH government are an example of a good practice because they helped the country stop the outflow of foreign fighters. Legislative actions such as the adoption of the **Strategy for Preventing and Combating Terrorism** and the amendments to the Criminal Code of BiH also demonstrate government’s adherence to its obligations as a partner in the global coalition against terrorism. Particularly salient is also the **Standard Operating Procedure in the**

**Case of Terrorist Attack in Bosnia and Herzegovina** which prescribes what exactly each relevant state institution and agency (such as the military, the fire department, the police, etc.) would do if a terrorist attack occurs.

Specific collaborative interventions include:

- Having a body which brings together all major religious communities. This has opened possibilities for collaboration on issues of religion between these communities. The role of collaborative mediator is played by **the Interreligious Council (IRC)** which unites religious communities in common anti-radicalisation efforts by encouraging dialogue and tolerance as well as connecting religious communities to the state, in a comprehensively healthy fashion, as opposed to state-instrumentalisation. The IRC itself aims to cooperate with the state. The IRC has implemented various projects in the City of Doboj, Republika Srpska, aimed at bringing together imams and Orthodox priests to collaborate on how to deal with religiously-inspired radicalisation.
- The IRC also focusses on monitoring attacks on religious sites and officials.
- Under the auspices of the IRC, the leadership of major religious communities created and signed a common statement against terrorism and violent extremism. Encouraging such symbolic acts of unity by religious communities is highly important and relevant, particularly in a country still marked by unresolved history along ethno-national (and religious) matters.
- The Islamic Community has also played an essential role in building resilience. For instance, the integration of the para-jamaats into the Islamic Community is seen as one of the most effective courses of action towards decreasing religiously-attributed radicalisation trends in BiH after 2015. The integration has arguably helped prevent religiously-inspired extremism by maintaining historically-rooted normative Islam in BiH and restricting the activity of imams preaching versions of Islam which promote radicalisation.
- The initiation of the Western Balkans Task Force (created in 2015) by **The International Republican Institute (IRI)**, brought together policymakers from BiH and the rest of the Western Balkans in building an informal counter-radicalisation network. The Task Force has engaged local, national,

and regional stakeholders (such as regional ministers of the interior, national coordinators for countering violent extremism, local government officials, civil society organisation representatives, academics, local practitioners, researchers and journalists) in forums discussing returnees and their families, as well as building resilience to violent extremism.

- **Egypt:** Various collaborative initiatives form part of Egypt’s resilience strategy, including, for example:
  - The establishment by Al-Azhar of the **Beit Al-Alih** (The Family House) initiative in 2011, which included establishing a large body staffed by Al-Azhar-trained clerics as well as Coptic Orthodox priests, with offices across the country to reduce the Muslim-Coptic tensions that so often fuel violence. The organisation has clear objectives, which include:
    - Reduce communal violence.
    - Reduce tensions between Muslims and Christians and work to build mutual understanding and respect.
    - Facilitate the resolution of complaints and cases with the prosecution with the logic that decreasing the number of lawsuits and criminal charges being filed by Christians against Muslims would pave the way towards greater societal peace.

The body is most active in Upper Egypt, where Christians present a much sizable portion of society and tensions run higher than in Cairo. The aim of the body is to intervene when tensions flare up before or immediately after an act of violence takes place to resolve matters amicably, encourage disengagement in violence, and build resilience and greater understanding between the Muslim and Coptic communities.

It has had some success in preventing certain attacks on church and Christian businesses and helped resolve disputes that could have otherwise easily ended in bloodshed across Upper Egypt.

- Dar al-Ifta’, like Al-Azhar, also launched a media-focussed **Monitoring Observatory** to examine ‘electronic fatwas’ (meaning religious edicts issued online) and radical views. It detects and responds to fatwas on social media

that excommunicate others ('takfiri fatwas'). The Observatory also issues periodical reports on terrorist operations, although far less frequent than that of Al-Azhar's Observatory.

- **France:** An example of a collaborative programme implemented in France is the **AMAL** programme. AMAL was developed by the French Ministry of Justice in collaboration with the Foundation for Strategic Research, an independent think tank which works on international security and defence issues, and is considered a pioneer programme for various reasons.

With the goal of preventing 'jihadi' recidivism in jails, AMAL selected first-line practitioners, provided training for the trainers, developed a protocol to convince beneficiaries to join the programme, and designed the programme based on the beneficiaries' needs in a holistic way (involving mixed methodologies with individual and group focus, psychology, anger and frustration management, theology etc.).

The Ministry of Justice later replicated this model in the 'terrorist' wings of different jails (i.e. with beneficiaries that were returnees or involved in domestic terrorist plots, who had just been sentenced or already in custody). One important aspect of this project was the work done on convincing potential participants to join, as some of them were not initially interested in joining the programme. These potential participants were not forced to join the programme, but were convinced through prolonged engagement, so that the target group was not the typical 'volunteer' one, nor the ones that have no choice.

- **Malaysia:** Part of the strengths of Malaysia's efforts in combating radicalisation is that the initiatives are run through a collaborative effort between various ministries including the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Minister of Communications and Multimedia, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Some government institutions such as the Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia and its forerunner Pusat Islam (Islamic Centre) — situated under the Prime Minister's Department, the Islamic Dakwah Foundation of Malaysia, and Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter Terrorism are also actively involved and prove to be vital in executing some of the measures aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism.

An example of one such collaborative programme is the counter-narrative campaigns pioneered by **Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter Terrorism**, which are led by young people<sup>1</sup>.

- **Morocco:** A good example of a comprehensive collaborative programme is the **Moussalaha/Reconciliation** programme for detainees involved in extremism and terrorism, launched by The General Delegation for Prison Administration and Reintegration (DGAPR) in the summer of 2017. This programme was set up to provide the best conditions for a participative reintegration of people who have been sentenced to prison for extremism and terrorism. According to the Prison Administration officials, this programme should be based on a scientific approach and should attack the foundations of terrorism. Aimed at protecting Moroccan society from extremism and terrorism, it involves monitoring and a long-term vision. Initially launched by the DGAPR in partnership with Rabita Mohammadia des Oulémas, the National Council for Human Rights (CNDH) and the Mohammed VI Foundation for the reintegration of prisoners, the programme has, since 2018, also been supported by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of State for Human Rights, the Ministry of Habous and Islamic Affairs, the Presidency of the Public Prosecutor's Office (Public Prosecutor's Office), and finally by the High Council of the Judicial Power.

The key word of the Moussalaha programme is 'Reconciliation'. This revolves around three axes/guidelines, namely:

- being reconciled with oneself,
- being reconciled with the text of the Qur'an, and finally,
- being reconciled with all of society.

Also, the 'courses'/lessons given within the framework of the programme are intended to supervise people imprisoned for acts of terrorism. The objective is to rehabilitate them psychologically by allowing them to behave in an appropriate manner within society and ultimately to assure them a good social integration at the end of their prison sentence.

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<sup>1</sup> These campaigns are discussed in detail under Good Practice #5 – 'Challenging Ideologically-Based Extremism' – below.

For this, the qualifying methodology adopted by the programme revolves around the following dimensions:

- Qualification and psychological support: Providing prisoners with cognitive and behavioural skills to immunise them against extremist discourse and promote their positive integration after their release.
- Intellectual and religious qualification: Deconstructing extremist discourse, correcting certain concepts, identifying the flaws contained in extremist discourse, providing keys allowing inmates to decipher the codes of fanatic discourse to avoid intellectual withdrawal and religious extremism and behaviour it generates.
- Judicial qualification: Helping prisoners to understand and assimilate the legal framework organizing the relationship of individuals with society and the State according to the dialectic of rights and duties and the principle of positive citizenship.
- Socio-economic qualification for reintegration: Providing prisoners with the necessary skills and capacities that will enable them to make the best use of their scientific and craft skills and qualifications, to build a personal or societal project which is not only aimed at achieving socio-economic independence but also at using personal capacities to serve society and be reconciled with it.

With a view to protecting convicts from the dangers of extremist ideology, ordinary prisoners are also trained in prison establishments to coach their fellow prisoners and help them develop a more positive attitude towards their fellow believers.

After these various qualifying phases, a 'scientific' evaluation is organised with each candidate to determine their progress.

### 3. Suitably Skilled and Experienced Practitioners Should Drive Implementation of Resilience Initiatives

As much as the design of a resilience programme requires specific skillsets and appropriate expertise, so too does the implementation thereof. The most lauded of initiatives, theoretically sound in both manner and form, can prove to be unsuccessful if its practical implementation is poorly executed.

**GOOD PRACTICE #3:** *Get the right people to do the job.*

While cultural understanding is significant, a practitioner also needs to understand the issues, and have the requisite skills, knowledge, and expertise to effectively implement resilience initiatives. Hiring a practitioner based on profile alone could have a detrimental effect on the quality of the programme.

Key competencies of a suitably skilled and experienced practitioner include the following:

- Being skilled in, and sensitive to, matters relating to diversity and cultural awareness. (These criteria are fundamental.)
- Being skilled in conflict resolution, and being able to effectively facilitate difficult conversations, dialogue, and debate.
- Having high levels of emotional intelligence and the ability to build relationships and trust.
- Being involved, committed and taking a real interest in matters.
- Being able to engage people and engage with people through a genuine empathy and inquisitiveness about them and their lives is key. Here flexibility rather than didacticism is important as different styles work for different audiences or individuals.
- Having sound technical knowledge of the subject-matter (including understanding the difference between orthopraxic/mainstream practice, and violence, and not conflating the two, and being able to recognise violence not connected to orthopraxic/mainstream religious belief/practices), as well as a deep understanding of the issues and the communities.

- Long, experiential knowledge is important, given the levels of nuance and complexity, and is needed to translate theoretical approaches into practical ones.
- Having a good grasp of ‘verifiable information’ to be able to communicate and discuss issues led by facts rather than opinion.
- Being able to collaborate productively with all the relevant stakeholders (including with top-down organised institutions (like various levels of the state, police, and so on) on the one side, and bottom-up organisations and communities on the other).

It is imperative that ongoing training opportunities be made available to a practitioner, for her/him to remain relevant, including providing the practitioner with regular updates on hyper-local information and trends. And it is equally important that the practitioner’s performance be evaluated to ensure that she/he remains able to competently meet the requirements of the role.

#### 4. Identifying Early Warning Signs of Radicalisation to Violence and Early Intervention

Different stressors may trigger violent extremism in different communities, and there is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach to identifying the early warning signs of radicalisation to violence. But early intervention is vital, especially in the pre-criminal phase, to help steer people away from violent radicalisation onto more peaceful alternatives.

**GOOD PRACTICE #4:** *Learn to recognise triggers of violent extremism in order to intervene before it takes root.*

These mechanisms could comprise a host of measures to identify triggers or trends, including, for example:

- engaging with local communities affected by violent extremism,
- engaging with state authorities and other stakeholders,
- engaging with bodies charged with monitoring acts of violent radicalisation, and



- establishing forums/platforms for engaging with people who may come across someone who may be radicalising to violence.

*Examples:*

- **Australia:** The New South Wales State Government’s **‘Step Together’** service is a best-practice example which combines a telephone helpline and webchat option to provide information, support and resources to both families and civil society workers who may encounter someone close or known to them who may be radicalising to violence. [www.steptogether.com.au](http://www.steptogether.com.au).
- **Bosnia & Herzegovina:** The **DeThreat** project was aimed at defining factors that drive the process of radicalisation and violent extremism. From the very beginning the programme focussed on the local community. The project also allowed for the collection of primary data from particular communities (as opposed to relying on government data). In addition, the work in this project was done in collaboration with local police officers, local authorities and with people who oversee monitoring radicalisation trends. DeThreat was also rated as a good practice by local political institutions.

The Interreligious Council’s role of monitoring attacks on religious sites and officials has also provided counter-radicalisation practitioners with a good overview of where they need to intervene and focus their resources for prevention.

- **Egypt:** The Monitoring Observatory of the Dar al-Ifta’ may also play a role in the early detection of discourses of radicalisation that then buttress violent extremism.

## 5. Challenging Ideologically-Based Extremism

Ideologically based extremism needs to be challenged openly as part of a broader approach to antisocial attitudes and behaviours, and meaningful opportunities to build resilience must be provided.

**GOOD PRACTICE #5:** *Engage directly, openly, and deliberately when countering violent radicalisation narratives.*

Violent radicalisation begins with grievances, and violent extremist narratives appear to offer solutions to these grievances. Ensuring that alternatives and resources are available

to help build resilience to violent extremism means recognising that grievances themselves may be legitimate, but that violence is never a solution in redressing them.

*Examples:*

- **Australia:** Several best-practice programmes relating to this are offered in Australia. One is the **Australian Multicultural Foundation’s ‘Community Awareness Training Manual: Building Resilience in the Community’** (<https://amf.net.au/entry/community-awareness-training-manual-building-resilience-in-the-community>). Programme evaluations have shown that participants feel empowered and show a greater willingness to engage in activities to counter violent extremism, including willingness to deliver training into their local communities. The programme is offered in both face-to-face and e-module formats.

Another best-practice example is **All Together Now’s ‘CAPE (Community Action to Prevent Extremism)’** programme (<https://alltogethernow.org.au/es/exit/>). Modelled on EXIT programmes in Europe but tailored to Australian circumstances and populations, the CAPE programme focusses on right-wing violent extremism. It offers counter-narratives and challenges white supremacist groups and ideologies, providing information on the destructive nature of such ideologies to friends, family and community leaders who are able to intervene in the lives of people at risk.

- **Malaysia:** As part of a comprehensive strategy aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism and countering terrorism in Malaysia, the government has set up various programmes and institutions to develop effective communication strategies and counter-narratives against violent extremist groups.

Various institutions including the Malaysian Special Branch, the Department of Islamic Development of Malaysia (JAKIM), Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism, and Counter Messaging Centre (under the jurisdiction of Royal Malaysia Police) are responsible for consolidating the works among themselves to produce an effective public campaign aimed at countering extremist narratives.

Some of the initiatives include the setting up of the **Jihad Concept Explanation Action Committee**, by JAKIM in 2015, to address misconceptions about jihad at

different social groups and institutions, through engagement with communities at various levels.

Following various studies around the radicalisation of youth, including the role of social media in this regard, the Malaysian government amplified its counter-narrative messages and presences online and among youth groups via various programmes designed and led by **Southeast Asia Regional Centre for Counter-Terrorism** (SEARCCT). Formed in 2003 (under the purview of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) SEARCCT has been very active in organising workshops at grassroots level and educational materials aimed for public consumption, especially for the youth. Two notable programmes that have run for several years across the country are: **Tapestry Workshops** and **Inisiatif Mahasiswa Muslim Perangi Ancaman Keganasan** (IM2PAK).

The Tapestry Workshops are a series of workshops designed to encourage youth participation in countering violent extremism efforts, through video production. Participants are given the support to produce films, videos or any visual materials that will carry the message of counter-extremist narratives to be shared among their peers.

IM2PAK reaches out to Muslim undergraduates to counter active recruitment efforts at the universities (Ahmady, 2019). It involves an active participation of university students to host discussions, talks, and public campaigns on religious-based extremism, religious narratives used by terrorist organisations, as well as a session on countering global religious narratives with ‘naratif nusantara’ (narratives from the South East Asia region).

Together with these programmes, SEARCCT has also produced extensive research and materials on this issue including: ‘Youth And Terrorism: A Selection of Articles’, ‘Don’t Lah Weh: A Peer-To-Peer Resource Guide on Ensuring Your Kawan2(friends) Never Becomes A Terrorist’, and ‘Reaching the Youth: Countering the Terrorist Narrative’.

- **Morocco:** The intellectual and religious qualification component of Morocco’s Moussalaha programme<sup>2</sup> seeks to challenge the extremist narrative by deconstructing extremist discourse, correcting certain concepts, identifying the

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<sup>2</sup> See Good Practice #2 – ‘A ‘Whole of Society’ Approach Should be Adopted’ - above.

flaws contained in extremist discourse, providing keys allowing inmates to decipher the codes of fanatic discourse to avoid intellectual withdrawal and religious extremism and the behaviour it generates.

## 6. Creating Safe Spaces for Open, Honest & Constructive Dialogue

Bringing people together to discuss their divergent views on something as contentious as violent religious radicalisation will naturally elicit strong emotional responses from participants. It

**GOOD PRACTICE #6:** *For effective and meaningful dialogue, people should feel comfortable 'having their say' in a structured environment.*

stands to reason, therefore, that a structured environment is required to house these conversations.

A delicate balance must be struck between allowing people to speak freely – without fear of reprisal – while at the same time containing the use of inflammatory language which would have the potential of derailing the conversation. There should be a strong focus on creating awareness, instilling empathy, and creating dialogue to constructively engage on difficult issues.

Seasoned practitioners, skilled in conflict management, are crucial role players in structuring and facilitating the dialogue, and ultimately steering the conversation in a manner that achieves its identified objectives. Proper consideration should be given to the inclusion of formerly radicalised individuals in the structure of a programme - as they may present, on the one hand, authentic experiences and powerful stories, while on the other, certain associated drawbacks.

*Examples:*

- **Belgium:** The programme ‘**Meeting points**’ involved youth work sessions talking about controversial issues. It was seen as a way for young people to air grievances in a democratic way, in a space where dialogues were not conditional and premised on adherence to certain pre-set norms. Advisory notes were drawn from the sessions with the aim of influencing policy.
- **Egypt:** Al-Azhar has been organising communal meetings across the country since 2013 to address radicalisation and other societal issues, which in large part targets

university students. Senior leaders and clerics from Al-Azhar often hold public seminars in peripheral governorates to which high-ranking security officials and Coptic Christians come. The Islamic Research Academy of Al-Azhar also sends preachers to engage with youth on the ground in public places like local coffeeshops to correct misconceptions about Islam and contain radicalisation.

- **Germany: Cultures Interactive (CI)**, a practitioner NGO operating mostly in Eastern Germany for over 15 years now, has as its main mission the prevention of right-wing extremism particularly among the youth. CI works with three methodological pillars:
  - One is cultural work: thus engaging youth through cultural trends such as graffiti, hip hop etc., any kind of creative activity or cultural productivity which allows youth to have a safe space and way to express themselves and talk about themselves through whatever cultural means they choose.
  - Second, is what one can refer to as civic education: this can include anti-bias trainings, for instance, and is adapted depending on the context.
  - The third element – and what has proven to be the most important one - is group work: these ‘talking circles’ are generally not offered to youth in school or elsewhere. Young people therefore find in CI an open space that assures them there is no agenda, there is no topic, there are no expectations placed on them, other than they using that open space for exchanging whatever is on their minds, whatever poses certain challenges, or whatever keeps them busy during the day.

What emerged over the years is that while violent extremism is often seen as an ideological or religious issue, the primary motivations are rather a sense of belonging to the group and also having a platform or a ‘scene’ in which they feel seen and heard, in which they can act out certain issues that have much to do with their personal biographies and also with the communities they come from. By creating a relationship of trust, it is then possible to exchange on an emotional and personal level, to which youth vulnerable to violent radicalisation seem much more receptive than, for instance, historic education.

- **United Kingdom:** One example of this practice was a programme whose aim was precisely to effect structured and meaningful dialogue. It brought people with far-

right views together with corresponding adherents to corresponding views within 'Islamism' (a problematic term which we have been unable to find a suitable alternative to) to engage in a structured dialogue, which was facilitated by people with a background and expertise in this kind of conflict management. In a sense this echoes an emphasis on *contact*, which has gained traction since the Community Cohesion agenda began in the early 2000s. It also, however, highlights that such contact must be meaningful, thereby reflecting the ambiguity found in empirical academic research into contact theory. It suggests a need for ongoing hard work in the potential benefits of such contact programmes if they are to bear long-term fruit.

In programmes based in dialogue workshops with young people, the format is discussion-based and unpacks ideas, concepts and meanings.

## 7. Specific and Focussed Youth Engagement & Resilience Initiatives Are Key

Whether as a preventative or an intervening measure, engagement with young people is essential, given the role they play in shaping our societies.

**GOOD PRACTICE #7:** *Recognise the crucial role that young people play in building effective resilience against violent religious radicalisation.*

Collaborating - sincerely - with young people in the design and implementation of resilience initiatives is also significant, as it engenders a sense of ownership and personal responsibility in trying to ensure successful outcomes.

But it all starts with educating, developing and empowering young people with the requisite knowledge, skills and tools to effectively participate in this space. Being able to think critically, to communicate effectively (specifically divergent views and/or

grievances), and to recognise cultural and religious diversity, are some of the most basic development areas.

Raising awareness about violent radicalisation, coupled with empowering youth with strategies and mechanisms to counter violent radicalisation narratives, is a powerful preventative tool.

*Examples:*

- **Australia:** Schools are central mechanisms of support and intervention for young people, and have a critical role to play in supporting young people experiencing challenges and adversities. Their role in educating young people to think critically and develop a strong sense of confidence about values, identity and belonging is clear. However, education is not the only service that schools can and should provide. Significant stressors for young people such as grief and loss can serve as triggers for the tipping point into violent action. Following up changes in school performance, behaviour or attendance and ensuring that culturally appropriate counselling services are available through school services or referral systems is essential, as is engaging families where appropriate with what resources are available through schools.

Directed at assisting schools with countering violent extremism (CVE), the New South Wales Government has developed resources that provide CVE-specific counselling and support for students and training to teachers and allied school support staff. This includes Specialist School Support Teams that connect with the efforts of community leaders and families in responding to critical incidents as well as general CVE prevention efforts. <https://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/countering-violent-extremism>, <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/la/papers/Pages/qanda-tracking-details.aspx?pk=240872>

Youth programmes and supports involving young people as co-designers and leaders are vital given the importance of peer influence. There are a range of youth-based or youth-focussed Australian programmes that seek to enhance young people's participation in community and civic life by emphasising skills

development, leadership capacity, knowledge and information sharing, and social cohesion across religious and cultural differences.

Two amongst many examples of community-based youth programmes that have had a sustained impact are the **Lebanese Muslim Association's 'Engage Connect Grow'** programme ([www.lma.org.au/community-programs/ecg/](http://www.lma.org.au/community-programs/ecg/)) and **Melbourne's Youth Activating Youth** programme ([www.yay.org.au/programs](http://www.yay.org.au/programs)).

- **Belgium:** Several programmes, focussing on youth engagement, have been implemented.

**MolenGeek** (<https://molengeek.com/>): Based in Molenbeek, this is a social initiative that created a co-working space for young entrepreneurs to come together, as well as providing training in coding and events.

A local municipality project in Vilvoorde, facilitated by the mayor, brought young people and police together to do improvisation theatre. The project chose those young people who had had clashes with police and those police who had been disciplined for racism, with the result that both came out with more empathy towards one another.

The Meeting points project<sup>3</sup> facilitated difficult conversations about controversial issues and provided a platform for the airing of grievances in a constructive and democratic way.

**Mentorship for Mothers** is a project designed to support mothers by putting them in networks and signposting who to speak to for different types of advice. It also offers legal assistance.

A further project aimed at parents set up talking groups for parents and used questionnaires before and after the programme on how parents felt about their education style in relation to their children.

- **Bosnia & Herzegovina:** Prevention projects targeting the empowerment of young people in BiH have been identified as successful practices. One of these is the project by the **International Organization for Migration** titled **Institutional Strengthening: Establishing a Formal Referral Mechanism for Preventing**

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<sup>3</sup> See Good Practice #6 - - 'Creating Safe Spaces for Open, Honest & Constructive Dialogue' - above.



**Violent Extremism.** In the framework of this project, counter-radicalisation practitioners have aimed at building resilience of radicalisation responses as a path to the prevention of violent extremism. One of the key focus areas is the development of critical thinking among young people. While the initiative's main target group are young people, parents and adult family members are also engaged as part of the project work as they shape the environment within which youth develop.

The **Atlantic Initiative** implemented a project on youth education, titled **Prevention of Radicalisation among Youth in BiH** to raise awareness about violent radicalisation. The project is an example of a good practice for several reasons:

- First, the project gathered young people from around BiH at workshops to discuss radicalisation and violent extremism and brought awareness to this target group about such processes.
  - Second, the project aimed at identifying long-term preventative tools which young people could carry and transmit to other youth at risk.
  - Third, these workshops were attended by youth who had already been radicalised.
  - Fourth, the project included participation by a former member of an extremist group in the UK who is currently de-radicalised. He shared his perspectives and explained his personal process of becoming radicalised and de-radicalised, something the project itself identified as a good practice.
- **Germany:** The prevention programme conducted by Cultures Interactive<sup>4</sup> provides a good example of a youth-focussed initiative which makes a valuable contribution to building effective resilience against violent radicalisation. It has been found that shifting away from the more traditional issues of ideology and religion and talking and just going into the everyday sphere of youth approaching topics such as gender is particularly effective, because it is something that they can relate to and is on their minds, they eagerly engage with it, and it can pave the way

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<sup>4</sup> Discussed more fully under Good Practice #6 – ‘Creating Safe Spaces for Open, Honest & Constructive Dialogue’ – above.

to later exchanging about what might have to do with a particular group that they just affiliated with.

- **Malaysia:** There is a strong focus on collaboration with youth and supporting them with sufficient resources, which are seen as crucial components in building effective resilience against violent religious radicalisation. A key feature of the Tapestry Workshops and the IM2PAK initiatives<sup>5</sup> is that they are youth-led programmes, which assists a great deal with ensuring that counter-extremism narratives are delivered to youth (being the targeted audiences) in a manner and language that appeals to them - contributing to the success of these initiatives.
- **United Kingdom:** Various youth-focussed programmes have been implemented and some of these are set out below.

One such programme with young people focussed on creating dialogue to help them challenge authority voices in the community (on various inter-generational issues) in a safe way, looking at language use. The programme was, however, deemed a failure as a shared understanding from differences in opinion of faith could not be established.

Another programme engages young people through stories and case studies of different types of violent individuals. The programme seeks to help youth connect and understand the processes at work, and includes discussion and reflection on how the respective individuals depicted in the case studies came to be radicalised. It also educates young people on how grooming happens (by considering examples of propaganda), does ‘myth busting’, and embeds the learning in practical tools if they are concerned with anything. There is a strong focus on emphasising positives around what they want from life and values.

A further example is a parenting programme designed to help parents have positive relationships with their children. This programme has an element of radicalisation, but is much wider.

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<sup>5</sup> See Good Practice #5 – ‘Challenging Ideologically-Based Extremism’ - above.

## 8. Evaluating Resilience to Violent Religious Radicalisation

It is important to robustly assesses resilience to violent extremism assets and vulnerabilities in local areas to inform evidence-based approaches to interventions and programming.

**GOOD PRACTICE #8:** *Regular and in-depth assessments of violent extremism strengths and weaknesses are significant for an effective resilience strategy.*

While there is much government and programme-based discourse around resilience to violent extremism, evidence-based assessments of resilience to violent extremism capacities and vulnerabilities are often missing.

Some of the factors that can converge to create vulnerabilities to violent extremism, or alternatively existing community resilience assets that serve as protective factors which can be further mobilised, require in-depth local assessment to help identify both strengths and weaknesses and help inform locally responsive, targeted interventions and programming.

*Examples:*

- **Australia:** A best-practice tool to support this assessment is the BRAVE measure for youth resilience to violent extremism (<https://brave.resilienceresearch.org/about/>), a standardised validated measure developed through a joint Australian-Canadian project that assesses five domains of resilience to violent extremism: cultural identity and connectedness; bridging capital; linking capital; violence-related beliefs; and violence-related behaviours. The tool is currently used in a number of countries around the world in various programming contexts.
- **Bosnia & Herzegovina:** The presence of an organisation like the **International Republican Institute** (IRI) has had positive impacts on countering radicalisation in BiH. The IRI has provided expert and professional analysis of the overall radicalisation and extremism situation in BiH. Through tools such as public opinion polls, expert research, the analysis of concrete proposals to security and

parliamentary bodies, the IRI has provided valuable knowledge to relevant actors so that proper counter-radicalisation actions can be taken.

## 9. Evaluating the Success of Resilience Initiatives

Measuring the success of an intervention or programme is difficult, as you will not necessarily be able to say with any degree of certainty whether the initiative stopped someone from turning to violent means.

**GOOD PRACTICE #9:** *Check whether your resilience programmes/initiatives are effective.*

Moreover, where a successful case is known, the affected person is usually reluctant to tell his/her story. In the absence of rigorous evaluation, there is potential for ‘success’ to be measured against abstract things, which is impossible to relate causally to any initiative and ignores an array of other influencing factors. Without evaluation, possible shortcomings and/or pitfalls may also go unnoticed. So, a proper evaluation mechanism to assess the impact of resilience initiatives is needed.

The true measure of success will not be found in following a generic assessment focussing only on demographics, and an over-reliance on statistics is an unreliable measurement.

Clear, methodological planning is required, without which it will be impossible to evaluate the effectiveness of the resilience intervention. Gielen (2017) makes the point that evaluation needs to be tailored to local circumstances and needs to form part of the project or programme from the beginning if it is to be viable and useful.

Tangible measures must be adopted, which may include, for example, participant surveys, external formal evaluations, and direct engagement with local communities. Naturally, any developmental areas identified through the process of evaluation must be suitably addressed in order to derive maximum impact from the resilience initiatives.

*Examples:*

- **Belgium:** Success is recognised in different ways. It is most often conveyed through individual examples or how local authorities have more knowledge and contact with local communities. It also manifests itself in people having a broader and more nuanced understanding of Islam, seen as evident in the decline in phone

calls to experts in government by first-line practitioners when dealing with a potential case of radicalisation. They are better able to respond knowledgeably in such cases (in contrast to earlier times when they might call a government expert because someone had a beard or headscarf).

- **France:** The AMAL programme<sup>6</sup> is a good demonstration of this practice, in that it took stock of previous failed attempts to tackle the issue of violent radicalisation in France and incorporated existing good practices from elsewhere in the programme design.

It learnt from the failure of other previous projects, and did not adopt laïcité and the 1901 law about state secularism as the fundamental framework or cornerstone of the programme, as most other programmes aimed at preventing and/or countering violent extremism in France do. It was found that the so-called ‘*approche sectaire*’ (the sectarian approach, which sees religious minorities as threatening ‘cults’ to be treated as a security issue in itself), over-focused on Western converts to Islam and on ISIS, without paying attention to existing successful programmes in Europe or on research and the state of the art in the field.

Based on these evaluations, AMAL, instead, imported some elements from existing tools in Europe (particularly Germany) but adapted them to the French reality.

- **Morocco:** The Moussalaha programme<sup>7</sup> incorporates a ‘scientific’ evaluation following the various qualifying phases, which is organised with each candidate to determine his or her progress.
- **United Kingdom:** NGOs employ a range of evaluation tools to measure and develop the impact of their programmes and projects and improve their design. These include:
  - tight project design - laying out clear aims for outcomes - before and after attitudinal surveys

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<sup>6</sup> See Good Practice #2 – ‘A ‘Whole of Society’ Approach Should be Adopted’ – above.

<sup>7</sup> See Good Practice #2 – ‘A ‘Whole of Society’ Approach Should be Adopted’ - above.

- before, during and after evaluation questionnaires of participants' knowledge of the issues being addressed (as participants often overestimate their knowledge at the beginning, and subsequently revise it)
- getting feedback at a greater distance from the project about whether or not people really had 'better conversations', whether a workshop helped them to challenge things more constructively, or truly 'used knowledge to transform it into action'
- substantial piloting
- adopting an iterative approach to development and improvement
- co-designing with input from facilitators who are delivering the workshops
- paying attention to body language reactions
- tailoring the approach and/or material
- constantly updating in response to rapid change in the general environment (as opposed to legal and policy-related change)
- having independent evaluations by a university
- when delivering to large groups, taking sample focus groups for more detailed discussion
- establishing an 'enhanced presence', involving, for instance, a facilitator remaining available at the school to talk throughout the day following the session (thus allowing people to respond after having had time to digest and process)
- getting feedback from teachers, for example, on any changes they see following sessions in behaviour, attitudes etc.

## 10. Conclusion

We have included a series of the best practices in this handbook, with a view to providing the reader with not conclusive models to use for their own contexts, but

with thoughts to consider as they might design their own models. We have tried to do so in a manner that is faithful to the technical operational aspects that have been highlighted, without – and we emphasise this point – endorsing or validating these practices in their own contexts, let alone outside of them. Violent extremism is an extremely complicated phenomenon, which the GREASE consortium has been trying to effectively analyse and consider from a variety of angles; and the efforts to build resilience against violent extremism are likewise also complex. As previously mentioned, there are a variety of factors to keep in mind, not least how fundamental rights and freedoms are upheld against the backdrop of ‘wars on terror’ in various countries worldwide.

Nevertheless, there is a genuine problem emanating from violent extremism, of various types arising from religiously-inspired ideas. [In this regard, as has been made clear by the GREASE consortium elsewhere, ‘religiously-inspired’ includes those extremist discourses that problematise religious communities, such as far-right extremism, as well as those discourses that incorrectly claim to speak on behalf of religious communities.] States and communities have a valid interest in exploring how to build resilience against such violent extremism, accordingly, and we hope that these practices can be useful items in discussions and debates about how to do so in the most comprehensive manner, maintaining respect for fundamental freedoms and rights for citizens and non-citizens alike.

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Project Coordinator: Professor Anna Triandafyllidou

Contact: [anna.triandafyllidou@eui.eu](mailto:anna.triandafyllidou@eui.eu)

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