

# The Need for Exit Programmes

## WHY DERADICALISATION AND DISENGAGEMENT MATTERS IN THE UK'S APPROACH TO FAR-RIGHT VIOLENCE

*VIDHYA RAMALINGAM AND HENRY TUCK*

Governments and civil society have invested heavily in responses to violent extremism. However, while it has been easy for governments to express concern about far-right extremism, some have struggled to offer practical responses. Some countries, like Germany, have invested heavily in programmes to respond to far-right violence; Germany invests €24.33 million per year in tackling far-right extremism via its Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth's Tolerance Programme, as compared to €4.67 million per year dealing with left-wing and Islamist extremism.<sup>i</sup>

Compared to other European countries, the UK stands out in some respects in its efforts to deal with far-right extremism, but falls behind in others. The UK has certainly prioritised race relations programming for several decades, and has been historically strong on anti-discrimination measures, which are either non-existent or new in many

European countries. For example, for all Germany has invested in tackling far-right extremism, it has done so with a much weaker anti-discrimination base.

However, a history of taking action or investing in an issue doesn't mean the job is done. Certainly with the release earlier this year of Mark Ellison QC's government-commissioned report into the police and corruption surrounding the Stephen Lawrence murder case, it is clear there is still much work to be done in the UK, even on race relations. Where there is a higher volume of action, and more methods tried and tested, there is bound to be a higher volume of mistakes to learn from. Germany has certainly seen its fair share of mistakes, with the uncovering of oversights, lack of data sharing and communications, and institutional discrimination in the build up to the discovery and trial of the National Socialist Underground terrorist cell. However, taking

action is the first step. Learning from what the evidence tells us across Europe, and from what works, also matters.

The UK's approach to far-right violence has centred around anti-racism and preventative work, intervention with those on their way into groups, incarceration, and victims support. But the UK is missing a critical step in between: intervention with those already in far-right movements, to stop violence from occurring in the first place. People who enter these groups tend to stay in them; it forms their social network, their family, and their lives. Even if people are prevented from joining far-right groups, as the government-run Channel intervention programme achieves in many cases, these groups remain intact and those inside them not only remain, but continue to recruit others, and become even more isolated or potentially dangerous.

Exit programmes, which deradicalise and disengage individuals from far-right extremist movements have been operating in Europe since the late 1990s, and have proven successful in Germany and Sweden. In these countries, hundreds of far-right extremists have been successfully disengaged from the far right scene and reintegrated into society. The UK is well placed to trial similar programmes to intervene directly with far-right extremists, and offer individuals a route out of extremist groups. The evidence shows that these programmes not only break down movements themselves, they also offer good value for money: they prevent criminal action

and violent action, undercut the costs of incarceration, and ensure individuals who would otherwise be entrenched in lives of criminality become productive members of society.

## INTERVENTION IN THE UK

When it comes to taking action on far-right extremism, the UK has been weak in its responses to existing groups. Since February 2012, when the Home Affairs Committee declared that the UK's Prevent strategy only paid "lip service" to the threat from far-right extremism rather than actually delivering on action to prevent it, more attention has been devoted to the far right. However, since the overhaul of Prevent, there has been little change in terms of measures taken.

This is not to say nothing has been done to deal with far-right violence. The UK runs a successful intervention programme, the Channel programme, in which between 2012 and 2013 approximately 14% (105 individuals) of those referred were thought to be at risk of further radicalisation towards the extreme right. Approximately 22% (23 individuals) of these cases required intervention.<sup>ii</sup> But direct action with far-right extremists has certainly not been prioritised to the same extent as it has elsewhere in Europe, namely Scandinavia, Germany, and the Netherlands. There are several reasons for this:

1. There have been numerous challenges in the UK over definitions when it comes to

far-right extremism, in a way that has not plagued the issue of Islamist extremism. In the past few years, government ministers – including James Brokenshire and Eric Pickles – have expressed alarm about far-right extremism, both mentioning the English Defence League (EDL) in their public statements on the issue, while the UK government and police do not officially categorise the EDL as a far-right extremist group. However, these public statements show the Home Office and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) are clearly worried about the EDL and its impact.

2. In part due to these definitional struggles, there have been challenges determining where this issue sits within government – whether in DCLG or the Home Office.
3. There has been an assumption that far-right extremists and groups are less capable of carrying out violence in the UK.

Though far-right groups have tended to be less well-organised than their European counterparts, violent far-right groups do operate in the UK. These include:

- Long-lived white supremacist and neo-Nazi movements, including Combat 18, Aryan Strike Force, and Racial Volunteer Force, which are indeed small but present.

- Small splinter groups, like the Infidels, which have split from more established non-violent or violent groups.
- Newer youth movements, such as National Action, which recruits on university campuses.
- Individuals and lone actors who may be influenced by groups, such as Pavlo Lapshyn, convicted of racially-motivated murder and for plotting a terror campaign, or even Ian and Nicky Davidson, convicted of planning terrorist attacks.

Unfortunately these groups are not inactive, and there tends to be worrying chatter and planning within them, particularly at times when there is heightened media attention on issues related or perceived to be related to ethnic or religious minority communities, for example the recent sexual abuse scandals in Rotherham or concerns about Islamist extremism.

Far-right groups in the UK tend to be small and fragment frequently due to disputes and leadership struggles. Though individuals may jump around among groups, they tend to stay within the scene, as it forms their main social network, and in many cases their families.

There is currently no provision of services in the UK to work with individuals who, once in a movement, may begin to question their ideology, or seek to leave or build a new life outside of a hate group. Mainstream social

services are not well equipped to deal with cases like these, as they require specialist knowledge and must be done with care and safety precautions.

## WHAT IS AN EXIT PROGRAMME?

Exit programmes are one of the most important and effective ways to have an impact on existing movements. They work with individuals to leave behind extremist ideologies, groups and movements. They attempt to change both the belief structures of individuals (deradicalisation) as well as the behavioural aspects (disengagement).

The first formal programmes that attempted to support exits from extremist or terrorist organisations began in the early 1970s with disengagement support and incentives aimed at members of the PLO Black September Organization.<sup>iii</sup> There were other similar initiatives implemented in Northern Ireland, Italy and Columbia in the 1980s and 1990s, primarily aimed at the IRA, the Red Brigades and FARC respectively. The past decade has seen a number of highly publicised deradicalisation and disengagement programmes aimed at violent Islamist extremists established in countries such as Indonesia, Singapore, Egypt, Yemen and Saudi Arabia, albeit with mixed success.<sup>iv</sup>

In comparison, the first Exit programmes tailored to the extreme far-right started in the late 1990s, initially in Norway, and then in

*“We have to enhance our efforts to set Exit programmes for those who want to leave extremist environments. We have to make sure they have the necessary support and that they are assisted not only in the first deradicalisation phase but also in the medium and long term.”*

***Cecilia Malmström, EU  
Commissioner for Home Affairs.***

both Sweden and Germany.<sup>v</sup> Exit Fryshuset in Sweden and Exit Deutschland in Germany have been particularly successful and proven sustainable in the long-term. There are a number of programmes conducting early interventions, but Exit programmes specifically designed to disassemble ideologies and fully re-integrate individuals into mainstream society remain under-represented amongst intervention initiatives.

It is important that both deradicalisation and disengagement aspects of Exit programmes operate in conjunction with one another, but also that support is long-term and sustained in order to minimise the possibility of recidivism. This work must be built on a solid understanding of what keeps individuals entrenched in far-right extremist movements, as well as what factors may motivate individuals to leave.

## MOTIVATIONS TO STAY IN FAR-RIGHT MOVEMENTS

People may be motivated to stay in a far-right movement for a number of reasons. In terms of ideology, life history interviews with far-right supporters in Britain reveal that the core motive for joining is often growing perceptions of cultural conflict, that diversity and migration threaten native groups. Supporters “have a strong enough attachment to their ‘way of life’ to make this cause salient.”<sup>vi</sup> People adopt racist beliefs for a number of reasons. These attitudes may be fuelled by media and hear-say about migrant abuse of the system and other scandals; in some cases it can be motivated by a negative personal experience (e.g. severe bullying or child abuse). Indeed even personal experiences of racism can shape one’s journey into a racist group.

A number of factors may lead individuals from a racist or prejudiced outlook into a violent extremist group. These factors have been identified by researchers, and include:<sup>vii</sup>

- ***Ideology and politics:*** Group meets an individuals’ feelings of political alienation from mainstream culture, or capitalises on a sudden ‘conversion experience’.
- ***Provocation and anger:*** Group provides opportunities for individual to respond to perceived provocation from immigrants and/or anti-fascist left-wing groups, or express anger at perceived threats to

resources and interests (e.g. jobs or social housing).

- ***Protection:*** Group provides protection from actual or perceived enemies in community or school.
- ***Drifting:*** Group becomes one of many that enable the individual to explore their curiosity and sense of excitement, rather than genuine ideological conviction.
- ***Thrill seeking:*** Group enables the individual to fulfil their psychological need for excitement, by exposing them to potentially dangerous situations.
- ***Violence, weapons and uniforms:*** Group provides a militaristic environment that is appealing to certain individuals.
- ***Substitute families and father figures:*** Group serve as a substitute family or contains older activists that act as father figures for those that have previously been lacking such support.
- ***Friends and community:*** Group offers friendship and social acceptance.
- ***Status and identity:*** Group enables the individual to obtain a positive identity and status, which they may lack in other spheres of their life.

It is important to note the rewarding elements of membership in the far right. Research and personal testimonies by former extremists

(‘formers’) have noted how far-right membership and collective acts of protest bring feelings of empowerment, of ‘doing something,’ or ‘making a stand’, and fighting for your community.<sup>viii</sup>

## MOTIVATIONS TO LEAVE FAR-RIGHT MOVEMENTS

The motives for leaving extremist groups vary on a case by case basis, and typically there is a combination of factors involved in an individuals’ decision to exit the far right. Our research has shown the following factors to be among the most common:

- ***Social factors:*** this includes a desire for change and the yearning for a ‘normal’ life; the negative social impacts of far-right affiliations; difficulty finding employment; aging out of the movement; or a positive personal relationship with a partner, family or children.
- ***A traumatic experience or “cognitive opening”:*** this may cause a re-evaluation of personal circumstances or loss of belief in the ideology and the political aspirations of the group or wider movement.
- ***Frustration or resentment with the group or movement:*** this may be due to infighting; disorganisation; a personal loss of standing or position; or disagreements over the activities, approach, or levels of violence used.

- ***Exhaustion or “burnout”:*** individuals may become tired of the effort required to maintain a far-right extremist persona or lifestyle.
- ***Legal issues:*** this includes arrests, criminal prosecution or incarceration.

There may of course be a number of other reasons that lead to the decision to exit, and these may be weighed against various barriers to exiting a group. Radicalisation is an incremental process, and the same applies to exiting extremism, regardless of an individual’s motives for attempting to do so. There are numerous challenges that individuals may encounter, including but not limited to:

- ***A perceived lack of viable alternatives to extremism,*** and the sense that it would be impossible to start a new life and build a new identity away from the far right.
- ***A lack of alternative social networks*** if the individual has severed ties with family and friends outside of extremist circles. This can be exacerbated by any positive experiences or qualities offered by the far right to fill those gaps, such as excitement, comradeship, personal relationships or a strong sense of purpose.
- ***The potential need to relocate*** in order to avoid contact with, or reprisals and threats from, former extremist associates.

- ***Barriers to employment*** such as criminal records, far-right inspired tattoos or a lack of education, training or relevant experience.
- ***Mental health or addiction problems.***

Due to such obstacles, individuals that do manage to leave their far-right past behind often experience depression, isolation, guilt, anxiety or a loss of confidence and self-worth. Such strong emotional reactions pose a considerable risk to both the individual themselves and the wider community as, if unmanaged, they can lead to a relapse to a far right group (or an alternative extremist group or criminal gang) or possibly even increased feelings of alienation and hatred towards mainstream society. It is therefore crucial that those wishing to leave the far right are provided, where possible, with sufficient support in order to do so effectively.

## METHODOLOGY

There are a number of different components that comprise Exit strategies. Among existing programmes, these are enacted in various

ways and to different degrees.

### ***One-to-ones and counselling***

One-to-one intervention and counselling is tailored to the particular needs of the individual and the nature of their involvement with the extreme far right. The number and frequency of meetings required are similarly determined on a case-by-case basis, and these can be delivered locally with counsellors travelling between cases or in an institutional setting (or both). Practitioners may work with clients to address extremist attitudes and behaviours, provide anger management sessions and work on broader social or life skills. Outside formal sessions or meetings intervention providers and counsellors often act as an available contact in times of particular difficulty, for example if an individual is nervous about slipping into past behaviour, sometimes long after they have completed the programme.

There are generally two approaches to dealing with ideology in one-to-one interventions: engaging with ideology upfront or as a secondary goal.

*“You were the only person that ever came... to meet me and listen to me. You gave me a neutral, objective view as opposed to all of the yes men that I was surrounded with. You made me see what is best for my family, myself and my future. You did all of this without making me feel judged. It was like talking to a mate... I would like to help others by learning from my experience of having tunnel vision.”*

***A former far-right extremist from the UK, reflecting on his relationship with his intervention provider***

## 1. Engaging with ideology upfront

Methods of engaging with far-right ideology upfront have been proven successful in a number of contexts, but must be done with care. Those that tackle ideology upfront usually focus just as heavily on relationship building. Ideology can only be successfully deconstructed within the bounds of a pre-existing trusted relationship. Direct challenge can be counter-productive, as can approaching from a right/wrong perspective. Successful methods include those piloted in the UK by Rewind (e.g. check swabs and DNA testing to expose the hidden diverse background of the individual) or by organisations working with vulnerable youth, like the Think Project in Wales (e.g. experiential learning and offering the opportunity to build a relationship with and discuss experiences with an ethnic

*“I was so used to you hate me and I hate you... Here it was like it didn’t matter how much I’d hated them, and I was still welcome and they would help me. It was something new; it was something I had never seen in my whole life!”*

***Johan, a former far-right extremist from Sweden, reflecting on the Exit Fryshuset programme***

minority, immigrant or asylum seeker). Exit Deutschland heavily prioritises tackling ideology in its work.

## 2. Ideology comes second

The reasoning behind this approach, taken by Exit Fryshuset as well as other violence intervention programmes like Aggredi in Finland, is that some individuals are simply well-versed in counter-arguments and confronting ideology directly can lead to a defensive position too soon, which can shut down all other avenues to shape the individual’s viewpoints. In some contexts, if individuals are largely driven to the far right for emotional or social reasons, there may be other issues to work through first before ideology can be breached in an effective way. However, shaping ideology is never entirely omitted from Exit work; it is simply a question of how and when it should be addressed. In Norway, police carrying out Exit work have found it particularly effective to use a conversational tactic called ‘The Empowerment Conversation’ which focuses on understanding the individuals’ goals and sense of self, and promoting a positive view of the self – which can lead to an ultimate change in attitudes towards others.<sup>ix</sup>

### ***Mentoring***

There is sometimes reluctance, especially among governments, to work with and utilise the knowledge of formers in countering terrorism and violent extremism. In this context, the contributions of formers are vital.

Formers are well equipped to encourage clients to question their existing perspectives and political beliefs, to move beyond the “them and us” dichotomy present in far-right narratives and ideologies. This is not to say that those who are not formers cannot achieve these results, but credibility matters in interventions, and former extremists are able to offer a level of perspective, understanding and credibility that ‘outsiders’ are often unable to match. They can alternate more seamlessly between the viewpoints of those both inside and outside the far right. They have proved to be particularly adept in developing trusting relationships with their clients and can serve as role models and proof that the transition back into mainstream society is possible.

Formers are never involved without professional or accredited training. In some cases, formers themselves have undertaken studies or training to become social workers or accredited counsellors, and themselves serve as primary case managers in interventions. But in most other cases, when deemed safe and appropriate, formers can be introduced into the process initially alongside the primary case manager, and can serve as a mentor and role model that can provide personal guidance, help address extremist ideologies, or participate with the client in supervised and constructive leisure activities. Successful Exit programmes in Germany and Sweden employ former members of the far-right scene as mentors or counsellors. Some formers have also conducted preventative

*“I got in touch with them (EXIT) because I felt I needed someone to talk to. It’s hard to talk to people who don’t understand individuals like me. It’s hard to talk to people from the outside... They don’t understand, they aren’t inside this world, and don’t understand what it’s like, and how you look at things and how you are as a person.”*

***Olav, a former far-right extremist from Sweden who completed the Exit Frvshuset programme***

work, speaking to young people about their experiences in the far right.

Formers carrying out this work tend to choose to do so anonymously and without public attention. Given their own personal processes of rebuilding lives outside of extremist movements, formers may hold full or part-time jobs in other industries, but choose to do social work on the side out of a desire to ensure others do not follow the same paths they did.

Of course, this must be done with checks and balances. Formers working at these organisations undergo an evaluation and must pass rigorous standards. Exit Deutschland has, in partnership with academic researchers, developed a set of standards for assessing whether a former is ready to be involved in intervention work.<sup>x</sup> Life After Hate, a non-profit based in the US, is currently working

with academics to develop an assessment framework which could be used to assess a former's journey out of an extremist movement. These tools are much needed.

### ***Tailored re-integration package***

Exit programmes map and coordinate a long-term reintegration package for each case. This might involve assistance with, for example: finding housing and employment; the provision of education, training and skills development; family support, parenting classes or help developing a healthy peer support network; tackling physical or mental health issues, including drug and alcohol awareness, abuse and addiction counselling, or tattoo removal; encouraging civic engagement with suitable charity, community or religious groups; and help with pursuing personal or professional interests and ambitions. It can also include advice on safety and preparations for potential relocation prior to leaving a group. Often the provision of many of these services will be conducted in conjunction with external providers and social services. In some cases with particularly less-ideological youth, this tailored package can simply mean offering diversionary activities to prevent individuals

from spending time with more ideological far-right group leaders.

## **THE EVIDENCE**

It is critical that Exit programmes are rigorously evaluated and transparent in their methodologies and outcomes. As with any violence prevention programmes, evaluation presents certain challenges. However, there has been a raft of independent research in recent years to develop an evidence-base for disengagement and deradicalisation programmes. This is a new and growing field of research, but there is considerable evidence to suggest Exit programmes are effective, and offer good value for investment.

### ***Cost-benefit analyses***

Exit programmes can have a significant, positive societal impact and represent good value as social investments. The Swedish Institute for Socio-ecological Economics has evaluated interventions with existing groups from a financial standpoint in a comprehensive socioeconomic analysis of two programmes, Exit Fryshuset and the Tolerance Project (a local initiative working

*“EXIT has given me back my self-esteem, EXIT has taught me to like myself, which I didn’t do before, and to see the potential that I can do things, that I’m not worthless, that I do have something to offer. In practical terms they gave me a work placement, which ended in a permanent job, and to get a chance to try to work and to feel that you are of use.”*

***Eva, a former far-right extremist from Sweden who completed the EXIT Fryshuset programme***

directly with young people vulnerable to or associated with the far-right in Kungälv).<sup>xixii</sup> They explore the costs to society and local communities of far-right extremist violence in comparison to the costs of operating successful, long-term counter-extremism initiatives targeting extremists themselves. They use various measures to estimate the costs of far-right violence including the costs of perpetration and victimhood. These include, among others, the loss of production (loss to GDP from an inability to work), welfare costs (including unemployment, disability or other benefits), costs to social services (including the healthcare and legal systems), and property destruction or damages. It was found that violent assaults that lead to lasting but moderate injuries can result in costs to society of approximately €550,000.<sup>xixiii</sup> In cases where the victim suffers permanent disabilities, this can rise to as much as €5.5 million over a 45 year period.<sup>xixiv</sup>

In terms of costs directly related to far-right membership, an individual belonging to an extreme far-right group (with a low or average level of violence) may, on average over a ten year period, commit 1.5 “politically” motivated crimes. They also commit 6.6 “other” crimes on average during the same time-frame as participation in such groups often acts as a gateway to other anti-social or criminal activities. The costs to society of such an individual could amount to as much as €650,000.<sup>xixv</sup> An extremely violent member of the extreme right who commits numerous assaults (some of which result in life-long but

not disabling injuries to victims) over a 15 year period (15-29 years old) could incur costs of between €3.8 and 4.3 million to society.<sup>xixvi</sup> The report also suggests that an extreme far-right group, with between 15 and 20 members, could incur a cost to society over a 15 year period of as much as €31.5 million.<sup>xixvii</sup>

For the Tolerance Project, since 1995 around 450 individuals have gone through the programme, at a cost of €3,200 per person.<sup>xixviii</sup> The total budget for the project, from inception to evaluation, was €1.4 million.<sup>xixix</sup> When compared to the cost of an extreme far-right group (€31.5 million<sup>xx</sup>) over a similar period of time to the projects’ lifespan, it would only need to reduce the impact of such a group by 5% in order to justify its funding and “break even” from a societal perspective.

The annual budget of the Tolerance Project (approximately €96,000) is lower than the various Exit programmes operating elsewhere as it works with younger cases that are typically less indoctrinated or entrenched into the extreme far-right.<sup>xxi</sup> It remains relatively comparable however to those of Exit Deutschland and Exit Fryshuset in Sweden, who spend around €200,000<sup>xxii</sup> and €180,000<sup>xxiii</sup> respectively each year.

Exit Deutschland has also identified some of the costs incurred by the police and criminal justice system associated with far-right activity. A single far-right demonstration on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2013, attended by around 100 Neo-Nazis, cost the Pforzheim Police €700,000 to manage.<sup>xxiv</sup> On this basis a Neo-

Nazi activist that attends five similar demonstrations per year could result in annual policing costs of up to €350,000.<sup>xxv</sup> Depending on the region, the annual costs of incarceration for a single prisoner in Germany range between €24,000 and €36,000. In comparison, Exit Deutschland's annual budget of €200,000 enables them to assist around 50 individuals that are attempting to break from their far-right pasts. At an annual cost of €4,000 per person, it is considerably less expensive to offer exit assistance (where appropriate) than some of the more punitive approaches typically used to tackle the far right.

There are of course difficulties in correlating the societal results directly with the activities of these initiatives.<sup>xxvi</sup> The decline of the far right in a particular region cannot necessarily be attributed entirely to the work of the project; it is however possible to compare its budget to the costs of inaction and non-intervention. In doing so it becomes clear that “the non-intervention alternative not only leads to undesirable social conditions but also to high and unnecessary societal costs”.<sup>xxvii</sup> One can also consider the figures of those that leave far-right extremist movements after having gone through Exit programmes.

Exit programmes can offer important social benefits and have a positive impact on wider counter-extremism efforts, but can also be understood as a form of social investment that represents good value to funders, including governments and taxpayers. Evidence from

Kungälv and Exit Fryshuset indicate that there is a robust economic rationale for funding such programmes as they can prove to be “an extraordinarily profitable affair for society”.<sup>xxviii</sup>

### ***Drop-out rates***

A clear measure of success in Exit programmes are the numbers of individuals successfully disengaged from the far right. Since 2000, over 500 individuals have completed the Exit Deutschland programme, with an impressive 97% having successfully exited the extreme right.<sup>xxix</sup> The German domestic intelligence service, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, BfV) also runs its own deradicalisation programme, which dealt with 130 clients between 2001 and 2012. Perhaps due to a greater focus on proactively reaching out to leaders of far-right groups, and disengagement at the expense of deradicalisation, the programme achieved a lower, but still impressive 76% success rate.<sup>xxx</sup> The Violence Prevention Network (VPN), which primarily operates in German prisons, has found that 95% of those far-right offenders that have completed their programme have not reoffended or returned to prison, and just 2% leave the programme prematurely.<sup>xxxi</sup>

The Exit Fryshuset programme in Sweden has been independently and externally evaluated by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention.<sup>xxxii</sup> This report found that, of the 133 people given assistance over a three year

period, 125 (94%) had left the White Power movement and been reported to have ceased criminal behaviour. Of the other eight, four returned to far-right groups, one joined a gang and two continued to struggle with drug addiction, while one individual remained unaccounted for. Based on Exit's own statistics, and accounts by Exit practitioners, by spring 2008 around 600 people had turned to Exit Fryshuset for their support.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Norway was the location for the first Exit programme, and although it is no longer running, and those involved note that the programme suffered from structural issues, the numbers behind it are strong.<sup>xxxiv</sup> Of the 100 young people that participated between 1995 and 2000, 90 did not return to the far-right racist scene. The programme also trained more than 700 practitioners from various local agencies, including the police, child welfare services and teachers, and also provided support and advice to over 130 parents on how to help their children avoid the influence of far-right extremist recruitment and ideology.<sup>xxxv</sup> Those who were involved in this work note that this work was also informally done by a handful of dedicated police officers using the 'Empowerment Conversation' methodology and investing in small-scale diversionary activities.

### ***Changing attitudes and beliefs***

It is also important to know not only when someone has disengaged or dropped out from the far right, but to what degree their ideology or attitudes change. Though not specifically designed for Exit programmes, it is worth

noting the evidence behind several methodologies to engage directly with far-right ideologies in intervention and prevention work. In terms of upstream methodologies, initiatives like The Think Project, inspired by the Swansea Ethnic Youth Support Team (EYST)'s work supporting victims of racism, have tested and evaluated methodologies for changing the attitudes of white youth in Wales who hold the most negative views against Muslims, asylum seekers, or foreigners. Research on the Think Project's methods have shown the most effective way to shift ideology on race, religion and diversity is to employ credible, uniquely skilled tutors; encourage a safe space for individuals to air prejudiced views and an open and honest dialogue; give individuals the experiences they need to think for themselves and think critically on these issues; and employ humour and focus on relationship-building as a prerequisite to changing ideology. Over 250

*"I had counsellors who quit working with me because they were scared about the depth of my knowledge and when I would be processing things and this doctrine would come out, people wouldn't know how to handle it, so people who specialise in unravelling right-wing doctrine is essential for someone who's exited or exiting. That would have been really helpful."*

***Daniel, a former far-right extremist from Canada on the need for specialist Exit counsellors***

young people from South Wales have completed this programme since April 2012, and around 95% have significantly changed their views about asylum seekers since the start of the programme. Another organisation, Rewind UK (an anti-racism programme) has achieved success with a particular method of offering a cheek-swab DNA test to individuals to trace their ethnic heritage. These tests undermine the assumption of white ‘purity’, and can shift the individual’s perception of their own identity, and thus of others as well.

### ***Knowledge generation***

Exit programmes can play an important role in improving knowledge of the internal workings, capabilities and recruitment tactics of the far right, which can enable preventative policies and programmes to be more effectively targeted and provide opportunities for further research.

Exit programmes have taken considerable strides to ensure the knowledge they generate contributes to the academic literature and research on disengagement and deradicalisation, as well as improves policy and practitioner methodologies. Existing intervention programmes offer training on the far right to other practitioners in schools, prisons, or probation and healthcare services and provide insights to policymakers and researchers via workshops, events or conferences. Exit Deutschland publishes its own open access journal JEX, the “first peer reviewed periodical in the world focusing on extremism, deradicalisation and democratic

culture”, and produces its own research via the Institute for the Study of Radical Movements (ISRM).<sup>xxxvi</sup> Exit Fryshuset has established the Centre for Information about Destructive Sub-cultures (CIDES) to help develop and share best practice in intervention and deradicalisation with other practitioners.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Both have also established other related programmes, including to assist the families of ‘foreign fighters’ (individuals that have travelled to participate in the conflict in Syria or Iraq), or to disengage young people involved in street gangs.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

However, what may be learned from past mistakes by the German state is that Exit programmes should not be used primarily as a resource for intelligence. In a previous report, we have advised against the securitisation of prevention and intervention measures in tackling far-right extremism.<sup>xxxix</sup> The securitisation of this work has led in some cases to hesitation from communities to speak to police, due to lack of trust. In others, where the security services forms instrumental relationships with formers or current members of movements, states can risk a situation where it becomes impossible to criminalise individuals due to the nature of these relationships.

## **RISKS AND MITIGATION**

Regardless of the experience and expertise of those operating Exit programmes and the successes achieved in Sweden, Germany and elsewhere, there will of course be a number of

risks associated with this type of programme. These risks can be anticipated and mitigated.

### ***Security***

Considering the nature of this work, threats are not uncommon and the security of staff and clients is therefore paramount. Programmes can maintain close contacts with the police and security services, as well as their external service providers, to identify any potential security issues. Some also employ former police officers to advise on any threats received, and trusted formers may also be consulted if they are familiar with the issuer of the threat. The most common response to direct or specific violent threats would be to refer the matter to the police or other relevant authorities. Others have also dealt with and responded to more generic or impersonal threats (online via email, social media or forums or through the post) directly through dialogue and engagement when deemed safe and appropriate.

### ***Legal***

Exit programmes may also require legal advice on occasion to consult on issues such as confidentiality. In some countries intervention providers are obliged to report potentially incriminating information about their clients (either on historical crimes or potential future violence). Laws in this area vary by jurisdiction so practitioners must be aware of any legal obligations and communicate these to clients early on. In the U.S. and Canada for example, clients are informed that they should avoid specific names, dates or locations when

discussing their former associates or activities to ensure the intervention process is not securitised.

### ***Staff Wellbeing***

As well as security, the wellbeing of staff is an important consideration. Confronting hate on a regular basis can be straining, especially if discussions become personal. Practitioners can lack an adequate support network when there is no official help available, and there can be a reliance on friends, families, colleagues and others conducting similar work internationally to provide this. Unfortunately opportunities for such support can be few and far between due to the relatively small number of practitioners conducting intervention work of this type. There may also be a lack of specialised support specifically tailored to those dealing with extremism, and in some contexts there remains a fear of coming forward when support is needed. In order to deal with these issues a number of options are available. For example, Exit Fryshuset's client coaches have a team leader that is trained as a therapist to guide, support, and supervise their work. In addition to this, external support (provided on a pro-bono basis) is also available.

### ***Sustainability***

It is vital that programmes are sustainable and there is continuity in staffing. There is no strict linear progression out of the far right, but evidence from Sweden, Germany and elsewhere shows that a successful case typically takes around 2-4 years to complete. If

*“When you were working with me it was as though I was being lifted up and carried through it all. Then the visits had to stop which I knew had to happen sooner or later. It was so much harder then though. I really struggled at times, still do if I’m honest. I’d love to be able to help other people who get involved with the far-right and help to put them straight.”*

***A convicted terrorist and former member of Aryan Strike Force and the Wolfpack, UK***

intervention is terminated prematurely, not only is there a higher risk of recidivism, but safety risks for staff and intervention providers.

There is the danger that Exit programmes could prove counter-productive and increase the risks of recidivism for some clients if terminated prematurely due to the long-term and non-linear nature of the deradicalisation and disengagement processes. Even in the UK, those doing interventions with far-right individuals note the dangers of interventions ending too early, and the increased risk of recidivism.

### ***Evaluation***

Despite the successes of other Exit programmes it would be naive to assume that setbacks are not somewhat inevitable with certain individuals. Risks can however be mitigated by a thorough evaluation and accountability process, both of individuals prior to being accepted onto the programme, and of the various elements of the programme itself. The voluntary nature these programmes can also ensure that those that are admitted have shown a genuine commitment to change.

Disengagement and behavioural change can be monitored relatively effectively through reoffending or recidivism rates, whereas deradicalisation, as an essentially a psychological process, is considerably more difficult to quantify with complete certainty. In order to inspire confidence in their methods amongst potential clients and justify the continuation of their funding, Exit programmes should be evaluated both internally, by regularly publishing their results, and externally by independent specialists.

Although the evaluation process will vary by programme, it should include quantitative measures, including case volumes, recidivism rates and other indicators such as the employment level of participants, to provide an indication of the overall success of the programme. Qualitative approaches, such as observations, interviews and surveys, and in-depth case studies, should also be applied to establish the extent to which the methodology employed is effective in changing the attitudes and behaviour of participants. Evaluation should also be conducted on a long-term basis in order to ensure that results remain accurate and participants have not returned to the far-right or other criminal activities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Responses to the far right need to be holistic and cover a wide range of tactics – ranging from anti-discrimination work, prevention and deterrence, to Exit programmes and victims support. The UK should thus continue and develop its much needed work on anti-racism and victims support. However, the importance of Exit programmes should not be understated, as it is an important step in preventing violence, and thereby victimhood. Exit programmes can offer numerous social benefits and a positive impact on wider counter-extremism efforts. As has been demonstrated in Germany and Sweden, they represent good value as social investments and more efforts should therefore be made to establish them in areas where the far-right operates and recruits.

The UK is well-placed to trial Exit work as it already has an evidence-based intervention programme on-going, with the Channel programme, as well as a small number of successful intervention providers dedicated specifically to far-right extremism; it would not be starting from scratch. There has been a

recent expansion of intervention and counselling work dealing with Islamist extremism, and particularly in light of recent concerns about returning British fighters coming from Syria and Iraq. Thus, the development of Exit programmes targeting violent far-right extremists would be a natural expansion of the current intervention strategies.

Exit work should ideally be aligned to and build on the strengths of Channel, including the expertise of intervention providers with a demonstrated track record of far-right interventions; and the established relationship between Channel, social services, and those coming into contact with vulnerable individuals.

However, building Exit programmes will involve slight tweaks to the current offerings of the Channel programme. This includes building a unique set of criteria and standards for far-right interventions in the UK based on the expertise of intervention providers, rather than deferring to local authorities to determine the number of one-to-one meetings required for an intervention. It also means funding longer-term reintegration packages

*“Many lads, admittedly not all, but many, who get active with the far-right come from the poorest and most deprived areas of the UK. Add to this the local authority spending cuts, shutting of libraries, youth clubs, community centres, and many local support groups. Exit work could be vital in preventing them from going back to their bad old ways.”*

***A former member of Aryan Strike Force and British Freedom Fighters, on the need for Exit programmes in the UK***

for each individual to ensure their journey out of a far-right movement is not cut short at one-to-one meetings, increasing risks of recidivism. It also means using the experiences of former far-right extremists to shape the intervention process, and to serve as mentors in particular cases.

The costs of an Exit programme in the UK would be comparable to Exit programmes in Germany and Sweden: an estimated £197,000 per annum to run a programme which offers one-to-one interventions, mentoring and practical support leaving movements, as well as structures to ensure safety of staff and clients.

Exit work in the UK should be designed with the following recommendations in consideration, based on the experiences of similar programmes across Europe:

- ***It should be run by trained and experienced intervention providers***, with a proven track record of far-right intervention in the UK, of which there are a few well-qualified individuals.
- ***It should be voluntary***, as evidence from countries where this work exists demonstrates that programmes are most effective when they are voluntary. The personal commitment of participants is vital and no direct financial incentives to exit should be offered.
- ***It should seek to change ideology***, there are already-proven methodologies

on how to do this effectively, and those currently carrying out this work would be best placed to do it.

- ***It should involve former extremists, but only where they would have an unparalleled impact on the individual*** and could offer mentorship. Formers themselves should pass rigorous standards checks, and should always meet with the individual in the presence of the main intervention provider. As it stands, the Channel programme works with former Islamist extremists to offer intervention; involving former far-right extremists as mentors should thus be a natural expansion of the current approach.
- ***It should be rigorously internally and externally evaluated*** and constantly refine its approaches and methodologies based on evidence about what is, and what is not working.
- ***It should consider providing support to the families and social networks of participants***, and Exit should generally be integrated into wider social support systems.
- ***It requires at least two years funding to ensure safety and reduced risks of recidivism***. Exit programmes are most successful when backed by long-term, sustainable financial support and are at least partially independent from central government. However, where

government runs long-standing successful intervention programmes such as Channel in the UK, it may be more feasible to start with government support.

Despite the diversity of the local and national social contexts in which Exit programmes operate, it is possible to identify a number of key features that work across countries and contexts. While such programmes cannot be transplanted directly from one context to another, an Exit programme in the UK should

adhere to the learning that has emerged from programmes elsewhere.

The UK has become increasingly holistic in its responses to Islamist extremism. It should be equally holistic in its responses to far-right extremism. The evidence is there – these programmes work; they are used where they are on offer; and they can contribute to a reduction in size and impact of far-right extremist movements, and certainly less violence and fewer victims.

## Endnotes

- <sup>i</sup> Interview with German Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, April 2013.
- <sup>ii</sup> The Telegraph (22.07.2013), “Hundreds of children identified as extremism risk”, available online: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/10193557/Hundreds-of-children-identified-as-extremism-risk.html>
- <sup>iii</sup> Koehler, Daniel. (2014) “Deradicalisation,” in *The Routledge International Handbook on Hate Crime*, Eds. N. Hall, A. Corb, P. Giannasi, J. Grieve
- <sup>iv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>v</sup> UK Home Office (2011) *Individual disengagement from Al Qa’ida influenced terrorist groups: A Rapid Evidence Assessment to inform policy and practice in preventing terrorism*, available online: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/116722/occ99.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/116722/occ99.pdf). German programmes include: Exit Deutschland: <http://www.exit-deutschland.de/>; Violence Prevention Network: <http://www.violence-prevention-network.de/>. The Swedish programme discussed is Exit Fryshuset: <http://exit.fryshuset.se/>.
- <sup>vi</sup> Busher, Joel. (2013) ‘Grassroots Activism in the English Defence League: Discourse and Public (Dis)order,’ in (Eds.) Taylor, Currie and Holbrook, *Extreme Right Wing Political Violence and Terrorism*. London: Bloomsbury.
- <sup>vii</sup> Goodwin, Matthew. (2012) *Right-Wing Extremist Violence: Causes and Consequences* in *The New Radical Right: Violent and Non-Violent Movements in Europe*. Institute for Strategic Dialogue.
- <sup>viii</sup> See Busher, Joel. (2013) ‘Grassroots Activism in the English Defence League: Discourse and Public (Dis)order,’ in (Eds.) Taylor, Currie and Holbrook, *Extreme Right Wing Political Violence and Terrorism*. London: Bloomsbury. See also, Gallant, Daniel. ‘The pathway out of violence: my story within and without far-right extremism.’ *openDemocracy*, 1 September 2014. Available online: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/daniel-gallant/pathway-out-of-violence-my-story-within-and-without-farright-extremism>.
- <sup>ix</sup> Ramalingam, Vidhya. (2014) *On the Front Line: A guide to countering far-right extremism*. Institute for Strategic Dialogue.
- <sup>x</sup> Available in German from Exit Deutschland.
- <sup>xi</sup> Prompted by the horrific murder of the 14 year-old John Hron in 1995 by four teenagers with ties to the neo-Nazi scene, the Tolerance Project was established in the Swedish municipality of Kungälv to combat intolerant and racist beliefs.
- <sup>xii</sup> Eva Nilsson Lundmark & Ingvar Nilsson.(2014) *A Summary of the Price of Intolerance – A Socioeconomic Analysis of the White Supremacy Movement and the Kungälv Mode*, available online: [http://toleransprojektet.se/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Sammanstallning\\_Eng\\_korr5.pdf](http://toleransprojektet.se/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Sammanstallning_Eng_korr5.pdf)
- <sup>xiii</sup> 5 million kronor, £432,000 or \$739,000 USD
- <sup>xiv</sup> 50 million kronor, £4.3 million or \$7.4 million
- <sup>xv</sup> 6 million kronor, £518,000 or \$887,000
- <sup>xvi</sup> Between 35 and 40 million kronor, £3-3.3 million or \$5.1 and 5.9 million.
- <sup>xvii</sup> 290 million kronor, £25 million or \$42.9 million
- <sup>xviii</sup> 29,500 kronor, £2,500 or \$4,400 per person
- <sup>xix</sup> 13.3 million kronor, £1.1 million or \$2 million
- <sup>xx</sup> 29 million kronor, £2.5 million or \$4.29 million
- <sup>xxi</sup> 887,000 kronor, £76,000 or \$130,000
- <sup>xxii</sup> Stats available from Exit Deutschland in German: <http://www.exit-deutschland.de/>. See cost-benefit cards. Approximately £158,000 or \$272,000
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Stats available from the Institute for Socio-ecological Economics, in Swedish. Approximately £150,000 or \$250,000
- <sup>xxiv</sup> Stats available from Exit Deutschland in German: <http://www.exit-deutschland.de/>. See cost-benefit cards.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Stats available from Exit Deutschland in German: <http://www.exit-deutschland.de/>. See cost-benefit cards.
- <sup>xxvi</sup> It is important to note however that there is considerable variation between individual members, groups, and their activities within the extreme far-right, and not all are likely to incur same levels of costs. The authors of the report also stress that there are inherent difficulties with attributing the financial costs and benefits of such complex social phenomena. Their findings are therefore cautious underestimates based on volume rather than a series of specific cases, and intangible measures such as social capital and community cohesion are discounted. These potential pitfalls are factored into calculations in order to limit the potential for over-estimating the benefits accrued by project.
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Eva Nilsson Lundmark & Ingvar Nilsson.(2014) *A Summary of the Price of Intolerance – A Socioeconomic Analysis of the White Supremacy Movement and the Kungälv Mode*, available online: [http://toleransprojektet.se/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Sammanstallning\\_Eng\\_korr5.pdf](http://toleransprojektet.se/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Sammanstallning_Eng_korr5.pdf).
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xxix</sup> Exit Deutschland: <http://www.exit-deutschland.de/>
- <sup>xxx</sup> UK Home Office (2011). *Individual disengagement from Al Qa’ida influenced terrorist groups*. London, UK.

<sup>xxx</sup> Violence Prevention Network: <http://www.violence-prevention-network.de/>

<sup>xxxii</sup> The most recent figures on those that have successfully completed the Exit Fryshuset programme are from 1998 to 2001. Since then the programme has helped around 700 more individuals, but Exit Fryshuset does not currently have the capacity or access to accurately monitor those that have completed their programme in the long term.

Ungdomsstyrelsen (2010), *Arbopparverksamhet Ungdomsstyrelsens analys och förslag på hur samhället kan stödja unga arboppare*

<sup>xxxiii</sup> *Individual disengagement from Al Qa'ida influenced terrorist groups* (2011), UK Home Office

<sup>xxxiv</sup> Interviews with Exit Norway practitioners, Oslo, April 2013.

<sup>xxxv</sup> *Individual disengagement from Al Qa'ida influenced terrorist groups* (2011), UK Home Office

<sup>xxxvi</sup> JEX Journal for Deradicalization and Democratic Culture: [www.journal-exit.de](http://www.journal-exit.de); Institute for the Study of Radical Movements: [www.istramo.com](http://www.istramo.com)

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Centre for information about destructive sub-cultures (CIDES): <http://fryshuset.se/in-english/social-projects/>

<sup>xxxviii</sup> Hayat – Exit Germany: [http://www.exit-deutschland.de/Startseite/Islamismus-/-](http://www.exit-deutschland.de/Startseite/Islamismus-/-Ultranationalismus/HAYAT/Beratungsstelle-HAYAT-E1337.htm)

[Ultranationalismus/HAYAT/Beratungsstelle-HAYAT-E1337.htm](http://www.exit-deutschland.de/Startseite/Islamismus-/-Ultranationalismus/HAYAT/Beratungsstelle-HAYAT-E1337.htm); Syrealise Fryshuset:

<http://syrealize.fryshuset.se/>; Passus Fryshuset: <http://fryshuset.se/in-english/social-projects/>

<sup>xxxix</sup> Ramalingam, Vidhya. *Old Threat, New Approach: Tackling the far right across Europe*. Institute for Strategic Dialogue. February, 2014.