

Prevention of violent extremism

Background

Radicalisation and violent extremism are posing huge challenges for societies: Extremist groups justify violence by instrumentalising obstacles to development such as inequality, poverty, poor governance and gender constructions. Extremist acts of violence themselves exacerbate existing conflicts and tendencies towards fragility and polarisation and destabilise social and state structures. There has been a considerable increase in violent extremism in recent years, particularly in the Middle East and in parts of Africa and Asia. Many of the countries affected are facing a real danger that violent extremism may destroy a large part of the development progress made over the past few decades – progress to which international development cooperation has contributed.

■ Significance for international cooperation

In this context, international cooperation is starting to focus on measures for the early prevention of violent extremism (PVE). After more than a decade of the ‘war on terror’, people are beginning to recognise that repressive measures alone do not lead to greater security. They cannot prevent radicalisation, nor can they protect people against violent extremism. Innovative measures, in particular preventive ones, are in increasing demand to supplement criminal law and measures used by the police, the military and intelligence services. The 2030 Agenda refers to PVE in Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 of promoting peaceful, just and inclusive societies. SDG 16 calls for international cooperation to support the relevant national institutions in building their capacity to prevent violence, terrorism and crime. The German Government addresses this topic in its Federal Government Strategy to Prevent Extremism and Promote Democracy of 2016 and in the guidelines on Preventing Crises, Transforming Conflicts, Building Peace of 2017.

PVE is thus attracting the interest of international donors and organisations and of GIZ’s commissioning parties, particularly the Federal Foreign Office, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the European Union (EU), as an area of work.

■ Our understanding – violent extremism

In the following, the term ‘radicalisation’ will be used to refer to the increasing shift by individuals or groups towards an extremist way of thinking and acting. The focus is on violent extremism, which aims to remove the existing social order through its actions. The violence used to do so takes many different forms ranging from damage to property, sabotage and violence on the streets to bombs and suicide attacks. Violence is not only regarded as a legitimate means of asserting one’s will, but is glorified in itself, as a result of which there is always a danger of mass violence.

Violent extremism is marked by pronounced friend/enemy stereotypes, a high degree of ideological dogmatism, political authoritarianism and an identity-based understanding of society that rejects all forms of social diversity and makes individual freedom subordinate to collective goals. Moreover, it is often characterised by a sense of mission and the acceptance of conspiracy theories.

The course radicalisation takes varies from one individual to another, although there are often similarities and common elements. In general, a distinction is made between two different kinds of drivers conducive to violent extremism: structural conditions (**push factors**) and perceptive amplification factors (**pull factors**). The push factors particularly include economic, political and social disparities, such as high unemployment rates, restricted civil rights, state repression, corruption and weak state capacity, above all in the areas health, security, public

infrastructure and education, along with gender constructions based on conservative, patriarchal social structures. The pull factors describe the personal, individual motivations and characteristics of radicalisation processes. A subjective lack of prospects, dissatisfaction and a sense of being personally slighted as well as perceived discrimination and marginalisation may lead to individual crises of meaning and identity and group-based hate and may fuel radicalisation.

■ Our field of intervention

PVE draws on experience in the field of violence prevention. Three levels are generally distinguished: Measures in the field of universal prevention (also referred to as ‘primary prevention’) are not geared to a specific target group. Instead, they aim to promote a society’s resilience towards violent extremism in general and may offer advice on promoting a democratic culture or intercultural tolerance before extremism arises. Targeted prevention measures (‘secondary prevention’) are geared towards people at greater risk of becoming radicalised due to particular circumstances, e.g. prisoners. This also includes people showing initial signs of radicalisation. The focus of these measures generally lies on support to improve the socio-economic conditions of this broad target group in order to prevent them from becoming entrenched in their ideology and/or move on to violent action. Indicated prevention (‘tertiary prevention’) is directed at individuals who have already become radicalised. This is thus often also referred to as de-radicalisation or distancing. In the projects it supports, GIZ has focused so far on universal and targeted prevention measures.

Our position

GIZ sees PVE as a socially significant and strategic topic that should be placed in a broader context of sustainable change. Approaches such as violence prevention, peacebuilding and the promotion of democracy, political participation, education and youth are core competences at GIZ and are suitable means for attempting to achieve a positive impact on structural factors conducive to radicalisation and violent extremism.

PVE approaches can be divided into relevant and specific measures: PVE-relevant measures are geared towards general institutional and structural conditions, for example by supporting institutions in implementing and coordinating prevention strategies or addressing structural deficits that may contribute to radicalisation (for instance unemployment and a lack of perspectives, inhumane prison conditions, discrimination against minorities). PVE-specific measures are geared directly or indirectly towards particular (cognitive or behavioural) patterns among people at risk or their social environment. This includes promoting resilience against extremist ideologies by reducing dichotomous views of the world or stereotypes and encouraging tolerance towards people with different outlooks. Measures to promote individual autonomy and encourage people to assume responsibility for shaping their own lives, like the ones implemented by GIZ, help counter extremist ideas about the individual becoming one with the masses.

In this context, GIZ’s position is as follows:

■ PVE requires multi-stakeholder approaches.

Radicalisation takes place in a context with competing political, social and religious or ideological interests. While many partner governments primarily see extremism as a security problem and would therefore like to receive support in the field of police work, the judiciary and the penal system, many social groups in our partner countries also regard it as a social, religious or cultural phenomenon. In order to ensure that the measures are relevant and that they enjoy credibility and acceptance, a number of stakeholders from the state and civil society, particularly community-based organisations, should be included, and existing community structures used. Tension between parts of the population and the authorities must be recognised in time and taken into account in order to minimise unintended negative results (see below). Integrating local intermediaries and multipliers, for example dignitaries or religious leaders, who share the social environment, traditions, language, culture and religion of the group of people at risk can play an important role both in shaping and implementing a measure. GIZ’s aim is to promote a culture of tolerance and prevention in society as a whole, to foster open dialogue and to highlight the need for extensive partnerships to ensure that prevention is successful.

■ PVE is based on the particular local context.

PVE-specific measures must be planned and implemented in accordance with the context in order to be able to address the interrelated causes and effects of radicalisation processes. Contextualisation is a standard procedure at GIZ, but it is particularly important here. Current research has recognised that different recruitment mechanisms are the main cause of different radicalisation processes in comparable situations and in similarly vulnerable population groups. When designing a project, the set of stakeholders and conflicts in the particular project context therefore needs to be systematically examined, including potential PVE strategies by partner governments and the internal perspective of the population groups affected. Context-specific planning of PVE measures requires appraisal missions designed accordingly and an inception phase (orientation phase at the beginning of the project) lasting several months.

■ PVE measures must be gender specific and must take account of gender stereotypes.

Conflict-ridden gender topics, such as traditional views about gender roles, sexism and ideas about the different ‘value’ of men and women, are an important factor contributing to the interest in extremist groups shown by young men and women. This includes gender stereotypes such as aggressive, militarised masculinity, which – alongside huge insecurity concerning one’s own role – are often one of the reasons why young men in particular turn to extremist groups. Similarly, girls and women from Muslim families may choose a stricter form of Islam than

that practiced by their parents' generation, for example, and join the jihadi movement. This might be felt to be a form of empowerment in a patriarchal family hierarchy. Even though women are much less active in acts of violence than men are, they may still assume important roles in disseminating ideologies in the family, the community and the media. Recognising that gender aspects and dynamics are widespread in all forms of extremism is vital for successful prevention, because the offers made and the recruitment strategies pursued by extremist groups are gender specific too.

■ **Only long-term PVE measures are successful.**

Lasting and hence successful prevention is only possible using long-term interventions and thus requires a long-term, binding commitment. Short-term stand-alone measures are not sufficient to work on the complex social or individual factors that are conducive to radicalisation processes. Implementation can begin with small-scale pilot measures that are adapted flexibly to the particular context. Larger projects and programmes can follow in the next step.

■ **PVE measures must be planned and communicated with an eye to the target group.**

Key implementation principles at GIZ that are particularly relevant to PVE measures are that planning and steering of measures should be as transparent and participatory as possible and should be carried out in cooperation with the institutions and stakeholders involved; moreover, communication with clients, partners, target groups and the public should be sensitive. The latter is significant in order to avoid too much emphasis being placed on security in connection with the topic and certain sections of the population being stigmatised. Thus extremists may present awareness-raising measures as hostile under certain circumstances. If these measures then unintentionally support extremist narratives, they soon become counterproductive and may scare off potential partners of international cooperation (IC).

■ **GIZ can integrate PVE measures as modules in comprehensive support activities.**

Lasting prevention of violent extremism that does not merely treat the symptoms requires a comprehensive approach that takes account of the political, social and socio-economic causes and counteracts forces of social exclusion. PVE measures are most likely to have a sustainable impact if they are placed in a broader context with good governance, promotion of democracy and the rule of law and combined with measures for social cohesion, inclusion of marginalised population groups and peacebuilding.

GIZ supports numerous projects designed to help achieve sustainable socio-economic development in the partner countries and to have an indirect impact to counter the structural factors that encourage

radicalisation, such as a lack of economic prospects, inadequate education opportunities, limited political participation, the absence of rights, a lack of transparency and corruption. Greater accountability on the part of state actors and a professional security sector reduce arbitrariness and abuse of power and boost citizen awareness and social cohesion. Projects that operate in the field of youth promotion and peacebuilding, violence prevention and dealing with the past, interreligious dialogue, access to law, promotion of education, the private sector and employment or strengthening of media diversity and media skills are also relevant to PVE measures and allow an integrated, modular approach to be taken. Conversely, it is only by integrating the PVE approach sensitively that a project geared towards general structural conditions or disadvantaged target groups becomes relevant to PVE.

There are other key overlaps with areas such as displacement and migration. Precise analysis of these contexts and development of specific reform approaches continue to be challenges for the years to come.

■ **Risk reduction is a key part of planning and implementing PVE measures.**

PVE projects have a heightened risk of unintended negative results, especially in terms of human rights and of gender and conflict sensitivity. This risk increases in cooperation with partner governments that have a different understanding of prevention. Projects may make an important contribution towards helping partners understand that disproportionate measures to counter extremism, for example arbitrary prosecution, are often counterproductive and in some circumstances may encourage radicalisation.

In the worst case scenario, PVE can be misused as a method of stigmatisation and political repression against opposition groups. For GIZ, there is a risk that target groups may see the company as a one-sided supporter of the security apparatus. GIZ uses the safeguards and gender management system to cover unintended negative results. Integrated context and human rights analyses and development of SMART (specific, measurable, attainable and action-oriented, relevant and time-bound) indicators and relevant (context-sensitive) monitoring systems are used to this end. With its many years of experience in developing results-oriented monitoring systems, GIZ is well positioned here and should make use of this knowledge. It is also important for projects to pursue realistic goals and to offer real prospects in order not to raise false expectations among either clients or partners. Indicated prevention – work with individuals who have already become radicalised – requires additional care in view of the risks. As a result of the possible proximity to extremist groups, particular attention should be paid to risks to personnel for GIZ and its partners if projects are to start operating in this area.

Lessons learned and recommendations for action

Lessons learned by GIZ in the field of PVE are currently found primarily in the field of universal prevention measures, for example the violence prevention project in South Africa. Initial relevant experience on PVE has been acquired in the GIZ International Services project financed by the EU on extremism in Jordanian prisons. In several projects financed by BMZ and the EU, activities are being implemented in the field of targeted prevention (e.g. strengthening young people for peacebuilding and peaceful conflict management in the Philippines, business promotion project in northern Cameroon). The project on Interfaith Dialogue on Violent Extremism (iDove) led by young adults from Europe and Africa as part of the sector project on Values, Religion and Development uses dialogue formats within and between the religions as a means of early prevention of violent extremism. Further PVE-specific projects are currently being launched or developed (e.g. the project on Prevention of Violence and Radicalisation in the Tunisian Penitentiary System financed by the German Federal Foreign Office).

It is challenging and demanding to demonstrate the effect of prevention and its visible successes. Wording objectives and indicators realistically remains essential to PVE projects and should be clarified with the commissioning parties in a constructive and critical dialogue. To develop its sectoral and analytical capacity, evaluate results and take part in key policy debates, GIZ is continuing to expand its links to applied prevention research.

Cooperation partners

GIZ cooperates with partners such as the German Prevention Congress (DPT) and its Institute for Applied Prevention Research (dpt-i). As Germany's largest conference on crime prevention and related areas of prevention, DPT has been bringing together the most important actors in the field of prevention work every year since 1995; PVE has also been included for several years now. DPT and the partnership with dpt-i provide GIZ with important forums for German and international debate on the topic and allow the company to position itself as a key actor in this sector.

Initial ties have been set up with the academic community and are to be extended.

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