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DERADICALISATION AND DISENGAGEMENT IN THE BENELUX

A variety of local approaches

Amy-Jane Gielen

Belgium has the highest number of foreign fighters per capita in Western Europe (Colaert, 2017; Van Ostayen en Van Vlierden, 2018). It is closely followed by The Netherlands, which produced over 300 foreign fighters. With the so-called Caliphate defeated, many foreign fighters have surrendered or have already returned home. Belgium has over 130 returnees (Segers, 2019) and The Netherlands 60 (AIVD, 2019). The question of what to do with these foreign fighters has sparked heated political and societal debate varying from sentencing (to death) in Iraq and Syria to prosecuting them in The Netherlands and Belgium and offering exit programmes. Such programmes are often a combination of interventions aimed at changing extremist beliefs (deradicalisation) or dissuading from violent extremist action (disengagement) (Horgan & Braddock, 2010). These programmes have become of particular importance in Belgium and The Netherlands as these countries are not only confronted with the terrorist threat of returnees, some of whom were responsible for (foiled) terrorist attacks, but are also dealing with an increase in home-grown violent extremism due to the fact that the Caliphate has been defeated and because extremist right-wing organisations are on the rise again (NCTV, 2019; Segers, 2019).

Exit programmes have become common across the world in the fight against violent extremism. However, the approaches used in different geographical locations differ substantially. While, for instance, disengagement and deradicalisation attempts in South East Asia and the Middle East revolve around theology and ideology, in Germany, Norway and Sweden, exit interventions focus less or not at all on ideology (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2013). In Mali, Niger and Chad, one study found that radio programmes were an effective part of a strategy to counter violent extremism (Aldrich, 2014). Yet, the strategy does not necessarily transfer to digitalised countries (Gielen, 2017a). Thus programmes for deradicalisation and disengagement are very much country-dependent. However, both Belgium and The Netherlands have not only organised their countering violent extremism (hereafter: CVE) policies on a national and in the case of Belgium on a federal level, but have also made municipalities responsible for CVE policy.
Belgium is a federal state, composed of communities and regions. Belgium has three communities: the Flemish community, the French community and the German-speaking community. The country is further divided into 10 provinces and 589 municipal councils (Belgium.be, 2019). The Netherlands is not a federal state, but consists of 390 municipalities. Most municipalities that are confronted with violent extremism (e.g. due to travel of foreign fighters) have their own local CVE programmes. As a consequence, deradicalisation and disengagement not only vary by country, but also very much locally in both countries. This contextuality, in combination with the high number of foreign fighters from the Benelux, warrants a separate chapter on deradicalisation and disengagement programmes in the Benelux. The Benelux consists not only of Belgium and The Netherlands, but also of Luxembourg. However, Luxembourg has nowhere near the amount of foreign fighters and the threat level Belgium and The Netherlands have. In the words of the High Commission for National Protection (HCPN): “While ‘tak[ing] the threat seriously and act[ing] accordingly by implementing the necessary policies and measures’,” the situation is “less acute than in other EU countries” (quoted from Van Ginkel & Entenmann, 2016: 46). As a consequence Luxembourg will not be further discussed in this chapter.

This chapter will start off by briefly discussing the broader national, (federal) and local policy frameworks, of which deradicalisation and disengagement programmes are part, also known as CVE. It will focus on how deradicalisation and disengagement are organised on a local level, highlighting the multi-agency and tailor-made approach. It will then go on to discuss the effectiveness of these efforts. It will do so by drawing on both our empirical research in municipalities as well as desk research of previous studies that have been conducted. The chapter concludes with several reflections on the Benelux exit approach and how the effectiveness of these programmes can be further improved.

The Belgian CVE context

As part of its counter-terrorism (CT) effort since the attacks in Madrid in March 2004 and in London on July 2005, the Belgian federal government launched the action plan Radicalisation (Stratégie fédérale belge contre la radicalisation violente), also known as “Plan R”, in 2005. In 2013 it became apparent that dozens of Belgian citizens had travelled to Syria to initially fight against the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Since then, Belgium has been heading the list in Western Europe of the highest number of foreign fighters per capita (Colaert, 2017). Plan R was updated in 2015 and still forms the cornerstone of the Belgian CT policy with the adoption of an increasing number of CVE measures, instruments, laws and/or institutions at federal, regional and local level (Wittendorp et al., 2017). An overview of the Belgian local, regional and federal initiatives has been provided by Gielen (2018d) and is summarised below:

- In April 2015, the Flemish Government approved the Action plan for the prevention of violent radicalisation processes (Actieplan ter preventie van radicaliseringsprocessen) that can lead to extremism and terrorism. This was updated in 2017 to an Action plan for the prevention of violent radicalisation and polarisation (Actieplan ter preventie van gewelddadige radicalisering en polarisering) (Colaert, 2017).
- In the Brussels-Capital Region Brussels–Prevention and Security (BPS) was set up in 2015 to play a central role in coordinating the various regional prevention and security chain operators. The BPS drafted the Global Security and Prevention Plan (GSPP) in 2017, which also includes the topic of polarisation and radicalisation.
A similar initiative was undertaken by Wallonie-Bruxelles which launched their *Initiatives de prévention du radicalisme et du bien-vivre ensemble* (Initiatives to prevent radicalisation and well-being together) in 2015 and set up a new service called CAPREV (Centre for the Assistance of People concerned by any Radicalism or Extremism leading to Violence) in December 2016.

Confronted with the foreign fighter phenomenon, the municipalities of Vilvoorde, Brussels, Mechelen, Antwerp and Liège were the first to respond and appointed “deradicalisation officials” in 2013 who were responsible for setting up a local approach to prevent and counter violent extremism (Renard & Coolsaet, 2018). These cities are also known as the “pilot cities”. In the following years many municipalities (e.g. Aalst, Charleroi, Ghent, Maaseik, Menen, Namur, Oostende, Verviers and Zele) – often supported by the regional government – followed their example and developed CVE policies.

In Belgium the mayor has to take the initiative to set up a Local Integral Security Cell (LIVC) to ensure that preventative and social services can share information together with the Local Task Force (LTF). The LTF is a multi-agency platform between the federal police, security services and the local public prosecution office. Within the LTF information is shared and radicalised individuals are monitored. The mayor forms a bridge between the security and the social domain and makes it possible to undertake legal and administrative measures or interventions aimed at deradicalisation and disengagement (Van Broeckhoven & Gielen, 2015). In Belgium, efforts to deradicalise and disengage are thus very much a local responsibility. The regions support the local level with finances and expertise (exchange), but do not carry out interventions aimed at deradicalisation and disengagement (Figure 16.1).

**The Dutch CVE context**

The Netherlands was first confronted with homegrown jihadism in 2004 when Mohammed B. assassinated the film maker Theo van Gogh. Mohammed B. turned out to be part of an extremist network of mostly Dutch-born young Muslims who were planning attacks as early as 2002 (Vidino, 2007). The network was also known as the Hofstad group. In the aftermath of the assassination and the arrest of members of the Hofstad group, the first “counter-polarisation and radicalisation” programmes were developed on both a national (Ministerie BZK, 2007) as well as a local level. The City of Amsterdam, for example, developed an action plan called “Wij Amsterdammers”, and Amsterdam boroughs followed suit (Gielen,

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**Figure 16.1** Belgium’s multi-agency approach.  
Source: Van Broeckhoven & Gielen, 2015.
The essence of these plans is that they attempted to address the root causes and drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism and enhance protective factors against violent extremism. Lousberg et al. (2009) provide an overview of the types of intervention that were part of the Dutch national and local programmes. The interventions aim to prevent both Islamic radicalisation and right-wing radicalisation. Lousberg et al. (ibid) structured 213 interventions used by practitioners, of which 106 were targeted at right-wing individuals and 174 at Muslims. The clustering led to an overview of 15 clusters of interventions in the preventive, curative and repressive stage. In the curative stage, mentoring and deradicalisation are offered to (potential) radicalised individuals.

The Dutch national and local CVE programmes came to an end in 2012, because violent extremism was not considered a serious threat any more by security services (Ministerie Veiligheid en Justitie, 2012, NCTV; 2012). One year later the conflict in Syria led to Dutch citizens travelling to join terrorist organisations such as Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). It was at that time, in March 2013, that the threat level had to be raised (NCTV, 2013) and a new national CVE action plan (Ministerie van Veiligheid & Justitie et al., 2014) was developed.

As in 2007, the local approach became the cornerstone of Dutch CVE policies in which municipalities are responsible for setting up local CVE programmes. These CVE programmes are most often a combination of preventive approaches (e.g. training for practitioners, community engagement) as well as individual case management (“persoonsgerichte aanpak”) for radicalised individuals (Gielen, 2015b). The individual case management takes place within a multi-agency setting in which municipalities are in the lead and reports of (potential) radicalised individuals are assessed and discussed. These signals can come from practitioners, members of the public and communities, the Police, the Public Prosecution Office, the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) or the Office of the National Coordinator for Security and Counter-terrorism (NCTV). The signals are either directly passed to the responsible policy officer of the municipality or are given to the mayor of the municipality. The signals are discussed within a multi-agency setting consisting of the municipality, the Police, the Public Prosecution Office, the Child Protection Service, the Probation Service, the Mental Health Service and the NCTV. Together they make a risk assessment of each (potentially) radicalised individual and decide on the best course of action. This can consist of (a combination of) legal, administrative and/or softer measures. Measures can include ideological/psychological counselling; family support; practical support with housing and a job; no contact with the former extremist network to prevent further grooming; social media ban to prevent further grooming and involving Child Protection Services to enforce necessary change in (troubled) family systems (Gielen, 2015b; Gielen, 2018a; NCTV, 2014). The individual case management within a multi-agency setting is visually presented in Figure 16.2.

It is thus within this multi-agency setting that exit programmes are offered. Exit programmes refer to “all efforts undertaken by or under the responsibility of a municipality aimed” at deradicalisation (changing extremist beliefs), disengagement (dissuading from violent extremist action), reintegration and rehabilitation (quoted from Gielen, 2018a: 456 based on Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Veldhuis, 2012). Exit programmes can be undertaken at different stages: to prevent imprisonment, during imprisonment or after imprisonment (Gielen, 2018a: 457). Based on the CVE prevention classification model (Gielen, 2017a), Dutch exit programmes fall in the secondary and tertiary category of CVE. Secondary prevention is aimed at preventing further radicalisation, tertiary prevention programmes are offered once someone has already engaged in acts of violent extremism, for example foreign fighters. Unlike secondary prevention, tertiary prevention is offered after criminal prosecution and possible imprisonment. So Dutch municipalities

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are responsible for deradicalisation and disengagement (Gielen, 2018a: 457). However, they can also make use of national facilities that have been set up and/or funded by the NCTV: the TER team and Forsa. The TER (Terrorism, Extremism and Radicalisation) team is a reintegration programme of the Dutch Probation Service (Reclassering Nederland, RN) for convicted violent extremists and Forsa is a national voluntary exit outreach facility for radicalised individuals. The nature of these programmes will be addressed shortly, but for now it is important to know that municipalities can request the help of both the TER team and Forsa for the deradicalisation and disengagement of radicalised individuals in their municipalities. Some municipalities call upon their help, others do not, while some combine the TER or Forsa with their own local tailor-made exit programme. The above-mentioned factors make deradicalisation and disengagement in The Netherlands very complex, contextual and specific.

**Effectiveness of the Dutch and Belgium exit approach**

The Dutch AIVD as well as the NCTV report that most returnees remain active in the jihadist network upon return, because they are welcomed by the jihadist network with open arms and sucked back into the network (NCTV, 2016a). The AIVD (2016a) has also stated that single interventions, such as only revoking a passport, are ineffective, as individuals are likely to attempt to travel to ISIS territory a second and third time with either fake or alternative identification. So, the question is, are effective deradicalisation and disengagement at all possible and how should they be done?

There is very little empirical evidence on exit programmes in general, let alone in the Benelux. Based on the limited scientific evidence, the few empirical studies that have been conducted and practice-based experiences, such as for example collected by the EU...
Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), some important lessons can be drawn. These lessons have been drawn up by Gielen (2017a, 2018a) and are reiterated in this section. El-Said (2012) reviewed several exit programmes around the globe and concluded that exit programmes must be tailor-made and take into account the contextual factors of each country, including culture, traditions, history and laws. The RAN, set up by the European Commission with at the time more than 2,000 practitioners working in CVE, has collected approaches and inspiring practices in CVE. Its collection of approaches and practices (Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2017), too, underlines that exit programmes should be tailor-made. It furthermore advises that exit programmes take a long-term approach and consist of multiple interventions aimed at the individual level via mentoring, psychological counselling, theological guidance and practical interventions such as provision of schooling and housing, as well as interventions aimed at the family level, such as family support. Furthermore, the RAN Collection underlines that exit programmes require a multi-agency approach, properly trained staff knowledgeable on the issue of violent extremism and specific competences in terms of, for example, relationship formation and communication skills.

Demant et al. (2008) similarly stressed the importance of an integral approach to deradicalisation and disengagement. In their opinion, exit programmes for jihadists focus too much on normative factors, concentrating on theological and ideological issues, and as a consequence overlook affective factors such as the family and peer network (ibid: 181). Demant et al. (ibid) argue that European exit programmes would benefit from a more comprehensive focus, dealing with all exit factors – normative, affective and practical – without favouring one factor over the others. This argument is also made in more recent studies on exit programmes (Koehler, 2016; Weggemans & De Graaf, 2017).

In sum, the success of an exit programme is dependent on the extent to which the exit programme is integral and holistic and addresses ideological, social and practical issues. The next sections will discuss the extent to which this is the case in the Benelux by discussing several evaluations (or the lack of them) in The Netherlands and Belgium.

**Evaluations of the Dutch Probation Service**

In 2012, the NCTV and the Dutch Probation Service developed a plan to improve the reintegration of extremist offenders in The Netherlands. The aim was to: (1) improve reintegration efforts of violent extremist prisoners whilst still in detention; (2) provide better aftercare upon their release; and (3) create a central and coordinated approach for dealing with violent extremists in the future (Schuurman & Bakker, 2016; Van der Heide & Schuurman, 2018).

This has led to the TER team being set up. The team has a legal mandate to work with people either suspected or convicted of offences related to violent extremism. The TER team becomes involved during a probationary sentence awaiting trial or after the sentence for violent extremism (related acts) is nearly finished and the individual is coming up for parole. The TER team conducts the same tasks as their “regular” probation colleagues: (1) making an assessment and reporting on the risk of recidivism; and (2) suggesting interventions to minimise recidivism and supervising individuals accordingly (ibid). To carry out these tasks, the TER team makes use of risk assessment tools (e.g. “RISc” and VERA-2R), protocols and guidelines on how to work with prisoners and probationers, as well as oversight measures such as electronic (GPS) monitoring systems (ibid).

The TER team differs from a regular Probation Service approach in the following aspects. First of all, the (suspected) violent extremist is supervised by two staff members in...
order to increase accuracy in conducting the risk assessment. Moreover, the team has meetings twice a week to exchange knowledge, share experiences and discuss best ways forward with a particular individual (ibid). Furthermore, members of the TER team, which now consists of 15 team members, have been extensively trained on violent extremism, ideology and conversation techniques (Reclassering Nederland, 2019).

Schuurman and Bakker (2016) conducted a process evaluation of the Dutch Probation Service and their TER team. They provide a process evaluation of the team concerned with the reintegration of formerly imprisoned violent extremists. Although this study cannot provide any hard conclusions on the effectiveness of the Probation Service in terms of deradicalisation and disengagement, the evaluation is particularly helpful in illustrating crucial contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of an exit programme. Relevant contextual conditions include managerial support for probation staff and good cooperation with other stakeholders such as municipalities. The process evaluation also highlighted a difference of opinion between the NCTV and the Probation Service about the theory of change and aim of the programme. The Probation Service mainly focused on behavioural aspects instead of also applying cognitive interventions. This also had implications for the ultimate goal of the programme, as the behavioural interventions can only achieve disengagement and not deradicalisation. The latter aim is a strong desire of the NCTV (ibid).

Van der Heide and Schuurman (2018) evaluated that same TER team two years later, but this time much more extensively with a theoretical evaluation, process evaluation and a qualified impact assessment of the reintegrate programme of the TER. This time they followed the programme for a 27-month period in which they interviewed 72 staff members, clients and stakeholders and the TER team responsible for 189 individuals. Whilst the evaluation results seem promising in the sense that the programme seems to consist of sound theory of change and terrorist-related recidivism is exceptionally low in comparison to regular Dutch recidivism figures, Van der Heide and Schuurman present the results with caution and disclaimers which underline the complexity of deradicalisation and disengagement and challenges related to their evaluation. First of all, no form of longitudinal structured risk assessment is applied, nor are recidivism rates collected after the oversight period by the Probation Service has ended. In the absence of these metrics, it means “effectiveness” is very much based on the (subjective) professional judgement by the TER team (ibid). As most individuals receive guidance from the TER team whilst they are awaiting their trial, one must always take into consideration that individuals have a vested interest in presenting a best (and disengaged) version of themselves (ibid).

The importance of context is reflected in the process evaluation, which highlights contextual factors that contribute to specific outcomes. Workload-induced stress, financial constraints and working with municipalities that were either less experienced with the issue of violent extremism or municipalities that followed their own specific course with a very different approach to deradicalisation and disengagement from the rest of the country (e.g. Amsterdam) were considered as limiting the effectiveness of the TER team. Working together in pairs to supervise individuals and having a psychologist for staff members to talk to were considered important contextual factors in the deradicalisation and disengagement efforts of the TER team (ibid).

**Evaluation of the Dutch local exit approaches**

Most municipalities have not evaluated their CVE programme let alone their deradicalisation and disengagement initiatives. To stimulate evaluation the NCTV has now developed an
Gielen (2018c) has conducted an evaluation of the exit programme of one of the biggest cities in The Netherlands based on 19 case files. The municipality in question has set up a team of mentors/intervention providers who can be deployed in cases of violent extremism or (possible) radicalisation. This team consists of several professionals who have different kinds of backgrounds and who already work for or within the municipality (e.g. social services, youth care, employment office). They have received extensive training on violent extremism, jihadism and conversation techniques about goals in life and religion. They are capable of making assessments in cases of violent extremism and mentoring and providing interventions for (potential) violent extremists. The team is diverse in terms of gender, culture and religious background which means there is always someone available who fits the needs and background of the case at hand. The municipal intervention providers are made available one day a week from their regular work and are able to work on a case for a longer period of time. They have contact with the cases on a weekly basis and work on the basis of outreach in the sense that they (can) make home visits, and so on. The intervention providers receive individual coaching and participate in monthly intervision (a form of peer-to-peer learning) and also receive ongoing training (ibid).

Gielen concluded that a proper evaluation was not possible because the municipality in question did not make risk assessments of their cases, nor did they log their interventions.

Table 16.1 Evidence and practice-based model for the design of exit programmes.

- Exit requires a long-term and holistic approach that takes into account the push and pull factors, combining multiple interventions that activate different mechanisms. For example, such a programme might entail mentoring, practical support, family support, physical and psychological assessment and counselling and theological and ideological guidance
- The sequence of interventions in the exit programme is important and must be tailored to the needs of the individual. Practical interventions can help participants gain sufficient trust to move forward with other interventions. Creating a safe and stable family environment can be an important precondition to mentoring and learning self-reflection
- Creating an alternative social network is essential to compensate for loss of friends or brother- and sisterhood
- The success of an exit programme does not seem to be dependent on the size or experience of a municipality. Rather, it seems determined more by the extent to which the exit programme is integral and holistic and addresses normative, affective and practical issues
- The success of an exit programme is also dependent on the intervention provider. The ability to establish a trust-based relationship with the individual and the family and operate in a multi-agency setting is imperative. These elements are also acknowledged in the empirical small-scale pilot study ($n = 5$) of a deradicalisation programme conducted by Hallich and Doosje (2017). These authors emphasised that a successful exit depends not only on “best practices” but also on “best people”. Establishing trust-based relationships between the intervention provider, the individual and the individual’s family and being able to provide support in a multi-agency setting are crucial elements for exit programme success
- While a soft approach seems more promising, legal and administrative instruments can be helpful in creating the right conditions for exit. Specific conditions are: no contact with the former extremist network to prevent further grooming, a social media ban to prevent further grooming and involvement of Child Protection Services to enforce necessary changes in troubled home situations

Source: Evidence and practice-based model for the design of exit programmes.
A proper before-and-after measurement therefore was not possible (ibid). It seems that lack of documentation and structural risk assessment is representative for the situation in other municipalities too. Gielen has proposed how to conduct such evaluations of the Dutch municipal approaches in the future (Gielen, 2018a).

**Evaluation of national exit facility Forsa**

As part of the Integral Action Plan Jihadism (Ministerie van Veiligheid en Justitie et al., 2014) a national exit facility was set up in The Netherlands in October 2015. The facility is aimed at individuals with violent extremist attitudes who are or were involved in violent extremist networks. The exit facility was initially only aimed at people involved in jihadist networks but is now also aimed at right-wing extremists. Forsa works on an outreach basis, which enables them to work nationwide. They offer:

- critical reflection
- trauma counselling
- empowerment in dealing with the (former) extremist network
- stimulating societal participation
- help to improve family and social relations
- increasing resilience
- dealing with religious and existential questions (AEF, 2018).

In an evaluation (AEF, 2018), researchers concluded the following on the basis of case file analysis:

- 90% of clients who received a tailor-made exit programme no longer posed a risk in terms of violent extremist behaviour. In the remaining 10% it was hard to establish an effect.
- None of the clients travelled to a conflict zone after receiving an exit programme.
- No concerns have been raised by municipalities that individuals who have been helped have formed a (new) concern.
- No individuals have reapplied to the exit programme.

These results are the short-term outcomes on the basis of case file analyses. Only a longitudinal analysis in which the individuals are extensively monitored will be able to provide indications of the impact of Forsa.

**Evaluation of the Belgium (exit) approach**

Gielen (2018d) has drafted a road map for CVE evaluation in Belgium. As part of this road map she made an inventory of the attempts that were and are being undertaken to monitor and evaluate the Belgian CVE approach (including deradicalisation and disengagement) on a federal, regional and local level. She concludes that monitoring and evaluation are not systematic parts of Belgium CVE policy. However there have been several initiatives from a policy, civil society and academic level to conduct evaluation in the Belgian context. This section provides an overview of the CVE evaluation initiatives that have been undertaken by policy and academic actors and is based on the above-mentioned road map which was commissioned by the Open Society Foundation (ibid).
After the terrorist attacks on the Brussels underground and at Brussels airport in 2016 a Parliamentary Commission evaluated the Belgian CT approach and identified a number of shortcomings, one of them being the imbalance between prevention and repression (Renard & Coolsaet, 2018). The Federal Plan to counter terrorism and radicalisation, “Plan R”, is continually evaluated but the results are not made public (Wittendorp et al., 2017). On a regional level, the Flemish Peace Institute has been commissioned by the Flemish Parliament to evaluate the local approaches in nine cities and municipalities (Flemish Parliament, 2018). This evaluation revolves around two questions: are the local measures in line with scientific knowledge and needs on the ground, and how are they implemented? This evaluation is a result of the Flemish Parliament placing the issue on the agenda by inviting academics to Parliament in 2017 and the Flemish Peace Institute editing a book ‘De-radicalisation’; Scientific Insights for Policy (Colaert, 2017).

On a local level, the policy officers of most of the pilot cities (Antwerp, Vilvoorde, Mechelen, Brussels and Liege) state that evaluation has not been an integral part of their CVE programme. The cities were initially so overwhelmed by the flux of foreign fighters that they focused on controlling the situation and developing a CVE policy. Nevertheless, most cities have a form of monitoring via their LIVCs in which they discuss the up-to-date statistics (how many are radicalised, how many have travelled, how many have returned?) and discuss what interventions have been implemented for each. Two cities have CVE programmes that are embedded in a broader organisation/department and that have to comply with the monitoring and evaluation framework of that organisation/department. Consequently, one of the cities has to comply with a quarterly process evaluation in which they have to provide an update on what kinds of intervention have been organised. The other city’s programme includes (impact) evaluation in the sense that effect measurements are undertaken before, during and after the intervention (Gielen, 2018d).

On an academic level the universities of Louvain (UCL), Brussels (VUB) and the National Institute of Criminalistics and Criminology (NICC) are collaborating in a research project called AFFECT. The objective of AFFECT is to assess the effectiveness of Belgian deradicalisation and CT policies and programmes and their impact on social cohesion and liberties. It aims to offer a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of these policies in order to identify good practices, but also loopholes, gaps and duplication of effort.

Professor van San from the Erasmus University of Rotterdam recently published a report (Van San, 2018) in which she is very critical of the Flemish CVE policy. The report states that most policies and interventions are not aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism, but are focused on the detection of the phenomenon, which can have counterproductive effects such as first-line practitioners becoming the extended arm of security services. She questions the added value of CVE programmes as there is little to no scientific evidence that they are effective. Her critical analysis only highlights the need for more evaluation. The latter point has also been made by Belgian youth workers who are very critical of the report and do believe in the importance of Belgian CVE programmes (Struys, 2018).

**Conclusion**

This chapter has provided an overview of the broader national, (federal) and local CVE frameworks of which deradicalisation and disengagement programmes are part in The Netherlands and Belgium. It has illustrated that a local and multi-agency approach forms the cornerstone of...
both the Belgian and Dutch exit programmes. It has also shown that, due to the administrative complexity and the variety of tailor-made exit programmes, it is very difficult to assess the effectiveness of these programmes. There is no “one-size-fits-all” programme; rather deradicalisation and disengagement in the Benelux consist of a variety of local approaches. Thorough evaluation of deradicalisation and disengagement initiatives remains scarce in both countries, although The Netherlands has a slightly better track record than Belgium. That is due to the fact that these countries were overwhelmed by the foreign fighter phenomenon. All the attention went towards containing the problem instead of reflection and evaluation. The evaluations illustrate a variety of evaluation methods, e.g. interviews, case file analysis, document analysis, and so on. It is not possible to make statements about the effectiveness of the Dutch and Belgian deradicalisation and disengagement programmes.

The evaluations that have been conducted do however all highlight the importance of contextual factors that need to be taken into account, such as the importance of a multi-agency approach, funding and properly trained staff who can establish a trust-based relationship with individuals. More evaluations and specifically longitudinal evaluations in which (de)radicalised individuals are monitored for a longer period are crucial to gain more insight into effectiveness. This requires that municipalities invest much more in conducting thorough risk assessments before and after and log all the interventions they have provided to individuals with the aim of deradicalisation and disengagement.

Note
1 Luxembourg does have a CVE programme in place which is mostly executed by the Respect, the centre against radicalisation, founded mid-2017. Their annual report provides an overview of the activities: https://www.respect.lu/documents/Jahresbericht-2017-respect.lu-Centre-contre-la-radicalisation.pdf

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