EX POST PAPER

High-Level Conference on child returnees and released prisoners

Summary

The RAN High-Level Conference in Luxembourg on 11 October 2018 showcased the current practices and the key challenges in EU Member States in dealing with child returnees from Iraq and Syria, child refugees fleeing from conflict zones to the EU, and detainees released from prison, in order for this last group to both prevent recidivism of those convicted of terrorism-related offences and prevent individuals radicalised in prison from committing acts of violent extremism.

Practices and views exchanged at this Conference led to the development of useful recommendations that could help Member States to complement, if required, their national policies on these topics and existing cooperative methods with partners both within and outside the EU.

This paper was prepared on behalf of the RAN Centre of Excellence by Anita Perešin, Adjunct Professor on Counterterrorism at the George C. Marshall Center (USA/Germany) and the University of Zagreb (Croatia) and Daniela Pisoiu, Senior Researcher at the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (Austria).

Introduction

Much has already been done in recent years to prevent radicalisation leading to violence, both at EU level and at national levels in Member States. The EU established the High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation (HLCEG-R), a Steering Board, and a task force for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) within DG HOME. The network of national prevention policymakers is furthermore formalised. A dedicated coordinator for preventing radicalisation was also appointed. All these efforts were made with the aim to create an effective structure and to bring together a wide range of stakeholders to make progress against existing P/CVE challenges, including those coming from especially vulnerable groups, such as child returnees and released prisoners.

In addition, the work of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) has proven to be essential **in bringing together first-line practitioners** from different Member States, to exchange lessons learned and best practices. The RAN also succeeded **in creating a framework for constructive dialogue between policymakers, practitioners and researchers** in the P/CVE field.

The HLCEG-R in its Final Report of 18 May 2018 (¹) identified child returnees and refugees from conflict zones, as well as detainees convicted for terrorism-related offences, as vulnerable categories who require appropriate short- and long-term care and support in terms of rehabilitation, and in prevention from radicalisation and committing acts of violence in the future.

In recent years RAN also actively discussed the needs of child returnees and released prisoners through the work of different RAN Working Groups (primarily RAN Youth, Families and Communities (YF&C), RAN Health and Social Care (H&SC), RAN Education (EDU), RAN Prison and Probation (P&P), and RAN Exit). RAN has also produced several papers, guides and insights on models and lessons learned in dealing with these two vulnerable categories to support the work of multiple practitioners and policymakers; these are listed at the end of this paper.

The High-Level Conference held in Luxembourg on 11 October 2018 represents an additional step in establishing a comprehensive and holistic approach in support of children and released prisoners. It brought together ministers, representatives from the European Commission, senior Member State officials and first-line practitioners to discuss ways to exchange views on existing models, practices, difficulties encountered and ways forward. This ex post paper summarises the **recommendations** and **best practices** drawn from the meeting.

This Conference identified some **gaps** and **future challenges**, with the intention to find solutions and provide recommendations to strengthen partnerships between stakeholders responsible for dealing with children and released prisoners.

Further efforts to improve the existing cooperation models are, however, highly recommended. This can be done through:

1) The **improvement of the collective work** of all stakeholders. The key to making progress against current challenges is to find an

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(¹) See the High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation (HLCEG-R), Final Report, 18 May 2018.

effective way to bring these participants together to promote common work practices.

2) Building **(more) links within and among different stakeholder groups** that exist in Member State countries:
   - those that are on the front line, like the civil society and NGOs;
   - policymakers (the administration at national, regional, city and community levels).

   Both top-down and bottom-up approaches are required.

3) The improvement of the **cooperation with non-EU nations** (especially Western Balkans and MENA countries) and **international partners** (such as the UN, European Forum for Urban Security, etc.) that face the same challenges from terrorism and violent extremism, in mitigating the threat.

I. Child returnees and refugees from conflict zones

Child returnees and refugees from conflict zones are especially vulnerable categories. Of concern is their vulnerability as victims and as potential (future) security risks.

At this High-Level Conference, two categories of children raised in extremist environments were considered:

1. **Children who left the EU** (with their families or alone, as was mostly the case with teenagers/adolescents) to live in the Daesh-held territory, **as well as those born to EU parents there**, and who have returned with one or both of their parents or on their own;

2. **Non-European children** travelling from Daesh territory or other conflict zones to Europe as **refugees** with their parent(s) or unaccompanied.

It is estimated that 1 400 European children are still in Iraq and Syria. Approximately 600 of them were born in that area and are younger than 5 years old. Others left the EU with their families or alone at different age levels. In addition, it is estimated that around 100 children are still in detention camps in Iraq, Syria or other countries, alone or with one or both of their parents (Belgium reported 15 detainee children and the Netherlands 20). Some of these children will, probably, sooner or later return to their country of origin or to that of their parents.

One of the key questions is what Member States should do for these children. Most Member States are tackling this issue on a case-by-case basis, considering both the child's best interest and security concerns, primarily:

1) Is repatriation sooner rather than later better in terms of both security and well-being of the child?

2) Is it always in the best interest of a child to bring mother and child together (if the mother poses a security risk)?

For example, France is working to bring back children held by Syrian Kurdish forces and belonging to suspected French foreign fighters, but will leave their mothers who are being prosecuted by local authorities. French authorities are preparing the repatriation of children on a case-by-case basis, depending on the mothers' acceptance of separation from their children. Some 40 mothers with about 150 minors have been reported in Syria. A large majority of the children are under the age of five.

France is among the countries that consider that the prolongation of repatriation of children (which could last many years) might lead to their further victimisation and radicalisation, in the hands of radicalised parents, Daesh or other local jihadist groups. It could also decrease the success of

reintegration and resocialisation programmes once they return. These children will be more affected by anger and disappointment with Western society and, therefore, probably less prone to reintegration and resocialisation.

Additionally, UNICEF ([2]) reports that some 32 000 refugee and migrant children entered Europe in 2017, including at least 17 500 unaccompanied and separated children. Approximately, 19 500 additional refugee and migrant children arrived in Europe through the eastern, central and western Mediterranean routes between January and September 2018, requiring protection, services and durable solutions.

A general conclusion from this High-Level Conference is that *all* **children coming from Iraq, Syria and other conflict zones are first and foremost victims who have experienced significant trauma. Depending on their age, gender, type of trauma and time of exposure, these children require adequate short- and long-term care and treatment.**

How to provide proper childcare

One of the key recommendations from this Conference on how to provide proper care for child returnees is to place importance on **timely and precise recognition** of the needs of the children and the creation of an **effective and holistic multi-agency childcare system.**

In order to properly recognise their needs, it is recommended to first differentiate: (1) age and gender, and (2) type of trauma and time exposure.

Children can be divided into **three age groups, each requiring a distinct approach** and intervention type:

1. **Teenagers/adolescents** (10–17 years)
2. **Preschoolers and younger children** (4–10 years)
3. **Infants and toddlers** (0–3 years)

Distinguishing between genders is important due to the different experience that girls (sexual abuse) and boys (child soldiers) have had during their lives in conflict zones.

Apart from the trauma inflicted in conflict zones, child returnees often face new traumatic experiences with local authorities and society, as well as separation from parents, lack of family support, stigmatisation and social isolation, exposure to conflicting values and world views, or mental health issues.

The implemented measures should, therefore, exclude additional traumatisation. For example, if separation from parents is unavoidable, family members and relatives should have an advantage over foster families to take over a child's supervision. The French experience has shown how traumatic separation from parents at the airport can be avoided by bringing family members to take over a child instead of (unknown to the child) social care specialists. Parents are now also obliged to prepare children for separation. Breastfed children can go into detention with their mothers if there is no negative attachment with them.

Additionally, a child's assessment system is applied for child returnees returning to France, consisting of three months physical and mental

([2]) See the UNICEF Situation reports and advocacy briefs on refugee and migrant children.

health evaluation. Around 500 French children have been taken to Iraq and Syria (40 % of whom are under the age of 4 years). For these children, it is important to create a background and history file (which includes information about parents, child's experience with and exposure to violence, relations with grandparents and other family members, etc.).

Another good practice is the *return plan* implemented in the Netherlands, for each of the 175 Dutch children in Iraq and Syria. Such a plan is created before their return, with detailed actions, contacts and information on who might take over the care of a child and which type of support they need.

The combination of trauma from conflict zones and after arrival might have lasting consequences on a child's well-being, mental health and sense of stability. Current experience with child returnees shows that almost all of them have faced events that might lead to post-traumatic stress. They suffer from disorders of different kinds, such as depression, sleep and relational disorders, anxiety and problems in personal development.

Therefore, an **effective multi-agency childcare system** should be established to provide a holistic approach to all children. It should include adequate mental health checks, immediate care and **long-term support** that include **child protection, schooling, social care, and primary and mental health services**, as well as support from families and communities.

A special care programme should also be provided to refugee children. Apart from past traumatic experiences, poor treatment in refugee camps or uncertain status within host countries, these children face even greater risks of exploitation at the hands of human smugglers and traffickers, (sexual) abuse and other grave forms of violence during and after their journeys.

Dedicated programmes for child refugees from conflict zones are still not fully in place in most EU Member States.

Some Member States have very detailed procedures on how to properly treat child returnees or refugees from conflict zones. Lessons learned from the experiences of Belgium, France and the Netherlands are:

- Establish a proper care plan for both child returnees and refugees from conflict zones. Adapt an individual care plan to the specific (sometimes different) needs of child returnees and refugees.
- Address both the needs of the children and potential (future) security concerns by creating an adequate short- and long-term assessment of the child's well-being, needs, vulnerabilities and potential risk factors.
- A multi-agency cooperation and a holistic approach are crucial, as is the good cooperation of relevant agencies from both child protection and security bodies.
- Provide individualised age- and gender-specific psychological and social support to each child.
- Apply regular child-tailored medical and psychological tests. Mental health issues should be identified by relevant practitioners, trained to detect PTSD in children.
- Keep the child returnees in the family (with grandparents or close relatives, if they are not radicalised), or in foster care.
- Bring child returnees and refugees to school as soon as possible, but ensure confidentiality of returning children to avoid stigmatisation.
- Train professionals and (foster) families – they must develop specific skills and learn how to provide appropriate care, and to detect PTSD and other trauma, but also early signs of radicalisation among child returnees and refugees.

Inadequate or improper socialisation and reintegration can make children more vulnerable to future radicalisation or victimisation by terrorist and extremist propaganda, indoctrination and recruitment. Therefore, it is important to instil resilience in these children.

How to instil long-term resilience in child returnees and child refugees

To achieve the desired resilience, it is important to develop proper tools to evaluate both the progress and the effectiveness of applied intervention methods.

At this Conference it was agreed that the following four preconditions should be in place, to minimise the obstacles to implementation and success of child rehabilitation plans:

1) A legal framework and organisation applicable at both national and local level

National approaches to prevent radicalisation leading to violence, presented during the Conference by the ministers, include **strategies, action plans, guidelines and protocols** that help guide long-term P/CVE interventions. They also show the diversity of approaches in different Member States, and the different organisational structures and challenges they face (based on the level of threat and resources applied).

There is no one-size-fits-all strategy, as countries differ widely in their national- and local-level competences and policies, nor is there a strategy that can be applied equally to all children.

Therefore, learning from each other is very important, especially on how to:

▪ create guidance, handbooks and toolkits to be more specific and to give concrete instructions to practitioners on how to handle concrete cases;

▪ establish nationally supported local approaches, driven by local context and circumstances, and tailored to different ages, genders and trauma experienced by children.

At this Conference, considerable efforts made in the Netherlands were presented as a good practice on how to support local governments in fulfilling their role in the prevention of radicalisation leading to violence. The Dutch authorities continuously stressed the importance of prevention, and are currently focusing on the development of Local Multi-Cooperation Intervention Teams.

Lessons learned from the past show the importance of continuous investment in maintaining the knowledge and P/CVE efforts, even when the threat level is low. It is also important to constantly evaluate interventions and strategies to adapt them to new circumstances. To be more efficient, it is recommended to exchange initial experiences and practical insights at all levels: between different professionals, between policy and practice, and with different local municipalities, but also with other Member States.

Member States want to see a more collective effort to tackle challenges in dealing with child returnees and refugees, and to improve the existing cooperative methods with partners both within and outside the EU.

2) Creation of favourable conditions for all professionals, as well as multi-agency cooperation and information exchange

The Member States' experiences presented at the Conference highlighted the many **challenges childcare practitioners face** when dealing with

child returnees and child refugees (³), owing to their inexperience in working with children raised in extremist environments. A viable support structure must be set up at both policy and practitioner levels (e.g. implementing new education curricula and facilitating access to expertise and training).

It is therefore recommended to develop:

- training programmes for all P/CVE professionals, to develop the necessary skills (including on how to recognise the first signs of radicalisation); as well as
- workshops for childcare practitioners, to share experiences, best practices and valuable insights on children's needs and other challenges.

Secondly, P/CVE measures, to be effective, rely on the cooperation of multiple actors (⁴) and the exchange of information across relevant agencies. To **improve** the **information management system**, the following are recommended:

- Establish a mechanism for sharing information among professionals from different services (security, health and psychological), to **share information** that is important for the creation of a proper long-term care plan for a child.
- If long-term security monitoring is necessary, protocols for keeping records and files in databases should be established, in accordance with **children's privacy** and **rights protection rules.**

Key questions that require further discussion are: (1) how to share information that is protected under special laws, and (2) if rules on **professional secrecy** have to be released. While the exchange of information is necessary to improve the effectiveness of the work of all professionals, it is also essential to protect the privacy of the child, to avoid labelling and stigmatisation.

3) Appropriate support for wider families and communities

The ultimate goal of long-term rehabilitation is to offer stability to child returnees, by **providing a safe and secure environment, enabling family support** (where possible), **and building connections between families and communities**.

What role should parents have in the rehabilitation and socialisation of children? Member States share different approaches and case-by-case experiences, but do not have a general approach in place.

Support from or direct access to parents during the process of resocialisation is not always possible. Their involvement depends on parent–child relations, the influence they have on their children, and other circumstances (e.g. if they are radicalised or imprisoned).

The involvement of close or extended family members has many benefits. It can provide children a sense of safeness and stability, as well as a sense of belonging to the family. From non-radicalised Muslim family members, a child can learn non-violent religious beliefs and reject inculcated violent components.

Family relations with the wider community are important both for the benefit of children and to provide the best foundation for overall community

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(³) The RAN 2015 Education Manifesto provides recommendations for educators on how to deal with radicalisation and extremism at school. See also the RAN Manual on Responses to returnees: Foreign terrorist fighters and their families, July 2017, pp. 78–79.
(⁴) A good practical example is the 'GO!' project in Belgium.

security. Therefore, it is important to build trust and to encourage dialogue between all stakeholders (family, community, local authorities, religious leaders, etc.).

Mentors and parent coaches, as well as respected community and religious leaders, who can play an important role in mentoring the child, are key in deradicalisation and disengagement efforts.

4) Trauma awareness and resilience-building

About 600 children who were born in Iraq and Syria with European parent(s) are younger than 5 years old. These children cannot yet be radicalised, due to their age, and consequently do not pose any security concern. On the contrary, children of that age are easily able to learn a new behaviour when placed in an environment with different standards, norms and values. They also have the highest chances of having a normal childhood and developing long-term resilience to radicalisation and violence. The experience of the Netherlands with child returnees has shown that resilience in children can be effectively built by giving them a secure, safe and predictable environment.

However, possible effects of trauma on children could be a (re)turn to violence, even many years after the traumatic event.

This highlights the necessity to impart the key skill of **trauma awareness to all individuals working with returnee children and children refugees** raised in extremist environments. There are still not many indicators on the long-term negative effects of trauma that can be expected in the future, due to the lack of evidence-based scientific research and the relative recency of this phenomenon. However, lessons learned from conflicts in the past could be evaluated and applied where appropriate.

To prevent mental health problems and disorders in the future, trauma awareness training for all practitioners who work with children as well as the education of children and (foster) families on the symptoms of trauma and how to deal with it are highly recommended.

Challenges and recommendations for additional discussions

Practices and views exchanged at this Conference give useful recommendations that could help Member States to improve their national childcare programmes and to enlarge collaboration between all stakeholders involved.

However, the EU Member States are still facing many challenges in dealing with child returnees and refugees from conflict zones. Some challenges require additional discussions to find the most effective solutions and adjustments at both the EU and national levels, such as:

1) Dealing with **professional secrecy.**
- It is important to establish a mechanism for sharing information among professionals from different services.
- However, such a mechanism must ensure children's privacy and rights protection.
2) Protection of **children's privacy** and **rights.**
- Security monitoring of minors could be applied only if allowed by national laws and if they cannot be replaced by other less intrusive measures.
- In such cases, protocols for keeping records and files in databases should be established, to protect sensitive information that could lead to stigmatisation and labelling of children.
3) Lack of **skilled professionals** and lack of **funds.**
- There is huge diversity among different Member State countries in relation to legislation, structure, number of skilled

professionals and financial resources. Not all countries have a budget to finance specific programmes.

4) Lack of **scientific research** or **evidence on the long-term effectiveness** of care plans.

- Learn from examples from conflicts of the past (e.g. programmes for children who experienced war during the 1990s).

- More evidence-based research on the risk of child returnees and refugees is needed.

5) Lack of **dedicated programmes for child refugees**.

6) The need to enforce a **religious dimension** in disengagement programmes for children who have been indoctrinated by the jihadi interpretation of Islam, instilled loyalty to Daesh and hatred toward other societies.

7) The need to engage in dialogue with the **media** ([5]).

- Responsible and thoughtful journalism is required. It is important that negative statements in the media regarding child returnees and refugees be reconsidered in light of their assimilation, the importance for the child to feel welcomed, and the undesirable cause-and-effect negative statements could have on their further victimisation and stigmatisation.

- More engagement with outlets different from social media is also required.

II. Release and rehabilitation of prisoners

The second topic discussed at the High-Level Conference was the release and rehabilitation of prisoners. Many European countries are at this time confronted with the issue that a number of extremists and individuals convicted for terrorism will be released in the coming months and years. It is estimated that there are currently 2 000 individuals in prison with extremist views, and that 120 will leave prison in 2019. The release of convicted terrorists cannot be carried out without adequate advanced preparation. While it might not necessarily be the case that *all* individuals convicted for terrorism or radicalised in prison pose security threats of various degrees, some however might. In fact, there are already some cases of individuals who engaged in terrorist acts after their release from prison. There is also a high risk of engaging in radical or extremist groups after release.

This can be illustrated with a recent case from the Netherlands, where seven individuals were arrested for plotting a terrorist attack. The plotters had planned to commit suicide attacks and were determined to use explosives and had been actively preparing for this. This was an unprecedented case in the Netherlands. Importantly for our topic, three of them had been arrested before for attempted travel to Syria.

This case is an illustration of the threat picture after the collapse of Daesh territory. On the one side, there are still many Daesh factions or affiliated factions active in the areas of Iraq and Syria. On the other side, the current threat level is marked by a growing risk of homegrown terrorism, fuelled by the diminishing of Daesh territory and online propaganda. This is also valid for returnees and individuals who are currently imprisoned. Member States need to prepare for

([5]) See the RAN Manual on Responses to returnees: Foreign terrorist fighters and their families, July 2017, pp. 83–85 (Section 8.2, 'Communication and counter-narrative issues').

the release of these returnees from prisons all over Europe.

Importantly, radicalisation can also occur in prisons themselves. Imprisoned individuals are vulnerable to radicalisation due to the fact that they already have problems with the government and with authority. Prison can be an environment where the government is seen as the enemy, "we against them", a space of polarisation.

The participants agreed that **rehabilitation and reintegration are key** for the prevention of recidivism and more generally for preventing against these individuals engaging in acts of violence. Another general point of agreement was that the measures towards rehabilitation and reintegration already **begin in prison**. This means that individuals need to have already worked out a plan in terms of both deradicalisation and resocialisation during their time in prison, otherwise they will run the risk of drifting back into extremist scenes and criminality.

Risk assessment has become an important tool for both prison and probation. As outlined by most speakers, **multi-agency** cooperation is key for social integration. The latter requires numerous stakeholders to be included: local communities, education and welfare, police, social and health care systems, religious authorities, etc. Local authorities need to be aware of released citizens in order to be able to monitor people once they are released. Motivating these citizens to

participate is key and it involves a relationship of mutual respect.

What have we done and know so far?

In both prison and probation, it is important to **clarify early on which objectives** are pursued when **working with inmates and released prisoners**. Existing programmes in prisons in Spain ([6]) and Italy ([7]) have a clear focus such as minimising reoffending and maximising reintegration, and separation from members of organised criminal groups seems to be an important component of the detention regime.

In Sweden, extremist inmates are in principle not isolated, however, followers are kept separated from leaders ([8]); the same is valid in Belgium, while in France inmates who are open to disengagement are separated from the ones who are not ([9]). Belgium has developed an Action Plan against radicalisation in prison, whereby intelligence services are working closely with the prison system. Detecting what happens in prisons is a priority for the government and for the prison staff. There are now also so-called deradex wings where hardcore terrorists and ideologists are placed apart.

It appears therefore that a key issue would be **not to separate extremists from others in bulk during their entire imprisonment, but to differentiate depending on certain factors** pertaining to the role, degree of ideologisation and motivation to

([6]) RAN CoE, The role of religion in exit programmes and religious counselling in prison and probation settings, Ex Post Paper. Madrid, Spain: Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2017.
([7]) RAN P&P, Ex post paper. Venice and Padua, Italy: Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2016.
([8]) RAN CoE, Right-wing extremism on the rise?, Ex Post Paper. Prague, Czech Republic: Radicalisation

Awareness Network, 2017. See also: RAN P&P, Ex post paper. Riga, Latvia: Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2016.
([9]) RAN P&P, Ex post paper. Stockholm, Sweden: Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2016.

disengage, as well as based on the particular situation in certain local contexts.

Factors influencing the **success of reintegration** work, broadly speaking, on three levels: **cognitive, relational and occupational**. In terms of reintegration, it is therefore important to address and challenge extremist ideas, perceptions and world views; to exploit existing social relations and create new meaningful ones if necessary; and to help provide meaningful occupations, ideally in the form of employment. Individual action plans and institutional structures need to be adapted or created to address these elements. Research on the reinsertion of organised crime offenders also confirms the importance of community support networks and employment for reinsertion into society, while outlining the importance of challenging antisocial values and beliefs [10]. Previous tools used in work with families can be adapted for the case of imprisoned offenders [11].

Furthermore, **monitoring during probation** is crucial. Standardised monitoring procedures are used in several European countries, and there is acknowledgement of the fact that probation officers in charge of released radicalised inmates need to be trained and specialised [12]. **Risk assessment tools** in this context are also key and there are several types thereof designed for various purposes [13]. Specialised training for prison and probation staff in these areas needs to be reinforced [14]. Furthermore, respect for the **rule of law and staff professionalism in prison and probation are key**. Finally, suboptimal conditions in prison correlate with recidivism [15].

In order for reintegration and rehabilitation to work, it is necessary to involve the community as well, which means that establishing good and constructive relationships is key. Croatian authorities, for example, have developed good cooperation with the Islamic community; as a result, Muslims are a constructive part of Croatian society. In December 2012, the Islamic community signed an agreement on rights and obligations of the Islamic community in Croatia. They have been involved in preventative efforts and in the fight against terrorism, by working with migrants, refugees, intelligence agencies, etc. Croatia is willing to share its experience on creating a European Islam.

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[10] Stys, Y., & Ruddell, R., Organized crime offenders in Canada: Risk, reform, and recidivism. Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, Vol. 52, Iss. 2, 2013, 75–97. doi:10.1080/10509674.2012.734370

[11] RAN CoE, Working with families and safeguarding children from radicalisation – Step-by-step guidance paper for practitioners and policy-makers, Ex Post Paper. Nice, France: Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2017.

[12] RAN CoE, RAN P&P and CEP (Confederation of European Probation), Ex Post Paper. Dublin, Ireland: Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2017. For more details on national models see: RAN P&P, Ex post paper. Venice and Padua, Italy: Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2016.

[13] Cornwall, S., & Molenkamp, M., Developing, implementing and using risk assessment for violent extremist and terrorist offenders, Ex Post Paper. Brussels, Belgium: Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2018.

[14] Cornwall, S., & Molenkamp, M., Developing, implementing and using risk assessment for violent extremist and terrorist offenders, Ex Post Paper. Brussels, Belgium: Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2018.

[15] Studies show a positive correlation between the harshness of prison conditions (overcrowding and number of deaths in prison) and recidivism. Drago, F., Galbiati, R., & Vertova, P., Prison conditions and recidivism. American Law and Economics Review, Vol. 13, Iss. 1, 2011, 103–130. doi:10.1093/aler/ahq024

In France, the project PAIRS is a programme to rehabilitate released radicalised detainees: it is a support framework with mental health and social workers, lawyers, etc. In the United Kingdom, there is a disengagement programme that provides a range of tailored interventions to tackle the rise of radicalisation. This programme is a good example of multi-agency work and it offers ideological, mentoring and religious support. Both programmes are mandatory programmes. We need to learn from these programmes and draw lessons from them.

Bulgaria has not yet experienced radicalisation in prison, or attempts embracing violent ideology, so there the level of threat is low. However, this situation can change and in order to overcome this challenge there is need for working mechanisms for cooperation, dialogue, exchange of information and coordination at the national and international levels. Prevention is integrated in the daily work of frontline officers in order to identify individuals vulnerable to radicalisation early on. In the first step, as soon as a person is sent to prison, information is collected about their past, criminal history, character, ideology and conduct, as this is important for a customised rehabilitation programme.

Research is also crucial, as there is a wide range of factors that may push an individual to extremism. In Bulgarian prisons, assessment of the risks of recidivism takes place as soon as the sentence starts; there are static and psychological assessments used as a basis for conclusions with regard to the stages of the procedure. **Staff skills are essential to correctly identify the signs of radicalisation**, so there are dedicated modules of a staff training programme to equip staff with knowledge of radicalisation, principles of case management, measures to be undertaken, etc. A programme promoting culture, religion and ethnic dialogue was carried out in 2017 in Bulgarian prisons to lower interethnic violence and promote tolerance between individuals serving prison sentences. A pre-release special programme prepares individuals for life outside prison with the aim to facilitate their social integration. There are also programmes to lower inequalities and discrimination, promote tolerance and increase social inclusion, as these are the main factors that actively counter potential radicalisation and especially when fuelled by religious or ethnic considerations.

In the Netherlands, considerable effort has been put into supporting the local governments in fulfilling their role in the prevention of radicalisation leading to violence, including in the context of prisons. The focus was on the development of Local Multi-Cooperation Intervention Teams. In this approach, local actors are key in combating terrorism. Against the background of two terrorist murders, it was realised that there was not enough investment in maintaining our knowledge and programmes in place. The lesson learned was that **preventative efforts need to be mainstreamed into a day-to-day business**. The aim is to make sure the first-line practitioners are able to recognise the first signs of radicalisation as part of their job. This can also be relevant for reintegration and the prevention of recidivism.

In Belgium, rehabilitation and reintegration are regional competences, while custody and prison administrations are federal. **Rehabilitation and reintegration follow a multi-agency approach**. Once released from prison, it is necessary to have a good information flux, so that the local authorities are aware. For the people who are released conditionally, the judicial system is followed by probation officers. It is however necessary to further develop structures: local integrated security cells and local task forces to share information, evaluate risk and make sure

which service is best placed to undertake which action.

What should we do (better)?

Overall, **the spectrum of offenders we are dealing with is in fact quite broad, which means that the intervention spectrum might also need to be enlarged**.

In the context of reintegration, it is essential to provide social inclusion upon release, with opportunities to join in social processes.

More needs to be invested in reintegration and rehabilitation and in mentoring programmes for **youngsters**. A priority should also be the prevention of sibling radicalisation.

There needs to be a close coordination between the measures taken inside and outside prison. This is especially relevant for cases where prisoners are released before the end of their sentence.

There should also be a systematisation and standardisation of the procedures to follow in the case of such released prisoners, rather than measures and processes on a case-by-case basis. Otherwise, individuals will easily lose their motivation to participate in such programmes.

Standardised procedures, structures and regulations need to be put in place with regard to information sharing and data protection, regarding which information can be shared.

Work also needs to be put into the relationship between various bodies that intervene, in order to ensure respect for one another and an understanding of each other's **professional culture**. It is necessary to know what the various organisations that intervene expect from each other in terms of information. Trust is necessary in order to be able to share information. In particular, the relation between the justice system

and administration needs to be improved. Establishing trust can be done, for example, by creating and agreeing on a common work objective, such as the reinsertion of the person and public security. A related factor is also the need to recruit more staff and train them, but also protect them, since they are often exposed politically.

Families and communities need to be more involved in reintegration and need to also be guided to this end. A sense of belonging is a human need. Extremist organisations are aware of this and they have specific recruitment strategies, including at the prison doors. Therefore, it is, as a counter-act, necessary to offer prisoners a sense of belonging to a group, which should be tailor-made. Families can support this process. Friends can also do this: it opens up another space for counselling and support. More broadly, the persons who can assist need to be identified ahead of time. It is a systemic approach, and these actors need support. An example is how to handle emotions once foreign terrorist fighters come back to the family. Beyond the familiar space, the question in every case is: where will the prisoners go to once they are released? In which community will that be? What are the organisations that work within these communities and are part of the game? It is important to pay attention to the influence of the media: what information will they give to the public on their release? Rehabilitation is known and usually accepted by the general public, but terrorist offenders are a special topic. We also have to keep in mind that they may be stigmatised once they come back to communities, so that strategies in these areas can be developed as well.

A media strategy needs to be put in place concerning the modes of communication when prisoners are released. It is important that the

latter do not become poster children or heroes for vulnerable people due to messages in the media.

Politicians also need to invest in changing the public opinion with regard to released prisoners. This is difficult, because rehabilitation of individuals convicted of terrorism is not popular with the public. However, funds need to be invested in rehabilitation programmes, even if the measures are not necessarily popular. Useful practices could be found in the management of similar cases, such as sexual offenders or paedophiles, on how the information flux between schools and neighborhoods is handled, how risk assessment and information sharing is made, and how we can deal with the emotions of the public.

Interventions and strategies need to be **evaluated** continuously, in order to adapt them to new circumstances. There needs to be exchange and **mutual learning** among countries on different levels and between policy and practice.

Research needs to be more integrated in our work; examples should be used from other areas, and there is need for more evidence-based discussion in order to not under- or overestimate the risk. Research should also focus on the impact of P/CVE in this area and consider big samples in order to properly assess effectiveness.

At the systemic level, we need to think about **long-term strategies and change**. This requires structures rather than one-off projects – including strengthening the existing ones – and it requires time.

There needs to be more investment in the prison systems in general, which are often overcrowded and understaffed. Investments are also needed in intervention and risk assessment, and training, as well as concerning exit programmes and the implementation of sophisticated recommendations.

On a broader level, a good balance must be found between supporting the most vulnerable people in society and providing security to all citizens.

Future focus and further development

A series of issue areas were flagged during the meeting for future focus and further development.

Generally, but also in the area of rehabilitation and reintegration, there was a call for continued **exchanges and cooperation** – as no single entity alone has the answer. While successful approaches should be replicated in other countries too, more guidance is needed: the development of practical handbooks, toolkits, workshops and also **trainings**, to develop the necessary skills. It is important to keep the practical focus. The products need to be accessible and practical.

Multi-agency cooperation needs to be strengthened. Whether in the phase of rehabilitation or in that of preventing radicalisation in prison, **the expertise and input of several types of institutions beyond prison and probation proper are necessary**. This means that prison and probation authorities should also involve other actors to the extent needed and possible. The differences in prison and probation systems in EU Member States make comparisons of multi-agency cooperation difficult, yet some items were found to be generally applicable, such as: the continuation of reintegration work during probation, and cooperation with local authorities and social actors. Some of the recommendations in this regard are: developing shared language and tools, developing trust and personal relationships,

and establishing information sharing agreements ([16]).

Also, as a more general point, it was indicated that **going beyond Europe might be necessary to see if others can give us insights and inspiration**. We may need to revise what is spot on and see what specific points it might be necessary to develop further.

Risk assessments need to be **adapted to specific circumstances**, such as needs, risk, recidivism or resilience assessment. **Structures and procedures are also needed for resilience assessment**: what are the needs of the detainee or the released prisoner, and on which point can we strengthen the decision of this person to leave the extremist group? At the moment, this is up to the individual social worker to assess. There are already risk assessment tools referring to public security, but none referring to the personal change. Furthermore, as outlined in the HLCEG-R Final Report ([17]), risk assessment tools need to be further evaluated.

The same report furthermore suggests the need to **evaluate existing exit, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes**, and to increase the sharing of already evaluated/audited programmes.

A closer look needs to be set on **returnees**. In the Dutch experience, returnees, once released, tended to integrate; however, this might be due to the fact that they were not hardcore radicalised.

The issue of **children** was also discussed. **Many extremist prisoners have children and thought needs to be put into how best to proceed regarding contact and the implications for public**

perception. An Albanian initiative to create a children's room in a prison might be taken as a starting point to advance on this issue.

All **presidencies** stressed their **commitment to the topic of rehabilitation and reintegration, and to combating radicalisation more broadly**. The 2018 Austrian Presidency stressed the importance of both security and humanity and the importance of talking about and disseminating EU values and freedoms. Romania outlined that it is not currently confronted with an imminent radicalisation threat; it is however preoccupied by the dimensions of the phenomenon in recent years and is committed to cooperation amongst governments, networking, and information sharing between policymakers, practitioners and researchers to strengthen the knowledge in this area. Furthermore, it is necessary to translate this knowledge into practice. A prevention strategy will be developed, and a particular emphasis of the Romanian Presidency is placed on online radicalisation and on prisons, with a special focus on identifying best practices and rehabilitation.

Other related issues discussed

Another issue pointed out was '**critical thinking**' in the context of **disengagement**. Promoting critical thinking is a central component of primary and secondary prevention; it can and should however also be included more at the level of tertiary prevention.

Participants also referred to the issue of **fake news** and the need to work on our communication about the EU and what it is doing. It is also important to train first-line practitioners in this area.

([16]) RAN P&P, Ex post paper. Stockholm, Sweden: Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2016.

([17]) See the High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation (HLCEG-R), Final Report, 18 May 2018.

The media in general is a stakeholder that needs to be afforded more attention and be involved more. Reporting has important effects on prevention work, including rehabilitation and prevention of violent crime. There is already a dedicated section, under 'Cross-cutting issues', on media communications in the RAN Manual on responses to returnees. We need to find ways to reach out to journalists, and to talk about responsible media reporting. We've mentioned these aspects in policies, now we need to take it a step further and go to the practitioner level and engage with other media and with social media.

To conclude on this section, while the aim is naturally to spread prevention programmes as broadly as possible, it must also be acknowledged that not all goals and not all individuals can always be reached. Research and previous meetings have shown that deeply indoctrinated individuals are more difficult to deradicalise and disengage than those who only have a superficial ideological knowledge or, indeed, than violent offenders ([18]). **Solutions therefore need to be developed in order to minimise the risks of recidivism even if the intervention at the individual level fails.** Interesting new approaches to terrorism prevention in this respect have been developed through research with a view to reduce the *opportunities, rather than the motivation* for committing acts of terrorism ([19]). Such approaches could be transferred into concrete policies and practices. We can also look at historical cases to understand the circumstances of highly ideological people who have not engaged in actual acts of violence, despite their radical views.

References of RAN papers for additional reading

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([18]) RAN CoE, Right-wing extremism on the rise?, Ex Post Paper. Prague, Czech Republic: Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2017.

([19]) Taylor, M., & Currie, P.M., Terrorism and affordance. New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012.

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