



Returning to Extremism: An Overview on Terrorist Reoffending and Current Challenges

Authored by **Susanna Z. Papp**, RAN Expert Pool Member,
and **Robert Örell**, RAN REHAB Co-leader

Radicalisation Awareness Network

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Introduction

Due to recent tragic terrorist attacks in Europe,¹ the question of terrorist recidivism has come to the centre of attention in public and policy discourses. Although the data show low recidivism rates in European countries, the impact of successful re-offenses are enormous and prompts the revision of existing practices. Discussions on extremist recidivism is timely for other reasons as well. Over the past decade, many European countries have seen a significant increase in and diversification of their extremist offender population.² According to certain estimates, there are currently about 4 000 inmates in Western Europe who are either returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), convicted terrorists, radicalised prisoners or inmates “vulnerable to radicalisation.”³ A significant number of these prisoners are planned to be released in the next two to five years. These advancements necessitate a more systemic addressing of questions on risk assessment, probation schemes and rehabilitation programmes.⁴

However, there are a number of challenges when discussing terrorist recidivism. Firstly, research on terrorism-related recidivism is scarce.⁵ Data on prevalence are mostly available from open sources,⁶ and definitions as well as measurements of recidivism also vary.⁷ The relatively small sample size also poses a challenge for research.⁸ Knowledge on the characteristics that differentiate offenders who reengage from those who do not is also absent. In addition, there are very few impact evaluation studies on rehabilitation programmes.⁹ While many countries use terrorism-specific risk assessment tools, they are still relatively new and there is not enough evidence regarding their use.¹⁰

The **goal of this paper** is to review and integrate the currently existing literature with practitioners’ experiences on the topic of terrorist reengagement in the European context. The paper aims to provide recommendations for practitioners working with violent extremist clients by discussing recidivism data, current challenges, risk and protective factors, and risk management strategies. As most of the currently available information is about adult male terrorist offenders who have served a prison sentence, they are overrepresented in this summary. More research is needed on the backsliding of juvenile offenders and radicals who have not been imprisoned.

The paper starts by providing an overview of the trends and challenges with regards to the current extremist prisoner population in Europe. Then key terms such as recidivism and reengagement are defined, and European statistics on terrorist recidivism rates are discussed. The next section summarises risk and protective factors of reengagement identified by the academic literature and supported by research evidence. The section is completed with European practitioners’ observations regarding additional risk factors, followed by recommendations. In the third section, five topics are identified that are of utmost importance from a reengagement prevention point of view. They are (1) the role of prison, (2) challenges of false compliance

¹ Three of the most recent cases of tragic reoffending took place in the UK and Austria. They are briefly summarised below:

On 29 December 2019, Usman Khan, imprisoned for planning terrorist activities in 2012 and released on licence, attacked and killed two people near London Bridge in the UK. Khan was shot dead by police during the attack. Reports suggest that Khan was seen as a model inmate who also participated in rehabilitation programmes. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-50594810>

On 2 February 2020, Sudesh Amman, released on licence after serving for a terrorist crime, attacked and injured two victims in Streatham, London, UK. Amman was shot dead by police during the attack. He was under active counter-terrorism surveillance at the time. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-51389884>

On 2 November 2020, Kujtim Fejzulai killed 4 people and injured 23 in a series of attacks in Vienna while on parole after being arrested at the Turkish border for attempted travel to Syria in 2018. Fejzulai was shot dead by police during the event. Throughout his 12-month prison sentence, Fejzulai took part in a deradicalisation programme, but was never assessed as deradicalised. <https://icct.nl/publication/vienna-attack-the-path-of-a-prospective-foreign-terrorist-fighter/>

² Basra & Neumann, 2020

³ Renard, 2020a pp. 20.

⁴ Basra & Neumann, 2020

⁵ Basra & Neumann, 2020; Altier, Horgan & Thoroughgood, 2019

⁶ Renard (2020a p. 21) sums up the challenges with open sources: “Measuring recidivism ideally involves the access to judiciary and /or penitentiary data, which is not always readily available or easily accessible. Some studies have therefore relied on open source data which may include a series of bias, lacunae, imperfections or mistakes.”

⁷ Silke & Morrison, 2020; Altier, Boyle & Horgan, 2019

⁸ Renard (2020a p. 21.) explains that the small sample size is problematic for multiple reasons. For example, only small changes in the sample may have significant consequences on the calculated rates. Data also show that the recidivism rate is low in cases of individuals who participated in a rehabilitation programme, as well as in cases where individuals did not participate in such programmes. It is therefore difficult to know exactly what effect rehabilitation programmes have.

⁹ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020c

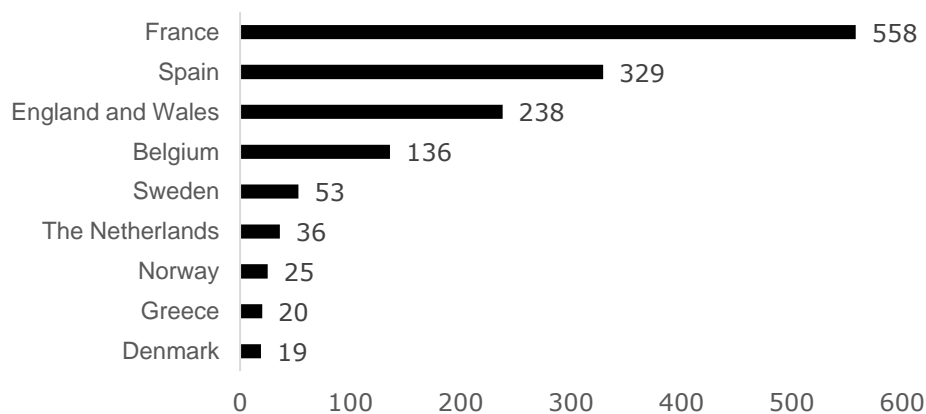
¹⁰ Basra & Neumann, 2020

and deception, (3) the role of assessment tools, (4) information sharing and interagency collaboration, and (5) transition management. Key issues and challenges in each of the five areas are discussed, followed by recommendations and inspiring practices. Lastly, proactive and preparatory measures are presented in case the worst-case scenario takes place and a client reoffends. The paper finishes by presenting a summary of the recommendations.

Characteristics and current challenges of the extremist prisoner population in Europe

The population of offenders who have been **convicted for terrorism-related crimes** has changed in the past decade in Europe. In addition, the majority of these inmates are expected to be released in the next two to five years.¹¹ Therefore, it is important to give an overview of the current extremist prison population in European countries. According to a recently published review by Basra and Neumann (2020) based on open-source databases, there are currently roughly about 1 500 prisoners in custody for terrorism-related offenses in the studied 9 European countries (Fig. 1.): 558 in France (93.5 % jihadists, 6.5 % Basque separatists), 329 in Spain (61.7 % Basque separatists, 38.3 % jihadists), 238 in England and Wales (76.8 % jihadists, 18.5 % right-wing extremists, 4.6 % other), 136 in Belgium, 53 in Sweden (with an additional 54 individuals held either on remand or released on probation), 36 in The Netherlands, 25 in Norway, 20 in Greece (85 % left-wing extremists, 15 % jihadists) and 19 in Denmark.

Figure 1. Number of convicted prisoners for terrorism-related offenses (Basra and Neumann, 2020)



When including those offenders who are monitored because of **suspicion of, or vulnerability to radicalisation**, this number exceeds 3000 in the reviewed 9 countries and Germany. The number of prisoners monitored for radicalisation in Germany is approximately 292.¹² Additionally, Austria had 39 inmates (including 2 women and 11 young adults, and an additional 20 individuals on pre-trial detention) in 2020.

The **average length of sentence** in the reviewed countries¹³ is between 4 and 16 years (4 in Denmark, 5.5 in Spain, 7.5 in the UK, and 16 in Greece), with a range from 6 months to 45 years. The **types of offence** vary according to each country's legislation, and may include attacking or attack planning, participating in or attempting foreign terrorist fighting, recruitment, leadership, providing financial or logistical support, distributing propaganda, as well as terrorist apologism (e.g. writing a celebratory post on social media in the aftermath of a terrorist attack).¹⁴ Regarding the **ideological background** of the perpetrators, 82 % of the prisoners are violent Islamist offenders, 7 % belong to violent right-wing extremist groups, while 10 % is

¹¹ Renard, 2020a

¹² Basra & Neumann, 2020

¹³ The data provided in this section is from Basra & Neumann, 2020

¹⁴ Renard, 2020a

classified as other, such as former ETA members, extremist Kurdish group members or individuals who do not follow a specific ideology. Less than 1 % are categorised as left wing or anarchist, most of whom are imprisoned in Greece.

Several **challenges** are identified by Basra and Neumann that have emerged in the past decade in Europe. They are summarised as follows:

- There is a **rapid rise in the number of terrorist inmates** that requires new responses from prisons. Some countries that had not had a terrorist prisoner population earlier, had to develop capacities and competencies in this field in a short period of time (e.g. Austria). Other countries engaged in applying new approaches as the population of ideologically motivated offenders has risen (e.g. France).¹⁵
- Terrorist offenders serve a **wider range of prison sentences**, many of them are relatively short term. In such cases the criminal justice systems have a limited window of opportunity to affect the process of change.¹⁶
- Terrorist inmate **profiles and backgrounds have diversified**. There are two significant recent trends: the rising number of right-wing extremist offenders and the increase in female Islamist perpetrators.
- The loss of the Islamic State's territory in Syria and Iraq increased the threat posed by **returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs)** in some European countries. According to 2016 estimates,¹⁷ approximately 1 200 FTFs who left the EU to join ISIS in Iraq and Syria are now back in their countries of origin.
- A **rise of right-wing extremism** has been observed due to the increase of populism and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Violent right-wing movements have capitalised on the anti-vaccination demonstrations, forming alliances with protesters to spread extremist ideologies and to mobilise people against governments in order to create distrust.
- **False compliance** seems to have become more widespread, especially amongst jihadist prisoners, although its true extent is unknown. This can be a major issue in relation to risk assessment and release arrangements.¹⁸

Recommendations to policy makers

- In order to effectively tackle newly emerging challenges posed by, among others, the rapid rise in the numbers and the diversification of terrorist inmates, proactive adaptation of procedures and processes are needed.
- Provide opportunities for Member States to share knowledge and inspiring practices.
- Address questions on risk assessment, probation schemes and rehabilitation programmes on a systemic level. In many contexts, case-by-case management of radicalised and terrorist offenders is no longer effective due to the rapid rise in their numbers.¹⁹
- More research is needed to understand and better respond to current challenges.
- Gender-specific approaches are necessary. Staff in all actor groups need to be trained in gender-related aspects and differences between radicalisation and terrorism.²⁰

¹⁵ For a review on the various approaches and prison regimes designed for terrorist offenders, see Chapter 5 by Basra & Neumann, 2020.

¹⁶ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2019a pp. 5.

¹⁷ Barrett, 2017

¹⁸ Basra & Neumann, 2020 pp. ii

¹⁹ Basra & Neumann, 2020

²⁰ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a

Terrorist reoffending: Key terms and statistics

Relapse in the context of politically or ideologically motivated crimes can be defined and measured in a variety of ways. According to the narrowest definition, **recidivism** is “two distinct convictions of an individual for terrorism-related offenses.”²¹ In other words, recidivism is the reconviction of an individual who had been convicted for a terrorism-related offence before. Broader conceptualisations use the criterion of rearrest or reincarceration. Even broader assessments include offenders who are monitored because of their suspected radicalisation which can be for a variety of reasons. For example, because authorities observe tentative signs of radicalisation, consider them ‘at risk’ or ‘vulnerable’ to extremism, or witness a strong commitment to extremist causes.²² The breadth of the conceptualisation is important because the broader the definition, the higher the reported case numbers and the larger the implications for managing and preventing relapse. It is also important to note that these measurements require the offender’s re-entry to the criminal justice system. Individuals who reengage in terrorist activities but escape the criminal justice system, or reoffend abroad, or are killed by police during their attack, are not included in recidivism data.

Therefore, some argue that it is more important to focus on **reengagement** instead of recidivism.²³ Terrorist reengagement is a term used in a broader, more general sense to describe “a return to terrorism after a period of disengagement, regardless of whether the disengagement was involuntary (e.g. imprisonment) or voluntary.”²⁴ This definition allows the inclusion of a wider range of extremist behaviours beyond reoffending (e.g. returning to an extremist lifestyle, travelling abroad to join a terrorist organisation, engaging in extremist activities online), independent of whether the actions have led to legal repercussions or whether they are considered illegal (regulations differ in Member States).

In this paper, the broader terms of reengagement and reoffending will be used to refer to terrorist backsliding in a more general sense. The term recidivism is used when referring to data on terrorist reoffence based on reappearance in the criminal justice system. It is important to note that most of the available data is based on reconviction of adult male offenders; therefore, they are overrepresented in this paper. More data is needed on juvenile and female extremist offenders, or violent extremists who have not been convicted.

In Europe, **recidivism rates** calculated by reconviction are between 2 % and 7 %, and are considered to be generally very low²⁵ (Table 1.). Similar low rates have been reported in non-European samples such as the United States, Saudi Arabia and Sri Lanka.²⁶

²¹ Renard, 2020a. pp.20.

²² Basra & Neumann, 2020. pp.9.

²³ Renard, 2020a.

²⁴ Altier, Horgan, & Thoroughgood, 2019. pp.2.

²⁵ Silke & Morrison, 2020; Renard, 2020a

²⁶ Israel is a notable exception with a recidivism rate of 60.2 % (Hasisi, B., Carmel, T., Weisburd, D. and Wolfowicz, M., 2019). However, Silke and Morrison (2020) argue that the Israeli sample is not comparable with the European one due to several differences regarding the sample characteristics and the average length of sentence.

Table 1. Terrorist recidivism in European countries*
based on Raja and Neumann, 2020; Renard, 2020a; Silke and Morrison, 2020

Country	Recidivism rate (%)	Number of terrorism-related offenders	Time span
Northern Ireland	2.2 %	453	1998 - 2011
Belgium	2.3 %	557***	1990 - 2020
England and Wales	3 %**	196	2013 - 2019
The Netherlands	4.4 %	189	2012 - 2019
Spain	7 %	199***	2004 - 2018

* The reported studies are not entirely comparable as they use different methodologies regarding selection criteria, timespan and definition of recidivism (Renard, 2020a).

** The reoffending rate rises to 3.6 % if Usman Khan and Sudesh Amman are included as they were killed and thus could not be prosecuted (Silke and Morrison, 2020).

*** These samples consisted of violent Islamist offenders.

The assessment of terrorist **reengagement** is somewhat higher and is estimated to be between 4.5 % and 16 % (with 4.5 % in the UK, 4.8 % in Belgium, 9.7 % in Spain and 16 % in France)²⁷.

There is not enough evidence to determine whether there are differences between the type of extremist group or ideology, and their risk to reoffend. Silke and Morrison note that it may be helpful to differentiate between returning foreign fighters from released terrorist offenders as there may be different dynamics in play regarding their risks of reengagement.²⁸

Researchers draw attention to the fact that these recidivism rates are far lower than recidivism rates for regular criminals that are generally between 40 % and 60 % worldwide.²⁹ This indicates that there may be a qualitative **difference between ordinary criminals and politically or ideologically motivated offenders**, although evidence is still scarce in this field. Some arguments are considered by Silke and Morrison (2020) to explain this difference:

1. The political or ideological motivation differentiates terrorists from other violent criminals. "(...) for many perpetrators, terrorism is seen as a means to achieving broader political goals, unlike the goals for many other crimes."³⁰ A long-term prison sentence disengages inmates from the ideological and social context, and "this helps explain why involvement in crime or violence is not then a feature of post-release life for most former terrorist prisoners."³¹ The necessity of differentiating terrorists from other criminal groups is also reflected in the development of risk assessment tools that are specific to terrorism-related offenders (e.g. VERA-2R, ERG).
2. Another important argument is that "terrorists are generally psychologically and socially different from other offenders and that these differences reduce the likelihood of reoffending on release."³² For example, psychiatric disorders are less common in terrorists than in other violent criminal populations, especially in the case of group-based terrorists. Although there is a higher incidence of mental illness amongst lone-actor terrorists, their number is still relatively small.³³

²⁷ Basra and Neumann, 2020

²⁸ Silke & Morrison, 2020. p.6.

²⁹ cited by Renard, 2020a. p.21.

³⁰ Silke & Morrison, 2020. p.5.

³¹ Ibid. pp.6.

³² Ibid. pp.6.

³³ Altier, Boyle, & Horgan, 2019

3. It can be argued that low terrorism-related recidivism rates can partly be explained by closer monitoring and supervision upon release from prison. However, it is important to note that perpetrators who are also strictly monitored, for example, for committing a serious sex offence or other non-terrorist violent offence, show a significantly higher rate of reoffending.

Another important question is if terrorist offenders engage in **regular criminal activity** after they are released from prison. There is some evidence indicating that only a very small amount of terrorist prisoners engaged in regular criminal activities after release. A study conducted in Northern Ireland about 453 paramilitary prisoners who were released in 1998 showed that 2.2 % were re-convicted for terrorism-related offences and another 2.3 % of them engaged in regular criminal activities.³⁴ On the other hand, if a terrorist offender has had a criminal history, there is a greater risk of returning to a criminal lifestyle.

Researchers in Europe have reached similar conclusions regarding the question of recidivism.³⁵ Successful terrorist re-offences have tragic and high impact consequences, and it is important to thoroughly investigate these cases and draw conclusions. It is however also important, as Silke and Morrison (2020 p. 6.) put it, “to better educate and inform both the policy worlds and the wider public about the general risk posed by released terrorist prisoners. This risk is not zero, but contrary to expectation, most released terrorists disengage from violent extremism. Those who re-offend are a minority.”

Risk and protective factors of reengagement

In this section, individual predictive and protective factors of terrorist reengagement are reviewed. Understanding risk factors are important because they can be translated to offenders' needs based on which targeted interventions can be designed. The dimensions of exit outcomes are presented as a conceptual framework for understanding individual risk factors. Next, the static and dynamic predictive factors are summarised based on literature and research review. These findings are complemented with recent observations reported by European practitioners. The section concludes with implications and recommendations for practice.

Dimensions of change

Before the discussion of risk factors, it is important to review the dimensions of exit outcomes as a starting point. Given that most released terrorists disengage from violent extremism, having the lack of relapse as a single outcome goal is not meaningful. The exit outcome dimensions are helpful in clarifying the definition of success of the derad/exit work, and are useful in assessing and monitoring extremist careers. The dimensions indicate that both the involvement in and the exit from violent extremist environments are considered a process that a variety of factors can influence. Risk factors of reengagement can be identified on all dimensions. Different actors may focus on different aspects in their work with the client.

Exit outcome dimensions:³⁶

1. **Engagement – disengagement.** The behavioural aspect of the process that focuses on the level of participation in extremist groups, activities and politically or ideologically motivated violence. Disengagement can be voluntary, when the individual is motivated and actively seeks to disengage, or involuntary (e.g. imprisonment).
2. **Radicalisation – deradicalisation.** The cognitive aspect of the process referring to the level of commitment to violent extremist attitudes, beliefs and values, especially with regard to the legitimacy of using violence to obtain political change. Deradicalisation describes the process of cognitive and ideological distancing, the re-evaluation of the previously held ideas and ideology, and eventually the rejection of extremist views.

³⁴ Silke & Morrison, 2020

³⁵ Renard, 2020a, Silke & Morrison, 2020

³⁶ based on Bjørge cited by Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2019b; and Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a

3. **Criminal activities – desistance.** This dimension refers to the level of participation in regular (non-ideologically motivated) crimes. Desistance refers to the discontinuation of criminal activities.
4. **Social marginalisation – reintegration.** This dimension refers to the level of involvement in prosocial networks and in mainstream social institutions (education, work, family). It comprises aspects of both functional and social reintegration.³⁷ A successful **functional reintegration** refers to leading a self-sustainable life, having a job, accommodation and healthcare. **Social reintegration** refers to integration into prosocial contexts (family, friends, colleagues, communities).
5. **Mental health.** This aspect encompasses psychosocial well-being and the presence or absence and severity of mental health challenges, such as substance abuse or mental illness.

A rehabilitated person leads a self-determined and self-sustained life without adhering to extremist views or participating in extremism-inspired activities.³⁸

Recommendation to practitioner organisations

Organisations working with radicalised and terrorist offenders are encouraged to develop their definition of desired outcomes in their work beyond the lack of re-offence. The five dimensions of exit outcomes (disengagement, deradicalisation, desistance, social and functional reintegration, mental health) provide a starting point for specifying desired outcomes and their measurement for monitoring.

Static and dynamic predictors of reengagement

There is a scarcity of research on recidivism risk factors that are specific to violent extremist offenders. In this section, a summary of the current literature and research results is presented on the factors hindering or facilitating reengagement to extremism. This framework³⁹ was developed by reviewing factors on general criminal recidivism and adopted to the terrorist offender population. Two types of predictors are distinguished. Static predictors are constant or stable characteristics of the offender that cannot be changed. Dynamic predictors are factors that vary over time and can be influenced. The emphasis should be placed on the dynamic factors, as they are “likely to result in a more meaningful and accurate risk assessment” and “open up the possibility to design targeted interventions in reducing the risk of recidivism.”⁴⁰

One of the most important **static predictors** is age. Similar to the general criminal population, it can be observed that certain terrorists may experience a gradual “aging out” effect.⁴¹ There are a number of ways ageing can have an indirect effect on reducing recidivism. By age, people tend to develop an increased capacity to make calculated decisions (e.g. weighing the costs and benefits of involvement). Those who joined for thrill-seeking may be more prone to want a more conventional lifestyle when they get older. Sometimes the shift that comes with age to focus on getting married, having a family and holding a stable job motivate disinvolvement. Finally, as terrorists are often exposed to excessive levels of violence, they may be more likely to experience feelings of burnout over time. However, it is important to note that as opposed to regular criminals, a strong commitment to the ideology may serve as a mitigating factor. In some cases, individuals transition to or reengage in a more indirect, facilitative or leadership role in their extremist environment as they age.

Other static predictors include a history of pre-adult involvement and a history of family or peer involvement in terrorism. Through social learning, these factors are thought to harbour antisocial attitudes and prevent the formation of prosocial networks. Early involvement often prevents people from obtaining a good education or gaining work experience that limits alternatives to pursue outside of the group. This is why a long history of involvement is also considered a static predictor. Although terrorists are not drawn

³⁷ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Altier, Horgan, & Thoroughgood, 2019

⁴⁰ Ibid. pp.33.

⁴¹ Ibid pp.34.

disproportionally from lower social classes, it is probable that those who come from a low socio-economic status might have a higher likelihood of reoffending.

Dynamic predictors of reengagement are related to ideology, social relations and substance abuse. Firstly, a strong commitment to a violent, radical ideology and/or a terrorist cause is one of the most important indicators of potential reoffending. Secondly, social ties to active members or supporters of an extremist group also signal potential risks. Thirdly, substance abuse is considered a risk factor that needs to be assessed and managed. On the other hand, good marital and family relationships, good education and stable employment are considered to be **protective factors**. Prosocial bonds (healthy family relations, friends, colleagues) are thought to have a buffering effect, probably through questioning the person's commitment to the radical ideology.

A review of 300 U.S. extremist journeys confirms the relevance of the risk and protective factors described above.⁴² These factors can also be understood within the previously described framework of the exit outcome dimensions. They encompass deficits or resources on the cognitive (radicalisation – deradicalisation), social and functional reintegration, mental health and desistance dimensions.

The main **barriers to disengagement** were identified as:

- poor educational background (60% of the cases);
- close-knit ties (family member, romantic partner, friend) to the extremist group (57 %);
- non-ideological criminal history (36%);
- unstable work history (31%);
- substance abuse issues (18%);
- mental illness (5%).

Some exit barriers were disproportionately present in specific extremist environments. In total, 80 % of the right-wing extremists struggled with issues of social mobility (e.g. limited educational attainment and poor work performance), while 77 % of the Islamist extremists in the sample were members in close-knit extremist cliques, with and the majority having low educational attainment. Although the extremist left-wing participants had low rates on most indicators, almost 60 % of them were members of an extremist group that included a close friend, romantic partner, or family member.

Facilitators of disengagement included cognitive, social and mental health related factors.

- Cognitive factors:
 - Changed religiosity (increase in, decrease in, or reinterpretation of religious beliefs or participation) (36 %);
 - disillusionment (24 %).
- Social factors:
 - Ending relationships with extremists and/or beginning new relationships with non-extremists (36 %);
 - physical separation from the extremist environment by moving to another city or state (24.5 %).
- Mental health related factors:
 - Decreased substance use (26 %).

⁴² Jensen, James & Yates, 2019

It is important to note that positive social changes (e.g. the termination of relationships with radicals and the formation of new prosocial relations) were reported by a very low number of Islamist extremists (14 %) and by a much higher number, over 40 % of the right- and left-wing extremists. Disillusionment was cited by 34 % of Islamist extremists and 26 % of the right-wing radicals, while it was less prevalent amongst left-wing extremists (18 %). **Disillusionment** is one of the most commonly cited reasons for individuals leaving extremist groups and/or for deradicalising *voluntarily*. Disillusionment can occur for several reasons, including cognitive dissonance posed by the discrepancy between ideology and real-life experience, traumatic experiences with violence, disagreements regarding tactical decisions, internal conflicts and power struggles, hypocrisy felt towards leadership and burnout. It is a good motivator for disengagement, but it should only be considered as a first step. In many cases, disillusionment does not lead to a change of the underlying extremist beliefs.⁴³

In order to identify current challenges regarding further risk factors, this section is complemented with **European practitioners' observations and lessons learned from challenging cases**.⁴⁴

- Working with offenders' **motivations** can pose a challenge in some cases.⁴⁵ One of the greatest challenges reported by practitioners is recognising false compliance (the next section discusses this question in detail.) In addition, practitioners report that in the cases of some returning foreign terrorist fighters, there is a lack of acknowledgement of being radicalised that leads to a reduced motivation to participate in deradicalisation programmes. In general, practitioners confirm that understanding clients' journeys of radicalisation can be helpful. Knowing clients' personal stories can help understand what motivations were in place and what functions the involvement served in their lives. This way, the rehabilitation plan can include healthy alternatives to fulfil the same needs in an adaptive and prosocial way. However, it is important to note that risk factors for reengagement might differ from one's initial involvement. The client's current context, motivations and possibilities need to be explored to provide adequate care.
- Practitioners are concerned about prisoners who will be **stripped of their citizenship** and required to leave the country after detention. This hampers the effectiveness of programmes for disengagement, deradicalisation and reintegration (DDR). In addition, people who cannot be expelled may slip under the radar and travel through the Schengen zone to another Member State.
- Cases of **arrest for the intention to leave** the country to join a terrorist organisation abroad require special attention. DDR is more difficult with **short sentences**. With the collapse of the ISIS caliphate, terrorists who attempted to join ISIS in Syria or Iraq but were imprisoned were characterised by a strong sense of failure for not being able to fulfil their mission in Syria. Some of them wanted to rectify their failure and decided to carry out attacks in Western Europe.⁴⁶
- Although psychiatric disorders are less common in terrorists than in other violent criminal populations, underlying yet undetected **mental health issues and conditions** may severely undermine reintegration efforts. Offenders who have been exposed to violent environments are likely to have experienced trauma and may suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder. Another recent observation by practitioners is that people on the autism spectrum may be more vulnerable to online recruitment. A case study showed that an undetected condition of autism and mental retardation prevented the formulation of a sufficient rehabilitation plan despite comprehensive reintegration efforts, leading to the client's online reengagement.
- **Personal crises** can dramatically weaken people's abilities to resist re-radicalisation.⁴⁷ Certain crises occur commonly in different phases of the rehabilitation (e.g. adapting to prison settings, feelings of

⁴³ Jensen, James & Yates, 2019

⁴⁴ Some of the points have been collected from practitioners on 16 and 18 March 2021 at the Radicalisation Awareness Network's digital meeting on 'How to prevent reoffending and reengagement of radicalised and terrorist offenders'.

⁴⁵ A comprehensive summary on how to work with clients' motivations in the exit process is available [here](#) Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020b.

⁴⁶ InFoEx Webinar, 2020 [Deradicalization Work and Recidivism for the Dutch context and Kujtim Fejzulaj who reoffended in Austria had a similar profile.](#)

⁴⁷ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a pp. 20

isolation and boredom in prison, adaptation struggles after release), while other crises may be unexpected (e.g. death of family members, kindling of old conflicts).

- **Stigmatisation** (real or perceived) is often a decisive factor in the mindset of radicalised people. Negative experiences in relation to stigmatisation and discrimination at every phase of the rehabilitation cycle pose a particularly acute threat to successful rehabilitation and reintegration. It is essential for all actors involved to undertake every measure to ensure that offenders are not being stigmatised or harassed based on gender, ethnic, or religious backgrounds.⁴⁸ There are also unique sources of stigma associated with terrorist offences by the public.⁴⁹ In addition, enhanced **media attention** also poses a challenge to reintegration.

In summary, it can be stated that examining understanding individual risk and protective factors opens the possibility to designing targeted interventions for offenders. Dynamic predictive factors of reengagement can be translated to offenders' **needs** (e.g. need for education, need for addiction treatment, etc.), in other words, to current deficits that can hinder post-release re-adjustment. That is why, instead of risk assessment, the focus should be widened to **risk and needs management** in prisons. This means that besides risks, offenders' individual needs are also assessed, and a rehabilitation plan is created and implemented with the aim to meet those needs. This requires a multidisciplinary approach and a multiagency team. A **multidisciplinary approach** in this case means that prisons provide a variety of assistance and support that are tailor-made to the offenders' needs. The needs are assessed, and the interventions are offered by a multiagency team that consists of a variety of competencies and professions, such as P/CVE specialists, psychologists, social workers, religious counsellors and educators.

The areas of **multidisciplinary interventions** are in line with the previously described exit outcome dimensions and may include the following:

- **Mental health aspect:** assessing and improving mental health (e.g. providing psychosocial support, psychological counselling, addiction treatment).
- **Cognitive aspect:** assessing and supporting deradicalisation (e.g. providing faith-based counselling, programmes that enhance critical thinking, cognitive behavioural programmes).
- **Social reintegration aspect:** fostering positive social connections (facilitating relations with healthy social networks, such as with family and community, offering skill development trainings to improve social and conflict management skills).
- **Functional reintegration aspect:** providing educational/vocational training to help future employment.

Besides risk factors, **personal and social resources**, as protective factors, need to be explored as they can be mobilised during the rehabilitation and reintegration phases. The rehabilitation process should start as early as possible, and the individual development should be regularly assessed and monitored. Ideally, the multidisciplinary assistance continues in the post-release probation phase as well. In that period, the social and functional reintegration tasks are at the centre of attention. Providing instrumental help with housing, financing, job opportunities, as well as preparing the receiving community are additional elements to be considered for successful and sustainable reintegration. In summary, promoting offenders' well-being and rehabilitation is the best way to ensure safety for society.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a pp. 36.

⁴⁹ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2019a

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Recommendations to practitioners

- Instead of risk assessment, focus on risk and *needs* assessment and *management* in rehabilitation and reintegration work. Apply a holistic approach: assess the offender's risks, needs, as well as personal, social and educational resources.
- Employ a multidisciplinary and multiagency approach to offer interventions already in prison that are tailor-made to the offender's needs. Areas of support may target mental health, deradicalisation, education/vocational training, and the facilitation of positive social networks.

Risk management throughout the prison-exit continuum

The RAN Rehabilitation Manual⁵¹ identifies seven distinct phases of the rehabilitation process, from pretrial detention through serving the prison sentence and release planning to the post-release period and stabilisation. The tasks, key actors and challenges of each phase are described in detail with the goal to create a template for successful rehabilitation and reintegration. In this section, cross-cutting issues from a reengagement perspective are reviewed on this prison-exit continuum. Five topics are discussed in detail: (1) the role of prison, (2) offenders' false compliance (deception and misleading of authorities), (3) the role of risk assessment tools, (4) information sharing and interagency collaboration, and (5) transition management. The key issues and challenges are discussed in each topic, followed by recommendations and inspiring practices.

(1) The role of prison

One of the main conclusions of Silke and Morrison's review on European terrorist recidivism was that compared to other types of offenders, prison seems to "work" for the adult extremist population.⁵² It seems that the relatively long-term removal from the extremist environment is sufficient in disengaging terrorists from their past criminal activities. However, prison can also be a "place of vulnerability"⁵³ especially for young and/or first-time convicts. This can present both a challenge and an opportunity. Entering prison can go together with a personal crisis that also provides the possibility to reflect on life choices and to open up to new ideas, paths and social groups. This vulnerability can however be abused by radicals inside the prison to recruit and indoctrinate in exchange for protection or alliance.

Radicalisation within prison is an important risk factor. Since 2015, there have been 22 prison-related terrorist attacks and plots in Europe, 6 of which took place in prison.⁵⁴ Currently, 54 % of the inmates monitored for signs of their extremism entered prison as 'regular' criminals, and not because of terrorism-related offences.⁵⁵ Practitioners report that recruitment and reengagement efforts often come from **outside of prison** as well. Multiple cases were observed where Islamist extremists actively sought contact with inmates to offer them a place to go to after release.⁵⁶ Prisoners who oftentimes have nowhere to go to after a long sentence can respond positively to this. In certain cases, inmates have been reported to be reached via social media. If a good rapport has been established, inmates are likely to disclose this information to the practitioner they work with.

Maintaining a **healthy prison environment** that is professional, secure and fair is key to reducing risks of radicalisation in prison. Prisons need to be safe for both staff and prisoners. A lack of structure and inconsistencies in security and control can impact prisoners' safety needs negatively, which in turn may be

⁵¹ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a

⁵² Silke & Morrison, 2020

⁵³ Basra & Neumann, 2020. pp.25.

⁵⁴ Basra & Neumann, 2020 Infographic https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/ICSR-Infographic-Prisons-and-Terrorism-Extremist-Offender-Management-in-10-European-Countries_V2.pdf

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ InFoEx Webinar, 2020 [Deradicalization Work and Recidivism](#)

met through other means, for example by religious or gang-like groups that offer protection.⁵⁷ This could open up the possibility for further influence, control and radicalisation. Choices about the placement (containment, dispersion, isolation, or a combination thereof) of the violent extremist offender is also important. “Prison regime choices should be guided by the aim to normalise violent extremist offenders whilst minimising risks to themselves, and to other prisoners, staff and the general public.”⁵⁸ Treating prisoners fairly, and with respect and dignity is the cornerstone of working with violent extremist offenders. Radicalised inmates see representatives of the state as enemies, and real or perceived injustices can strengthen their radicalised mindset. Investing in day-to-day staff-offender relationships through strengthening the dynamic security measures and professionalism is key. “No clever piece of software or risk assessment tool can compensate for the absence of sufficient staff, space and basic resources.”⁵⁹

Conditions to work optimally with violent extremist offenders include the avoidance of understaffing and overcrowding, a committed prison management, and the provision of trainings for staff. Most countries recognised that it is neither necessary nor cost-effective to provide radicalisation training to the entire prison staff. Instead, centralised extremist units were created that provide expertise and input where needed.⁶⁰ Specialised extremist units can also play a key part in classifying extremist offenders, managing security information and providing trainings to prison staff.

Recommendations to prison staff and administration

- Create and maintain safe working conditions in prison. Avoid overcrowding and understaffing.
- Provide a healthy prison environment where offenders are treated with respect and dignity.
- Develop expertise and train staff to work optimally with this type of offender. Staff must recognise the radicalisation process, not just be on the lookout for 'signs'.⁶¹
- Make efforts to prevent and address stigmatisation and racism of staff and other prisoners.
- Assess and adapt prison regimes, if necessary.
- Develop and implement an individual classification system for violent extremist offenders in prison.
- Develop and implement a risk and needs assessment system for violent extremist offenders in prison.
- Develop and implement individual rehabilitation plans for violent extremist offenders with a multiagency team.

Inspiring practice

CelEx (Extremism Cell) (Belgium): CelEx is a specialised unit that was created within the central penitentiary administration in 2015 in Belgium. It is “tasked with centralising all relevant information from prison staff and external partners (police, intelligence services, prosecutor’s office) to facilitate the detection or evaluation of radicalised inmates, and to make informed recommendations for the placement and detention regime (the ‘CelEx regime’) of these inmates.”⁶² It has become one of the cornerstones of the Belgian approach to radicalisation in prison.

⁵⁷ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2019a pp. 8.

⁵⁸ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2019a pp. 7.

⁵⁹ Basra & Neumann, 2020 pp. iii

⁶⁰ Basra & Neumann, 2020 pp. ii

⁶¹ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2019a pp. 8.

⁶² Renard, 2020b pp. 8.

(2) False compliance

The question of false compliance and the deception of authorities have been brought into the spotlight by some of the recent tragic re-offence cases. In France, two guards were killed in a prison attack in 2016 by Bilal Taghi who was serving a 5-year sentence for attempting to travel to Syria. He had been considered a model inmate.⁶³ Usman Khan, the 2019 London Bridge attacker, had participated in rehabilitation and disengagement programmes, and had also been considered a success story.^{64,65} It is important to note that the presence of sincerity and authentic, internal motivation for change, or the lack of it, are of utmost relevance in the case of regular offenders as well. Perpetrators know that showing remorse and guilt and taking responsibility for one's actions, and complying with authorities, can influence the overall judgement of the offender, and his/her sentence and timing of release. In addition to this, distancing oneself from violent, radical ideologies is similarly important in the case of violent extremist perpetrators. Monitoring these prisoners requires up-to-date training of prison staff on knowledge of extremist movements, groups, symbols, literature, music, narratives and ideologies.⁶⁶

Amongst ETA prisoners, a study found that a positive sign regarding the intention to deradicalise was the willingness or ability to criticise former comrades.⁶⁷ In the context of Swedish right-wing extremists, a positive sign to commit to deradicalisation was the public admission of their former involvement and the confirmation that they are not part of it anymore.⁶⁸

In general, **signs of radicalisation in prison** may include behaviours such as rejecting prison authority, refusing to interact with others aside from their in-group, celebrating a terrorist attack or associating with known extremists.⁶⁹ However, changes in the signs of radicalisation have been observed. In a 2015 interview,⁷⁰ French prison officers noted the differences regarding how signs of radicalisation of Islamic extremist offenders had changed in a 5-year period. Earlier, signs were much more explicit and overt, for example, a change in the inmate's dress code. Nowadays, radical prisoners may keep a low profile, making monitoring much more challenging. More subtle warning signs may be when an inmate withdraws, talks little with guards, changes social contacts, or does not pray at appropriate times.⁷¹ It also seems that there is a growing awareness amongst inmates about within-prison monitoring and surveillance. As a result, more of them seek to pass their time without incident or arising suspicion.⁷² In recent years, more cases were reported, for example in France, where inmates' behaviours were misinterpreted. It was observed that some radical Islamist prisoners saw the time spent in prison as a test of their commitment and were determined to use their time to work on themselves (e.g. studied psychology to become a better recruiter or studied Islamic and jihadist history to become a better ideologue) and to learn how authorities operate.⁷³ These cases show that signs of radicalisation have become far less explicit and radicals may use their time in prison for other purposes beyond attempts to recruit or network.

Dissimulation and deception of authorities may occur in any criminal and terrorist population.⁷⁴ Offenders often 'look for the right answers' to give to authorities in order to positively influence their sentence, prison conditions or time of release. Therefore, it is important to understand what is perceived by perpetrators as 'good' or 'favourable' behaviours in the eyes of the authorities. Religiously motivated offenders may understand abandoning their religion as a sign of showing positive change. In the context of violent Islamist offenders, it is supposed that the concept of 'taqiyya' is in use when perpetrators deceive or dissimulate to hide their true intention. Taqiyya is a mostly Shiite Islam concept to describe precautionary dissimulation or denial of religious belief and practice in the face of persecution.⁷⁵ Fieldwork in a French female prison

⁶³ Basra & Neumann, 2020

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Although a prison psychologist who assessed Usman Khan told security staff about her concerns regarding his release (Weaver, 2021)

⁶⁶ Basra & Neumann, 2020 pp. 26.

⁶⁷ Alonso & Bada, 2016

⁶⁸ Mattsson & Johansson, 2020

⁶⁹ Basra & Neumann, 2020. pp.25

⁷⁰ cited by Basra & Neumann, 2020. pp. 26

⁷¹ Basra & Neumann, 2020

⁷² Ibid. pp.29

⁷³ Ibid. pp.29

⁷⁴ Basra & Neumann, 2020. pp.29

⁷⁵ Esposito, 2014

suggests that dissimulation in relation to religion is likely to be underreported.⁷⁶ However, this neither suggests that Islamist offenders have a higher propensity to engage in deception nor that *not* practicing one's religion is a sign of deception. The **question of religiosity** remains complex as it bears varying significance for different offenders. For many of the Islamist extremist perpetrators, (re-)discovering their faith in prison can have a positive influence on their rehabilitation, while others may convert only to enjoy certain benefits in prison (e.g. alliance to and protection from a group or access to different food). This is also why one of the primary aims of monitoring is to distinguish between religiosity and radicalisation.

As a response to recent reoffences, the expectations toward risk assessment tools and technological solutions (e.g. electronic tracker, polygraph) have increased. While close monitoring and surveillance are very important, they are not sufficient. Conversations amongst inmates can, for example, be recorded by eavesdropping devices, but their processing takes time. In the case of Michael Chiolo, an inmate who planned and attacked two prison guards in France in 2019 with the help of his wife, such recordings revealed the planning of the attack with his fellow inmates the day before. The tapes could not be processed in time.⁷⁷

Besides comprehensive surveillance, this is why the role of well-trained staff who are able to build relationships with inmates is crucial to detect even small changes over time. This approach in prison translates to the strengthening of '**dynamic security**', which means that information is obtained from every interaction between staff and inmates to highlight changes in attitude and behaviour. "For this to work, staff-offender interactions must take place in an environment where confrontation and fears of assault are minimal"⁷⁸ and a relationship can be built even if it takes a long time, months or sometimes even years.⁷⁹

Methods that are recommended to effectively identify and manage false compliance are time- and resource-intensive. An integrated approach that includes regular assessments made by multiple and experienced staff, coupled with comprehensive intelligence and effective information sharing routines would be sufficient to spot and respond to most false compliance cases.⁸⁰ Although there are no methods that can uncover 100 % of the cases, it is very difficult for most offenders to trick people and sustain a lie for a long period of time.

Recommendations to security and prison authorities

To effectively identify false compliance and to manage risk in prison:⁸¹

- Strengthen the dynamic security approach in prison. Provide training to prison staff on dynamic security.
- Provide specialised training to prison staff who work with radicalised and terrorist offenders on radicalisation, both in a general and in a context-relevant manner.
- Use surveillance to find discrepancies between what an inmate tells prison staff and what they tell their fellow inmates.
- Use multiple counsellors and psychologists to make assessments to determine if they all come to the same conclusion.
- Have an extended period of evaluation in a variety of contexts (e.g. pre-trial, post-conviction).

⁷⁶ Cited by Basra & Neumann, 2020.

⁷⁷ Basra & Neumann, 2020. pp.27.

⁷⁸ Ibid. pp. 28.

⁷⁹ Ibid. pp. 28.

⁸⁰ Basra (2020) <https://twitter.com/rajanbasra/status/132364044112317954>

⁸¹ Basra & Newmann, 2020, pp. 29.

Inspiring practice

Inspiring practices in dynamic security training in Belgium, France, Spain, Finland, Norway and Estonia are summarised in the book 'Best Practices in Dynamic Security Training' published by the European Penitentiary Training Academies in 2021.

(3) Risk assessment tools

Risk assessment is a central task throughout the entire rehabilitation process. In many countries, law enforcement and prison management use terrorism-specific risk assessment tools (e.g. VERA-2R, ERG, TRAP18, RADAR-iTe), but they are still relatively new and there is not enough evidence regarding their use. Commonly reported challenges by practitioners are their long duration and the possibility to fake the answers. In certain instances, it was observed that prisoners shared information about the questionnaire amongst themselves and prepared the answers in advance. The accuracy of the assessment tools also depends on the skills and experience of those who use them.⁸² In addition, most of these assessment tools do not require a rating of the certainty of the gathered evidence that is also important in assessing the accuracy of the diagnostic results.

It is important to set realistic expectations regarding the use of risk assessment tools. They can be an important source of information if experienced and trained staff use them. They are best used as one of multiple sources of assessment and over an extended period of time. When determining detention conditions or potential early and/or conditional release, relying solely on the risk assessment tool's results is not advised.⁸³ Assessment tools do not replace regular information gathering by multiple sources who have a regular personal relationship with the offender.

Recommendations to practitioners

- Carry out risk assessment continually, throughout the entire rehabilitation process accounting for change and development.
- Set realistic expectations regarding the use of risk assessment tools. They are best used as *one* of multiple sources of information, over an extended period of time, by experienced and trained staff.
- When determining detention conditions or potential early and/or conditional release, do not rely solely on the risk assessment tool's results.

(4) Information sharing and interagency collaboration

Investigations of many successful re-offence cases in Europe have revealed insufficient information sharing amongst agencies, insufficient assessment of the security information, and lack of safeguards as reasons why re-offence prevention failed. In 2020, Kujtim Fejzulai killed 2 and injured 23 people in a series of attacks in Vienna 1 year after of his release from prison where he spent 12 months for attempting to travel to Syria. Investigations revealed that the Austrian authorities were notified before the attack about Fejzulai's attempt to buy ammunition for an assault rifle in Slovakia while he was on probation. However, following a brief investigation no further action was taken. The ongoing investigations of Usman Khan's re-offence case revealed that although he was perceived as a model inmate by some, his assessing psychologist was highly concerned about a release because of the potential to reengage.⁸⁴ During the imprisonment of violent extremist offenders, as well as after their release, several actors work together. State agencies (e.g. prison and probation services, intelligence agencies, law enforcement, municipalities) collaborate with civil society

⁸² Basra & Neumann, 2020

⁸³ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a

⁸⁴ Weaver, 2021

organisations (CSOs), local communities, families, employers and various professionals (P/CVE specialists, social workers, psychologists, religious counsellors). This section focuses on interagency collaboration from a security perspective.

From a risk management point of view, obtaining, assessing and sharing information between agencies is of utmost importance, both in prison and during post-release probation. Police and intelligence services are fundamental actors in information gathering. In some cases, prison administrations have also developed intelligence units within prisons.⁸⁵ Transitioning to the post-release probation period requires the re-arrangement of the agencies' roles, responsibilities and cooperation, and the integration of new stakeholders. Formalised and clear framework for information exchange must be in place at all stages. Regular and clear **channels and routines of information flow** need to be established. In some cases, meetings every two weeks in a multiagency setting to share information is not enough. These cases may require active, daily interagency case management. All the information should be gathered by the **case manager** on a regular basis who oversees the process and has the authority to take action, if necessary. In some countries, the case manager is the probation officer, in other cases it is a specific body. **Clear legal frameworks** for information sharing between different state authorities and relevant CSOs are necessary to ensure that all actors have all the information they require, as well as the relevant legal protection necessary for working in this sensitive context.⁸⁶ Inspiring practices of interagency collaboration are listed below.

In recent years, the emphasis has shifted to a highly securitised view in re-offence prevention⁸⁷. However, practitioners emphasise that safeguarding human relationships are required to both modify behaviour and reduce risk.⁸⁸ They stress the importance of **building rapport and trust** with multiple practitioners in the reintegration process. Within the context of a close connection, practitioners are able to identify early warning signs and changes in the released offender's behaviour patterns that cannot be detected by technological devices, such as electric tags.

During the probation period, any **sign of change** in the ex-offender's behaviour or habits can be considered worthy of attention. If the client starts to attend a different place of worship, begins to have a different circle of friends, changes habits, reports about conflicts, or mentions problems in his/her marriage, family or in other social contexts, these are all signs that need attention. Missed appointments or the violating any parole conditions must be taken seriously. Severe conflicts between the client and members of his/her personal support network can lead to high tension, a personal crisis and/or the loss of support (or the threat of it). This can be an opening for the client to go back to old contacts. Withdrawal and/or the change in friends or place of worship have to be followed up to check that it does not indicate a reconnection with extremist environments. Following clients' online activities can also reveal if there is a discrepancy between what they communicate to professionals and what they post/follow online.

Challenges that have been identified by practitioners with regards to interagency collaboration include, amongst others:

- How to create good cooperation and a shared language between different agencies that have a different (e.g. security or reintegration) focus and work cultures?
- How to create the legal framework for information sharing and interagency cooperation?
- How to share information effectively between agencies while respecting GDPR regulations? How to manage sensitive information?
- How to create effective interagency case management? Who is best suited to act as a case manager? How to avoid interface problems?

⁸⁵ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2019a

⁸⁶ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a

⁸⁷ Interview with Simon Cornell in the Guardian (Townsend, 2019)

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Recommendations to policy makers and practitioners working in a multi-stakeholder setting

- Create the legal framework for information sharing and interagency collaboration.
- Create efficient interagency information sharing and case management processes.
- Make sure that roles and responsibilities are explicitly clarified and understood by each actor in the multiagency team.
- Ensure that roles are clearly defined, differentiated and efficiently coordinated. Assessors' roles should not be conflated with those in a supporting capacity. Actors in a supporting capacity for prisoners (e.g. social workers, therapists, P/CVE specialists) should not carry out risk assessment as it would inhibit trust building and hinder their professional relationship.⁸⁹

Inspiring practices

Returnee coordinators (Hesse, Germany): Returnee coordinators in Hesse serve as a central interface for security authorities, public bodies, local communities and CSOs. Coordinators are responsible for the multidisciplinary case processing, networking, information gathering and transfer, as well as for organising round-table meetings.

Multi-agency public protection arrangements (MAPPA) (UK): MAPPA is the set of arrangements through which the police, probation and prison services work together with other agencies to manage the risks posed by violent and sexual offenders living in the community in order to protect the public in England and Wales. It is not a statutory body in itself, but rather a mechanism through which agencies can better discharge their statutory responsibilities and protect the public in a coordinated manner.

The Aarhus model (Denmark): The Info-house is a crime-preventive collaboration where the key actors are police and the municipalities, but also includes other authorities like the regional psychiatry and the prison and probation services. There are 12 Info-houses in Denmark, one for each police region.

(5) Transition management: multi-stakeholder collaboration

Whether there are critical periods when re-offence risks are higher is an important question. According to statistics, the majority of re-offending happens within the first year after release.⁹⁰ The first three months of post-release can be especially critical for former extremist and terrorist offenders. "Even seemingly small miscommunications or omissions may have serious consequences. For example, releasing an individual on a Friday afternoon, having forgotten that many of the allocated supportive contacts will not be available until Monday. This could result in the individual turning to the support networks of the extremist scene they espoused before being imprisoned. In order to prevent such impulses, probation workers, social workers and P/CVE specialists managing the rehabilitation process must be available 24/7. Even if everything goes according to plan, the first few hours or days are the most crucial, as individuals are particularly vulnerable."⁹¹ The success of the transition depends largely on the preparations made in prison. Transition management requires effective interagency cooperation. In other words, the successful transition of roles and responsibilities, as well as information about the offender to and between multiple actors. Besides that, two key aspects are also crucial: trust building and the involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the process.

⁸⁹ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a

⁹⁰ Renard, 2020a

⁹¹ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a pp. 68.

“Probation is about relationships”⁹² and relationship building has to complement intelligence activity. Professionals who will work closely with the ex-offender after release, such as the probation officer, P/CVE specialists and social workers, have to build trust with the offender in order to work efficiently. **Trust building** takes time, this is also why release planning and the introduction of key practitioners have to start at least six months before release. Professionals’ experience shows that trust building with professionals who represent state authorities can be limited. Practitioners who work for independent CSOs are uniquely positioned to build trust with extremist offenders because they are perceived as distinct from state actors.⁹³ In certain cases, CSOs employ rehabilitated and specially trained former members of violent extremist groups as mentors to support the rehabilitation process. Violent extremist ex-offenders who participated in an exit programme in Sweden where they had – amongst other services – a former extremist as a mentor, identified three key components of the programme that helped them change.⁹⁴ They emphasised the role of the first meeting that took place in a non-judgemental and non-threatening atmosphere, the shared past with the former extremist mentor who served as a role model and the importance of informal dialogues.

Involving and enabling CSOs in the rehabilitation and reintegration process is advised for several additional reasons. In many cases CSOs, as independent actors, can provide specialised expertise (e.g. P/CVE specialists) and run deradicalisation programmes and/or family or community empowerment and cohesion measures.⁹⁵ They can serve as a bridge, linking to communities. In some cases, CSOs are already well-known and trusted by the relevant communities. However, “especially in the role of P/CVE specialists, CSOs need the capacities and legal protection to contribute effectively to rehabilitation processes.”⁹⁶

Another important component of successful transition management is the early involvement of all additional **relevant stakeholders** that can positively influence the social and functional reintegration of the released prisoner. They may include, but are not limited to, municipalities, CSOs, social workers, possible employers and relevant members of the local community. Ideally, contact with family members is already facilitated from detention in the case where family is assessed as being a positive source of support. Families and receiving communities also need to be prepared before release. The offender is encouraged to take ownership over his or her release planning. Release planning meetings in which all relevant stakeholders participate and take an active role help the creation of family- and community-based solutions and shared responsibility taking. This way, they contribute to fostering long-term, viable and sustainable pathways to reintegration. Social net conferencing is a method used to prepare and execute such planning meetings by professionals (see the description of the inspiring practice below).

Tasks upon release may include the provision of a wide range of instrumental help, emotional support and accessibility even in unusual hours. Ex-offenders need to be picked up at the prison gate in a literal and metaphorical sense. Instrumental support may include providing transportation, accommodation, or financial aid. Both the client and the practitioners have to be prepared for the possibility that the individual’s former extremist network may exert pressure, intimidation, or even violence with the goal to either draw them back to the group or to retaliate for leaving. In such cases, protection and the possibility to relocate the client are important. Exit organisations usually work very intensively with clients in the first 6 to 12, or even 24 months. High intensity contacts may mean multiple meetings a week, including weekends, if necessary. However, reengagement can occur at a later time period as well, even after a decade. In the **stabilisation phase**, the main challenge for individuals is to successfully handle demanding everyday life situations on their own, from administrative paperwork to more serious personal crises (e.g. the death of a family member, financial

⁹² Interview with Simon Cornell in the Guardian (Townsend, 2019)

⁹³ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a pp. 6.

⁹⁴ Christensen, 2015

⁹⁵ Ibid. pp. 86

⁹⁶ Ibid pp. 87.

problems, etc.)⁹⁷ If the ex-offender is not resilient enough, it can make him or her vulnerable to re-radicalisation and become a target of extremist recruitment. In the stabilisation phase, exit organisations reduce the contact frequency, but keep being available in the long run so that clients would know that they can turn to them in times of high stress and difficulties.⁹⁸

Recommendation to policy makers

Create a framework for CSOs who work with violent extremists to get access to long-term sustainable funding as opposed to short-term, project-based financing.

Recommendations to practitioners⁹⁹

- Ensure the continuity of support services upon and after release.
- Involve and enable relevant CSOs as independent actors early in the rehabilitation process to allow time for trust building.
- Engage communities, families, municipalities and local authorities early in release planning to ensure a smooth transitional period after release. Encourage their active participation to help shared responsibility taking and the formation of family- and community-based solutions.
- Encourage the offender to take ownership and responsibility of his/her own release planning.
- Consider relocation of the ex-offender, if necessary.
- Prevent and counter stigmatisation and discrimination at all levels.
- Pick ex-prisoners up at the prison gate literally and metaphorically. Provide instrumental and social support, availability and high intensity contacts in the initial phase of release.
- Equip relevant actors with the necessary means to provide intensive contact and support (24/7 if needed) with offenders during and after release.¹⁰⁰
- In the case of violent extremist offenders who received short sentences, the criminal justice systems have a limited window of opportunity to affect the process of change. Ensure continuity in providing rehabilitation services to these offenders based on their needs. Probation services can also help design alternatives to prison rehabilitation.¹⁰¹

Inspiring practice

Social Net Conferencing method (Austria): The Austrian organisation NEUSTART employs the Social Net Conferencing method to facilitate the rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders and perpetrators of regular crimes. Social Net Conferencing is used, amongst others, to prepare the release of extremist offenders by involving a wide range of participants in face-to-face encounters to create a realistic, binding and sustainable release plan. The method encourages family- and community-based solutions, client ownership taking, shared responsibility taking and the strengthening of family bonds.

⁹⁷ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a pp. 83.

⁹⁸ InFoEx Webinar, 2020 [Deradicalization Work and Recidivism](#)

⁹⁹ Recommendations by Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a pp. 6.

¹⁰⁰ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a pp. 20.

¹⁰¹ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2019a.

Preparing for a worst-case scenario

Practitioners and policymakers are under immense political and public pressure to ensure public safety.¹⁰² This pressure becomes more articulate after successful terrorist attacks. It is important to thoroughly investigate each case and make reforms where necessary. However, both academics¹⁰³ and practitioners are concerned about policy measures taken hastily as a response to public pressure after a terrorist attack, resulting in what Renard (2020a) refers to as “fear-based policies.”¹⁰⁴ It is important that policies are driven by evidence instead of by “unsupported assumptions or misperceptions.”¹⁰⁵ Efforts need to be made to “better educate and inform both the policy worlds and the wider public about the general risk posed by released terrorist prisoners. This risk is not zero, but contrary to expectation, most released terrorists disengage from violent extremism.”¹⁰⁶

Although the statistical likelihood of severe reoffending is very low, both state and non-governmental organisations that work with violent extremist offenders have to prepare for the possibility of a worst-case scenario in case their clients reoffend. Resources and support services for the organisation’s employees who are affected by the case and possible media pressure need to be made available. Providing access to psychosocial support, psychological counselling and group supervisions in the aftermath of a terrorist attack is important to support affected practitioners. Preparation should also include the development of a crisis management protocol that contains a crisis communication plan. Taking a proactive approach in managing media relations can also contribute to more effective future crisis communication. This includes creating and nurturing good contacts and cooperation with expert journalists on a regular basis, long before a crisis takes place. Proactivity is also important in communicating the organisation’s work to the general public, media and policymakers. Employing an independent expert or body to evaluate the organisation’s work can be a source of reference to highlight the achievements, clarify the areas of competence, and strengthen the transparency and integrity of the work.

Recommendations to practitioner organisations

- Create protocols and resources to support employees who are affected by a reoffence case and possible media pressure. Provide access to psychosocial support, psychological counselling and group supervisions.
- Thoroughly investigate reoffence cases to draw lessons learned and modify or reform your praxis, if necessary.
- Encourage practitioner exchanges where failed cases are analysed with the goal to share knowledge, lessons learned and possible reform outcomes.
- Create a crisis management protocol that includes a crisis communication plan in preparation for a worst-case scenario. Take a proactive approach in managing media relations. Develop and nurture good relations with expert journalists long before a crisis takes place. Communicate your organisation’s work to stakeholders.
- Employ an independent expert or body to evaluate your organisation’s work. It can be a source of reference to highlight achievements and strengthen the transparency and integrity of the work.

¹⁰² Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2019a, pp. 4.

¹⁰³ see for example, Silke & Morrison, 2020; Renard, 2020a

¹⁰⁴ Renard, 2020a pp. 19-20.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. pp. 20.

¹⁰⁶ Silke & Morrison, 2020 pp. 6.

Summary of recommendations

Recommendations to policy makers

- In order to effectively tackle newly emerging challenges posed by, among others, the rapid rise in the numbers of and the diversification of terrorist inmates, proactive adaptation of procedures and processes are needed.
- Provide opportunities for Member States to share knowledge and inspiring practices.
- Address questions on risk assessment, probation schemes and rehabilitation programmes on a systemic level. In many contexts, case-by-case management of radicalised and terrorist offenders is no longer effective due to the rapid rise in their numbers.¹⁰⁷
- More research is needed to understand and better respond to current challenges.
- Gender-specific approaches are necessary. Staff in all actor groups need to be trained in gender-related aspects and differences between radicalisation and terrorism.¹⁰⁸
- Create a framework for CSOs who work with violent extremists to get access to long-term sustainable funding as opposed to short-term, project-based financing. In many contexts, they are the actors who can ensure the continuity of support services upon and after release from prison.
- Create the legal framework for information sharing and interagency collaboration.
- Create efficient interagency information sharing and case management processes.
- Make sure that roles and responsibilities are explicitly clarified and understood by each actor in the multiagency team.

Recommendations to practitioners

To create a multidisciplinary rehabilitation programme:

- Organisations working with radicalised and terrorist offenders are encouraged to develop their definition of desired outcomes in their work beyond the lack of re-offence. The five dimensions of exit outcomes (disengagement, deradicalisation, desistance, social and functional reintegration, mental health) provide a starting point for specifying desired outcomes and their measurement for monitoring.
- Instead of risk assessment, focus on risk and *needs* assessment and *management* in rehabilitation and reintegration work. Apply a holistic approach: assess the offender's risks, as well as their needs and personal, social and educational resources.
- Employ a multidisciplinary and multiagency approach to offer interventions already in prison that are tailor-made to the offender's needs. Areas of support may target mental health, deradicalisation, education/vocational training and the facilitation of positive social networks.
- Develop and implement individual rehabilitation plans for violent extremist offenders with a multiagency team.

To create and maintain a safe and healthy prison environment:

- Create and maintain safe working conditions in prison. Avoid overcrowding and understaffing.

¹⁰⁷ Basra & Neumann, 2020

¹⁰⁸ Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020a

- Provide a healthy prison environment where offenders are treated with respect and dignity.
- Develop expertise and train staff to work optimally with this type of offender. Staff must recognise the radicalisation process, not just be on the lookout for 'signs'.
- Make efforts to prevent and address stigmatisation and racism of staff and other prisoners.
- Assess and adapt prison regimes, if necessary.
- Develop and implement an individual classification system for violent extremist offenders in prison.
- Develop and implement a risk and needs assessment system for violent extremist offenders in prison.

To address the issue of false compliance:

- Strengthen the dynamic security approach in prison. Provide training to prison staff on dynamic security.
- Use surveillance to find discrepancies between what an inmate tells prison staff and what they tell their fellow inmates.
- Provide specialised training to prison staff who work with radicalised and terrorist offenders on radicalisation, both in a general and in a context-relevant manner.
- Use multiple counsellors and psychologists to make assessments in order to determine if they all come to the same conclusion.
- Have an extended period of evaluation in a variety of contexts (e.g. pre-trial, post-conviction).

To create effective interagency collaboration:

- Create efficient interagency information sharing and case management processes.
- Ensure that roles are clearly defined, differentiated and efficiently coordinated. Assessors' roles should not be conflated with those in a supporting capacity. Actors in a supporting capacity for prisoners (e.g. social workers, therapists, P/CVE specialists) should not carry out risk assessment as it would inhibit trust building and hinder their professional relationship.
- Make sure that roles and responsibilities are explicitly clarified and understood by each actor in the multiagency team.

To create multi-stakeholder collaboration:

- Involve and enable relevant CSOs as independent actors early in the rehabilitation process to allow time for trust building.
- Engage all relevant stakeholders, including communities, families, municipalities, and local authorities early in release planning to ensure a smooth transitional period after release. Encourage their active participation to help shared responsibility taking and the formation of family- and community-based solutions.
- Encourage the offender to take ownership and responsibility of his/her own release planning.

To create effective transition management:

- Ensure the continuity of support services upon and after release.
- Start release planning and the integration of new stakeholders at least six months before the release. Allow time for trust building.
- Prevent and counter stigmatisation and discrimination at all levels.

- Equip relevant actors with the necessary means to provide intensive contact and support (24/7 if needed) with offenders during and after release.
- Pick ex-prisoners up at the prison gate literally and metaphorically. Provide instrumental and social support, availability, and high intensity contacts at the initial phase of release.
- In the case of violent extremist offenders who received short sentences, the criminal justice systems have a limited window of opportunity to affect the process of change. Ensure continuity in providing rehabilitation services to these offenders based on their needs. Probation services can also help design alternatives to prison rehabilitation.

To prepare for a worst-case scenario:

- Create protocols and resources to support employees who are affected by a reoffence case and possible media pressure. Provide access to psychosocial support, psychological counselling, and group supervisions.
- Thoroughly investigate reoffence cases to draw lessons learned and modify or reform your praxis, if necessary.
- Encourage practitioner exchanges where failed cases are analysed with the goal to share knowledge, lessons learned and possible reform outcomes.
- Create a crisis management protocol that includes a crisis communication plan in preparation for a worst-case scenario. Take a proactive approach in managing media relations. Develop and nurture good relations with expert journalists long before a crisis takes place. Communicate your organisation's work to stakeholders.
- Employ an independent expert or body to evaluate your organisation's work. It can be a source of reference to highlight achievements and strengthen the transparency and integrity of the work.

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About the authors:

Dr. Susanna Z. Papp is a psychologist, lecturer, and trainer. She holds a Ph.D. in psychology and has contributed to the work of the RAN Rehabilitation Working Group since 2013.

Robert Örell is an independent expert, former director of Exit Sweden and program director of ExitUSA, with two decades of experience in the field of disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration. He is the co-leader of the RAN Rehabilitation Working Group since 2012.

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