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## CONCLUSIONS PAPER
*RAN event – Reoffending Violent Extremist and Terrorist Offenders*
*27 January 2021 – Digital Event*

# Radicalised and Terrorist Reoffenders

## Key outcomes

When a radicalised or terrorist offender after release from prison relapses and commits a terrorist or extremist offence, this is followed by criticism from the public or politicians, and the attention from media is extremely high. The Small-scale Expert Meeting that took place on 27 January 2021 gathered experts as well as practitioners and had the goal to provide a first overview about the current situation in Europe regarding recidivism rates of radicalised and terrorist offenders as well as the characteristics of these cases. This meeting was also used for the preparation of future meetings about the prevention of recidivism. The discussion was divided into three parts, with the first looking at data available, the second looking at the characteristics of the offenders and reoffenders, as well as expectations for the future, and the third exploring possible follow-up actions for RAN meetings and other activities on this topic.

Some of the key outcomes of the meeting were:

1) Compared to other crimes, **the level of recidivism of terrorist offenders seems to be relatively low** at 5–8 %.

2) With a rise in both radicalised and terrorist prisoners, and a growth in the number of releases, there is an urgency for **better assessment of the number and characteristics of prisoners close to being released**, who might again be involved in future extremist and terrorist activities and networks.

3) Having a common and more precise understanding on what "**recidivism**" is, what a "**reoffender**" is, and on the difference between recidivism and reengagement could help to better address the topic. How is **re-engagement** in violent and non-violent extremist networks and activities, such as recruiting and mobilising, also part of the problem? In terms of methodological approach, should the target group be broadened since the beginning of the discussion to **terrorist _and_ radicalised prisoners?**

4) There is a need for **more quantitative _and_ qualitative data** on reoffenders. The latter is especially crucial for practitioners, as they need insights into profiles of reoffenders to better understand the drivers of reoffending and to be able to optimise individual case management and maximise the results of disengagement, deradicalisation and rehabilitation (DDR) interventions.

This paper summarises the highlights of the discussion as well as the recommendations that were formulated by the participants and will give an outlook on possible follow-up topics.

# Highlights of the discussion

- The topic is quite sensitive as policymakers and the public seem to be very animated by the risk posed by violent extremist and terrorist offenders after release. While radicalised and terrorist offenders have been released back into society for decades and have undergone reintegration programmes, this phenomenon has only recently received more attention, including by the media. This is mainly due to some **high-profile incidents** that have happened in the past months and years.

- This creates a sense of **urgency**. There will be more terrorist and extremist prisoners released in the near future, and each reoffender case increases the public pressure on professionals involved in DDR programmes as well as on the prisoners released.

- When talking about "reoffenders", there is a **lack of common understanding** that makes the discussion difficult: What we mean when talking about:

  o a) **recidivism:** relapsing back into extremist behaviours does not necessarily lead to carrying out attacks, as it can also result in non-violent activities such as recruiting or other supportive activities; and

  o b) **the target group:** in France and the United Kingdom, for example, not only do those convicted for terrorist offences count towards the statistics, but also those convicted for **other offences** who at the same time are **considered as radicalised offenders**.

- Generally, the recidivism rate amongst violent extremist and terrorist offenders (VETOs) has a global median of 5,5 % ([1]). Compared to the recidivism rate of "regular offenders" (globally, generally between 40 and 60 %) ([2]), **VETO recidivism is extremely low**. Moreover, the statistics of recidivism amongst "regular" offenders usually take into account a time period of two years after release from prison. In the context of released radicalised and terrorist offenders, statistics usually look at a much longer period of up to eight years. The highest risk of recidivism for radicalised and terrorist offenders usually occurs during the first months post-release ([3]).

- The differences between individuals who reoffend and those who do not are not yet researched enough. Practitioners need **qualitative data** about the individual profiles as well as circumstances surrounding a reoffender. We need to better understand both the reoffenders and those who don't reoffend.

- Despite a general lack of quantitative data, the meeting was able to collect some country data from expert participants:

  o **France:** Around 60 released radicalised and terrorist offenders in the last 2 years, and, as of 2020, around 500 prisoners convicted for terrorist offences ([4]), 900 Islamist extremist prisoners convicted for non-terrorist offences as well as 700 Islamist extremists on bail or on parole ([5]).

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([1]) The global median of 5,5 % was given by the contributing expert and can also be found in the article Convicted terrorists less likely to reoffend than other criminals – study (The Guardian, 28 April 2020).
([2]) Ibid.
([3]) Thomas Renard (2020), Overblown: Exploring the Gap Between the Fear of Terrorist Recidivism and the Evidence.
([4]) Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann (2020), Prisons and Terrorism: Extremist Offender Management in 10 European Countries.
([5]) Europol (2020), European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2020.

- o **Austria:** Since 2006, 116 terrorist prisoners were released with a recidivism rate of 4 % ([6]). The Vienna attacker from November 2020 was the only one reoffending in such a violent way; most commit offences such as trying to travel to Syria to join Daesh.

- o **Spain:** Between 2004 and 2017, 4 % of released radicalised and terrorist offenders have reoffended ([7]). However, the rate might actually be higher as many jihadist offenders get deported to their country of origin after release and cannot be monitored.

- o **General situation in Europe:** 3 080 radicalised and terrorist inmates, 1 414 convicted of terrorism, and 1 666 convicted for other crimes but recognised as extremist and radicalised; 90 % of these inmates are male and 10 % female. In total, there were 23 prison-related offences since 2015, of which 6 took place in prison ([8]).

- **What role could/should risk and needs assessments play** in the context of recidivism? Some countries, like Greece and Sweden, do not have tools specific to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). In general, gathering information is crucial: proper info sharing amongst the different stakeholders plays a key role in preventing reoffending, but it is still an area where several gaps are present. In addition to info sharing, what is also crucial is **how** this information is used in a **holistic case management** process.

- **False reassurance: re-engaging in extremist activities and with extremist networks:** Some released offenders re-engage with extremist networks but choose for now to get involved in non-violent activities. These are network-empowering activities like preaching or propaganda, but they might turn violent again when there is a new "call to arms". One example is fighters during the Afghanistan conflict in the late 1970s and 1980s who re-engaged in fighting years later during the Bosnia conflict in the 1990s. Non-violent/not-yet–violent extremist activities can be extremely dangerous — e.g. through the creation of networks — but might not count as recidivism. There is therefore a need to broaden the perspective on this topic and focus on **re-engagement** rather than only on terrorist offences.

- There are at least three dominant relevant profiles or target groups of prisoners:

  - o **Terrorists and violent extremist offenders** convicted for terrorism/violent extremism who might *recidivate;*

  - o **Terrorists and violent extremist offenders** convicted for terrorism/violent extremism who might not recidivate but might *re-engage* in extremist networks and activities;

  - o **Radicalised prisoners:** "ordinary criminals" who were either already radicalised when their detention period started or they radicalised in prison, and after release might *engage* in extremist and terrorist networks and activities.

  In the eye of the public, in the political debate and in the media, these are all prisoners who were in custody, were "flagged" as known extremists or terrorists, and have been released.

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([6]) These numbers were given by an expert present at the meeting based on the numbers of the Austrian probation service NEUSTART.
([7]) This number was given by experts who attended the meeting.
([8]) This overview for Europe is based on Basra and Neumann, Prisons and Terrorism: Extremist Offender Management in 10 European Countries.

# Recommendations

- **Conduct more research:** There is a strong need for collecting data about the recidivism in EU Member States and to analyse them. This would provide a picture of the phenomenon in the EU and help to better define the challenges to be addressed.

- **Collect and analyse qualitative data** regarding reoffenders: What are the specific profiles and psychological and biographical circumstances as well as social and functional surroundings? Did they participate in a rehabilitation and reintegration programme or not? There is a need for breaking down the different types and profiles of reoffenders for practitioners to design their work.

- **Build a framework for a common understanding:** Case studies have shown that there are a number of terrorist attackers who had been imprisoned before, but not for terrorist offences, such as Ibrahim and Khalid El Bakraoui, two of the Brussels 2016 attackers, who had previously been imprisoned for numerous crimes such as robberies. This calls for a wider definition of the target group that includes offenders who are recognised as radicalised **but who haven't been convicted** for terrorist offences. Moreover, non-violent/not-yet–violent extremist activities could go under the radar, but they can be extremely harmful. A discussion amongst practitioners and experts about the relation between "recidivism", "reoffending" and "re-engaging" should be interpreted and managed to better understand the risks of conducting violent extremist or terrorist activities after release.

- **Analyse the results of risk and needs assessments conducted before the reoffending behaviour:** Are there parts of risk and needs assessments that have failed? Was the reoffender ranked low- or high-risk? Is there a space for improvements on this?

- **Organise risk management through active personal case management**, don't overestimate an assessment with a risk assessment tool, but monitor *and* engage with the prisoners from the moment they enter prison.

- **Understand the drivers of reoffending:** Similar to processes of radicalisation, it is crucial to understand the push and pull factors of reoffending: What role does **ideology play**? Are individuals being re-radicalised, or have they just kept a low profile for a substantial period of time?

- **Use case studies:** Case studies of radicalised or terrorist reoffenders can provide insights for practitioners and create room for concrete and useful exchanges. Practitioners can discuss together where they see room for improvement or identify critical moments for intervention. The case study of Usman Khan, who killed two people and injured three during an attack in London in November 2019, showcases the variety of questions that arise when talking about reoffending. He was sentenced for terrorist offences in 2012, temporarily released in 2018 and took part in a prison-based education programme "Learning together". He was perceived as a good example of rehabilitation. The question that arises here is: Did he manage to fool people around him during his sentence of six years, or did he re-radicalise after his release? Having a close look at case studies can highlight these important questions and aspects.

- **Be transparent** about what intervention programmes can deliver. Due to the extremely high expectation of the public towards DDR programmes in the context of P/CVE, communication and transparency towards the public is key in order to create **realistic expectation management**. This will help to manage properly the pressure and the attention of the public and media when a case of recidivism happens.

# Relevant practices

Practices mentioned that could be relevant for the joint meeting:

1.  **MAPPA** (United Kingdom) stands for Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements and it is the process through which various agencies such as the police, the prison service and probation work together to protect the public by managing the risks posed by violent and sexual offenders living in the community. This aims at managing the crucial moments of the rehabilitation process such as the transition period just after the release of a radicalised or terrorist offender through communication, information sharing, and the agreement on supportive or restrictive measures.

2.  **The Belgian approach** is built around a shared database of persons subject to direct or discrete follow-up measures. To ensure proper follow-up and exchange of information, new local multi-agency structures have been set up such as a platform on the national level (National Task Force), different platforms on a regional level (Local Task Forces) and municipal councils (Local Integrated Security Councils). The database can be edited and consulted by law enforcement agencies (local and federal police forces — first-line practitioners as investigative units), intelligence agencies, prisons, et al. Every police district has appointed a police information officer who participates in the different platforms and is crucial to assist the local police to enforce the measures and support the mayor who is chairing the local council, in their efforts to identify socio-preventive measures towards those individuals.

# Follow-up

For the upcoming joint RAN Prisons, RAN Rehabilitation & RAN Police Meeting on 16 and 18 March, the following topics were proposed:

- The presentation and discussion of **case studies** in order to identify specificities in the reoffenders' profiles. One case that was mentioned was the Austrian attacker who carried out an attack in November 2020.

- To share **best practices** when it comes to sharing information and, more importantly, using this information in the rehabilitation and reintegration process of an individual, and in the follow-up after release.

- Focus on **specific countries:** Some countries have a higher number of radicalised and terrorist offenders.

# Further reading

For further information on this topic:

Europol's European Union Terrorist Situation and Trend Report 2020 gives a good overview of the number of radicalised and terrorist offenders throughout Europe and breaks it down into the different phenomena, convictions and length of sentences.

To understand the link between ordinary crimes and terrorism, Rajan Basra and Peter Neumann of the ICSR have published reports such as Drugs and Terrorism: The Overlaps in Europe and Crime as Jihad: Developments in the crime-terror nexus in Europe.

When thinking about how to categorise and analyse offenders' and reoffenders' profiles, the article Comparing the Different Behavioral Outcomes of Extremism: A Comparison of Violent and Non-Violent Extremists, Acting Alone or as Part of a Group, written by Sarah Knight, David Keatly and Katie Woodward, can serve as an example.