

STUDY VISIT

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CONCLUSION PAPER

RAN Study Visit to Paris

7 – 8 December 2021, Online

RAN Study Visit to Paris on 'Effective management of the prison-exit continuum'

Key outcomes

France is among the European Union (EU) Member States confronting challenges posed by a large number of violent and extremist terrorist offenders (VETOs) in custody. As of 2021, records showed 450 prisoners convicted for terrorist offences and 640 prisoners convicted for non-terrorist offences, as well as 670 former offenders released on bail or parole¹. There are also about 120 radicalised and terrorist offenders who were released between 2019 and 2021², while 130 will be released by 2024. With the management needs of the prison-exit process continuing to grow in importance for France, the prison administration has put in place a policy to fight radicalisation. The policy is structured along three axes: detecting, evaluation and preventing. The study visit to Paris provided participants the chance to learn about France's policy in detail and engage in discussions with both the prison officials and the practitioners who engage with radicalised and terrorist offenders on a daily basis. The main points that emerged over the course of the study visit are listed below.

- **Evaluation and risk assessment in prison are conducted in a holistic manner** by different professionals, to gain understanding of the individual's needs, resources and vulnerabilities. Based on this assessment, not only the risk is determined, but also the nature of the follow-up support needed.
- This holistic approach to both evaluation and care management is provided by **a multi-disciplinary team**, consisting of prison officers, psychologists, educators and cultural and religious mediators, including external consultants.
- **Religious and intercultural mediation** play a central role in the prison and probation's deradicalisation approach, as well as within the PAIRS resocialisation programme.
- **Building trust and creating authenticity in the relationship with the inmates** is a key aspect in deradicalisation work but presents a major challenge. Risk assessment tools are helping professionals in the evaluation process, but a significant part of the work is related to creating trust between the inmate and the intervention team.

¹ Numbers provided by the French Ministry of Justice.

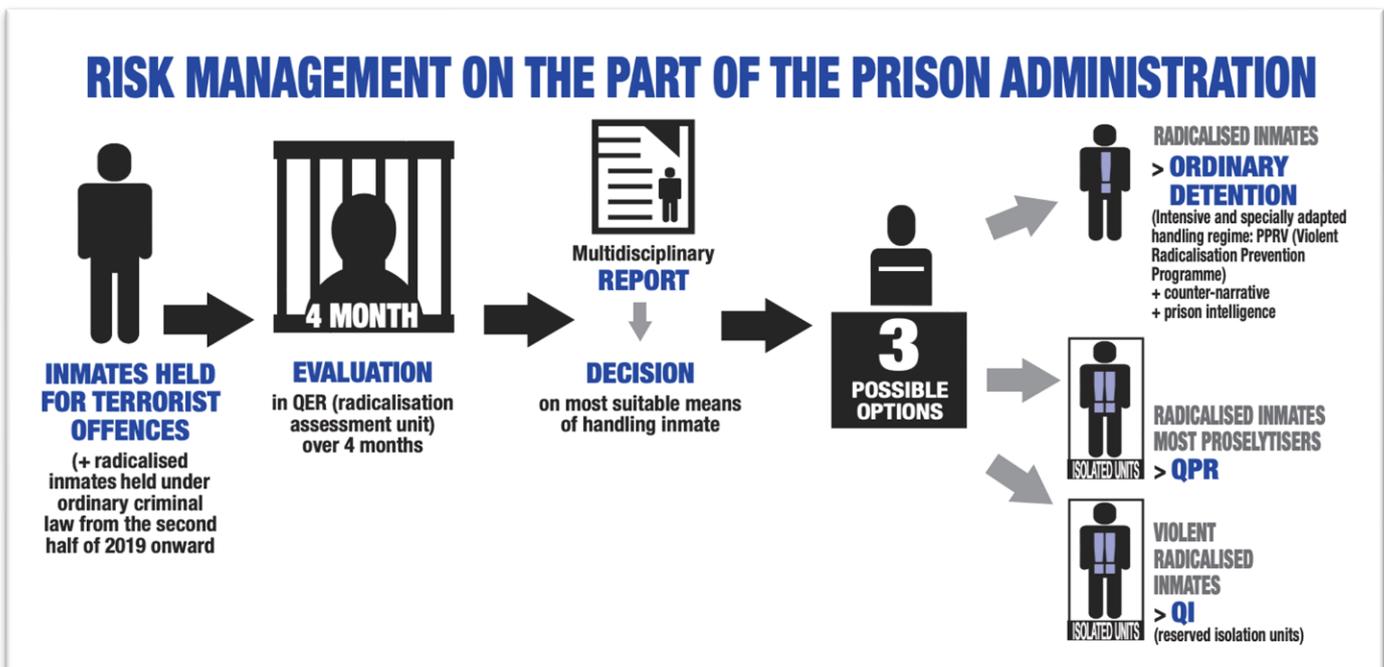
² RAN Conclusion paper: Radicalised and Terrorist Reoffenders, 2021 and Fatima Lahnait, [Combating radicalisation in France: from experimentation to professionalisation](#). 2021

- **Civil society organisations** providing deradicalisation support outside prison, particularly after release (such as the PAIRS programme), are considered partners and **a complementary service** to the prison and probation efforts, working towards the same goal.
- **Gender-sensitive approaches are necessary** when extending the existing offer to detained women, acknowledging their specific needs. Addressing the role of parenthood for both mothers and fathers in custody is crucial.

This paper summarises the main insights gained about the French policy on effectively managing the prison-exit continuum. It presents the approach in detail, highlighting inspiring practice as well as gaps and challenges that emerged during discussions. Finally, recommendations and further reading are presented.

Highlights of the discussion

In 2019, the French prison administration started a new radicalisation risk management process aimed at inmates held for terrorist offences. Since mid-2019, this also includes radicalised inmates held under ordinary criminal law. Inmates held under ordinary criminal law are referred to the evaluation process by the prison intelligence unit. The entire process is depicted in the graphic below.



Source: Interministerial Committee for the Prevention of Crime and Radicalisation Media Kit 2019, p. 19. Note: since publication of the Media Kit in 2019, terminology has changed. Detainees located in QPR are referred to by the prison administration as 'detainees ideologically convinced but accessible to care', while detainees located in QI are referred to as 'detainees presenting a high risk of proselytising or taking violent action'.

Managing radicalised inmates in custody

- Over the past three years, six radicalisation assessment units (QER)³ have been established across France. One unit exclusively for women is planned to open in early 2022.

³ Quartiers d'évaluation de la radicalisation

- Multidisciplinary teams consisting of prison and probation officers, psychologists and educators, as well as cultural and religious mediators, are tasked with evaluating radicalised inmates and VETOs. The multidisciplinary teams meet in regular intervals to discuss specific cases.
- Before engaging with the target group, prison and probation staff receive a 2-month intensive training, tailored to their professional profile. The prison and probation administration has created new staff positions and engages consultants with specialised P/CVE expertise (e.g., in religious or intercultural mediation, psychologists and educators) to support evaluations and subsequent VETO management and treatment measures.
- The evaluation takes place over a period of four months and is conducted via a clinical structured dialogue approach, and risk assessment tools developed by the prison administration. The process looks into many different aspects of the detainee's situation, in order to assess the level of ideological impregnation, the risks of proselytism and violent acts, and to identify risk and protection factors. These include their life course (primary socialisation, education, work history), the role of religion and knowledge transmission in their past (influencers, literature, school of thought, etc.), their current social network and relation to others as well as the extent and nature of the radical ideological belief held.
- On the grounds of the multi-disciplinary assessment indicating their respective danger level, the prison administration decides about the placement of the detainee in either ordinary detention, which means they will remain in contact with other prisoners, or placement in either a specialised unit for radicalised offenders' disengagement – the radicalisation care unit (QPR)⁴ - or solitary confinement (QI)⁵.
- The assessment by the multidisciplinary team in the QERs is complemented by prison intelligence units (SNRP)⁶, which since 2015 have been tasked with gathering information in prisons for use by national security bodies. Both units are distinct within the prison administration but collaboration takes place.
- In ordinary detention, VETOs and radicalised inmates benefit from enhanced management and participate in the Violent Radicalisation Prevention Programme (PPRV)⁷.
- In the radicalisation care units (QPR), of which there are currently six across France, VETOs and radicalised inmates are placed for a period of six months and can be renewed if the prison administration deems it necessary. There they have the opportunity to participate in individual and collective activities of the PPRV programme. A **multi-disciplinary team of case workers** (from prison and probation services or specially hired consultants) including mediators, psychologists, social workers and educators intervene to support the distancing and disengagement process and prepare the inmates for social reintegration and release. Multi-disciplinary commissions gather twice a month for case-by-case discussions and progress assessment.
- Reception of offers in the QPRs is mixed. While some inmates want to participate, they sometimes indicate that they cannot show this in front of their peers. Long sentences present a challenge for disengagement and reintegration efforts pursued in custody. With VETOs receiving sentences of up to a lifetime in prison, reintegration prospects are simply too far off in the future to engage inmates in existing programmes.
- In recent years, there has been growing awareness about the fact that woman who travelled to formerly Daesh-affiliated territories committed a variety of offences, similar to their male counterparts. A third of the 72 women currently in custody in France took part in attempted attacks. Engaging with these women presents specific issues in the prison context⁸. Many grew up in dysfunctional families and/or had violence perpetrated against them by men, including sexual violence. These factors, as well as their experiences in Syria and Iraq, including having been one of multiple wives and losing their husbands, are sources of trauma.
- To date, the current radicalisation risk management process is exclusively aimed at preventing and countering Islamist extremism. However, violent right-wing extremism too has become an increasingly larger issue of concern in past years in France.

⁴ *Quartier de prise en charge de la radicalisation*

⁵ *Quartiers d'isolement*

⁶ *Service national du renseignement pénitentiaire*

⁷ *Programme de prévention de la radicalisation violente*

⁸ A French study on the specificities of working with detained women in the prison context is currently underway, grounded in a series of interviews. Publication is scheduled for the first half of 2022.

Facilitating and monitoring reintegration after release

- Preparing radicalised offenders and VETOs for their reintegration into society starts six months before release. Multi-agency teams of case workers from the probation service, mediators and others continue to support the rehabilitation measures after release, ensuring continuity, e.g., through home visits. Based on the risk assessment/evaluation synthesis prepared in prison, the focus is also on analysing the environment of the individual, their employment reintegration and their social contacts.
- The measures stipulated for an inmates' release on probation are determined by judges. Jurisdiction over this time period lies with both the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of the Interior. Post-release measures include governmental programmes partnering with organisations specialised in social and medico-social support and interventions.
- The civil society programme PAIRS (Individualised Support and Social Reaffiliation Program) was launched in 2018 to support the disengagement and reintegration of VETOs in open environment and replaced its predecessor RIVE (2016-2018). PAIRS is implemented by two organisations, Groupe SOS and the NGO Artemis. If a judicial decision has been taken for a released VETO or radicalised inmate to enter PAIRS, participation is a precondition of probation and therefore obligatory. Support is terminated if a new crime is committed or if the individual fails to participate or does not respect the practitioners, schedules etc..
- At PAIRS, released VETOS and radicalised offenders on probation receive individualised and needs-based socio-professional support, lasting between 1 and 1.5 years. The main pillars of the programme include religious mediation, psychological support and social stabilisation support (such as employment). A large network of affiliated partners in different domains allows for fine-tuned support of individual needs.
- A need was highlighted during the meeting to work on the issue of parenting and parenthood with both men and women participating in the programme. Factors linked to clients' self-perception as parents can be linked to shame and represent a good starting point for conversation.
- Monthly meetings with the probation officer and quarterly reports by the PAIRS staff represent the qualitative assessment of the measure for every participant.
- Information flow between the prison administration and PAIRS was mentioned as an issue, as most prison information is confidential. At the same time, PAIRS indicated that some of their colleagues prefer not to be biased by an information overload about their participants, while others prefer to tailor their approach from the outset.
- On a similar note, it was mentioned that currently, ideological recruiters are somewhat more flexible than practitioners working for the prison administration when it comes to staying in contact with former inmates who are moving between different French prefectures. To some extent, this current gap is being filled by some of the external consultants, who are more flexible when it comes to keeping contact with former inmates across jurisdictions. However, this is not a long-term solution.

Role of ideology and religion

- The religious and intercultural mediation approach plays an important role in both the prison and probation deradicalisation programme and the PAIRS programme. During the meeting mediators working both inside and outside prison described the focus of their work and their key challenges.
- Religious and cultural mediators intervene in many ways (including during evaluation in prison and probation, training of staff, input to multi-agency panels and others), but a core aspect is to support inmates in their efforts to distance themselves from polarised narratives and religious views linked to violence. This is undertaken through an approach rooted in human and social sciences, fostering critical thinking, media and historical literacy and reflection. To do so, mediators engage inmates in group or individual critical debates on history, conflicts and geopolitics in order to rationalise thinking. Alternative literature, interpretations and non-polarised ideas are then introduced and discussed.
- It is important to first establish a common benchmark between the mediator and the client by determining fundamental values both agree on. Mediators work towards raising awareness of the holistic nature of the Quran and the importance of context such as history and prophetic traditions, basing their arguments on

theological concepts. They also aim to expose ideological fallacies and contradictions. It is key to establish a mental checkpoint of self-honesty with the individual and to encourage them to read and review religious texts in their complexity, beyond self-serving interest.

- Other approaches rely on exposing the individual to how much they don't know, while providing space for self-reflection. The aim is to encourage the client to make a difference between memory and history, and/or to highlight how the latter is instrumentalised in fundamentalist ideologies.
- Mediators also work towards identifying what the ideology offers to the individual, what attracted them to it – including factors such as supremacy, status promise, dignity, purity, salvation, material profits, a binary and simplified worldview or other. Inmates' perception of their sentence is also important. Do they consider it as injustice, do they feel remorse or are they aware of the gravity of their actions? Another factor when considering ideological indoctrination is their date of departure to the formerly Daesh-controlled territories. For example, did they leave before or after the Paris attacks?
- The level of active or passive deception and concealment of the extent to which the ideological belief is held (*Taqīya*) is also examined. One approach is to test the limits of the individual's comfort zones and flexibility in thinking about issues they feel strongly about.
- Experts on conspiracy theories also work with inmates to enable them to make their own choices and form opinions, with the goal of having them become agents of their own lives. This work also entails inserting doubt and awareness of complexity, as well as promoting empathy. It also involves working on influence mechanisms on four levels: political and media speech, the internet and social networks, prejudice and stereotypes and their own perceptions.

Recommendations

For prison administration

- Including CSOs in deradicalisation and rehabilitation efforts along the prison-exit continuum can offer additional opportunities and flexibility to respond to the individual's specific needs.
- Improving the sharing of information between professionals working in prison and probation and exit workers after release is key for continuity and coherence along the prison-exit continuum. This cooperation should be based on mutual respect for each partners' respective mandates. Creating situations where other perspectives are included can help build trust.
- More collaboration is needed between territories, professions and institutions in order to observe an individual's deradicalisation and rehabilitation in the long-term and across changes they make to their geographical and social surroundings.
- Participants from other Member States stressed the following recommendations when reflecting on the French experience and the challenges they face in their respective contexts.
 - Prison and probation administrations should ensure that new recruits are motivated and understand the importance of exit work and their role from the outset, as well as the beneficial role of CSOs in this field. P/CVE training of all staff needs to be practical and based on actual cases and experiences.
 - Existing gaps in information and knowledge flow between different professionals working along the prison-exit continuum (e.g., correctional officers, probation, social workers, exit workers from the CSO sector) need to be addressed.
 - In contexts where prevention and rehabilitation programmes for VETOs in prison and probation are still nascent or lacking, it is important to use existing resources and build preparedness and awareness for P/CVE work, even if VETO cases are small.

For practitioners

- When it comes to the actual work of disengagement and rehabilitation, it might help to consider that radicalised individuals' worldviews are often hanging by a thread and that the challenge is identifying that thread in order to be able to offer tailor-made solutions.
- On a similar note, ideology is very closely knit with ego. Therefore, humiliating inmates or released former offenders will very likely backfire. The goal should be dialogue, not confrontation.

Relevant practices

1. PAIRS (Programme d'Accompagnement Individualisé et de Réaffiliation Sociale) provides individualised support to people convicted or suspected of terrorist offences or who have become radicalised during their detention. <https://www.groupe-sos.org/solidarites/justice/>
2. The Nelson Mandela Rules are a free e-learning course provided by the UNODC [https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Leaflet - Nelson Mandela Rules online course.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Leaflet_-_Nelson_Mandela_Rules_online_course.pdf)

Follow up

The meeting identified a gap in terms of applying existing programmes along the prison-exit continuum to radicalised women and female VETOs. A follow-up meeting could be organised to investigate how these programmes may be adjusted to fit the specific needs of women. Secondly, parenthood was identified as a crucial aspect of engaging with participants of resocialisation programmes. This could also be a useful aspect to further explore during upcoming meetings.

Further reading

Interministerial Committee for the Prevention of Crime and Radicalisation (2019). The State, territorial authorities, and society: a chain of protection against radicalisation. Appraisal plus key facts and figures. See: <https://www.cipdr.gouv.fr/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/2019-04-11-CIPDR-ANG-V2-2.pdfbat.pdf>

Marc Hecker, "Once a Jihadist, Always a Jihadist? A Deradicalization Program Seen from the Inside", Focus stratégique, No. 102 bis, Ifri, February 2021. See: https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/hecker_once_a_djihadist_always_a_djihadist_2021.pdf

Scheer, D. H. & Chantraine, G. (2021). Intelligence and radicalization in French prisons: Sociological analysis bottom-up. *Security Dialogue*. Lille. See: <https://lilloa.univ-lille.fr/handle/20.500.12210/55768>

RAN Cross-cutting Thematic Event Conclusion Paper [Released violent extremist or terrorist offenders – Continuity between prison, probation and reintegration](#) (2021)