

# DGAP REPORT

InFoEx Workshop, Berlin, May 28-29, 2020

## Issue Paper: Preventing Recidivism of Islamist Extremists

by Sofia Koller  
with contributions by  
Prof. Andrew Silke,  
Marion Lempp, and  
Kurt Möller

NEEDS RISK ASSESSMENT NETWORK  
STABILIZATION RELEASE  
PRISON  
NEEDS  
RELEASE REENGAGEMENT  
RETURNEES PRISON RECIDIVISM  
NETWORK EXT  
RECIDIVISM NETWORK PREVENTION  
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EXTREMISM RETURNEES  
RELEASE PRISON RECID  
SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT REENGAGEMENT

## ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL FORUM FOR EXPERT EXCHANGE ON COUNTERING ISLAMIST EXTREMISM (INFOEX)

InFoEx is a joint project of the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) and the Research Center for Migration, Integration and Asylum of the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF). InFoEx brings together good practices and scientific findings from tertiary prevention of Islamist extremism in Germany and abroad. The aim of the project is to compile empirical findings on radicalization and deradicalization processes with a focus on their practical applicability for deradicalization work. To this end, the BAMF Research Centre initiated a network of research fellows who are embedded at local advice centers and research institutions, partnering with the BAMF Advice Centre on Radicalisation. Together with counselors working in these local advice centers, these research fellows represent the core members of InFoEx.

## ABOUT THE WORKSHOP ON MAY 28-29, 2020

Due to the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the workshop was organized virtually. Among the more than 30 participants were network partners of the BAMF Advice Centre on Radicalisation from civil society and government institutions as well as practitioners and academics from Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Sweden. To align the workshop with the needs of its stakeholders, research fellows embedded at local advice centers and at research institutions in Germany shared – in agreement with practitioners at their local advice centers – specific information needs and questions prior to the workshop. External experts were invited accordingly. At the workshop, the participants were able to share their experiences and views of the challenges of preventing recidivism as well as examples of good practices.

## CONTACT

Sofia Koller, Project Leader InFoEx, Email: [koller@dgap.org](mailto:koller@dgap.org)

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# Executive Summary

Several deadly attacks in Europe over the past years were carried out by terrorist offenders who had only recently been released from prison and who had been in contact with deradicalization and disengagement programs. For any country faced with the threat of Islamist extremism and terrorism, these incidents raise the question of how to prevent or at least significantly reduce the risk of recidivism of terrorist offenders. Actors involved in prevention work therefore need to have a closer look at the effectiveness and sustainability of deradicalization and disengagement efforts.

Against this background, the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) in cooperation with the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees (BAMF) organized an international virtual workshop in May 2020 on how to prevent recidivism of former violent Islamist extremists. This workshop took place as part of the International Forum for Expert Exchange on Countering Islamist Extremism (InFoEx), offering the BAMF's governmental and civil society network partners a platform to discuss challenges and good practices with several external experts. Among the topics addressed was preventing recidivism in prison and after release, dealing with potential de-deradicalization efforts by extremist actors, addressing psycho-social and other aspects of recidivism as well as counteracting recidivism in the context of returning foreign fighters from Syria and Iraq. Based on the discussions at the workshop, the following key recommendations have been formulated for practitioners, researchers, and governmental actors working on the prevention of recidivism:

# Key Recommendations

- 1** Governmental and civil society practitioners should use the time that terrorist offenders spend in penitentiary institutions to establish contact with potential clients and identify their individual needs and challenges.
  - 2** Practitioners should work on a transition management program for inmates from the first day they spend in prison. This includes establishing close-knit support networks to address needs and challenges after release.
  - 3** Practitioners need to be aware of current online and offline trends, such as the existence of Salafist “hot spots” in the local community. They should also have an open discussion with their clients about the re-recruitments efforts that (former) inmates are likely to face.
  - 4** Especially researchers should examine more closely why some individuals re-offend and reengage while others do not. The objective is to avoid unnecessary restrictive measures and inform evidence-based policy.
  - 5** All actors, including also prison administration and security agencies, should clearly communicate what can realistically be achieved through tertiary prevention of violent extremism in- and outside the prison context.
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# Introduction

The murderous attacks in the German city of Dresden and in a Paris suburb in October 2020 as well as the shooting in Vienna in November 2020 painfully reminded the European public of the threat that Islamist extremism and terrorism continue to pose in Europe. Especially worrying is the fact that two of these attacks were apparently carried out by recently released terrorist offenders. In both cases, the alleged attackers had been in contact with deradicalization programs. This raises the question of how to prevent or reduce recidivism and potential violence. It also forces (beside other relevant institutions) actors involved in prevention work to have a closer look at the effectiveness and sustainability of their deradicalization and disengagement efforts. Many of the challenges that European countries face – for example in managing the transition period after release – are similar. Yet differences in the social, political, and legal context can also make it necessary to find a unique response, as for example regarding possible Salafi-Jihadist ‘hot spots.’

Practitioners, governmental officials, and researchers benefit from discussing the challenges and from identifying good practices for preventing recidivism that may be useful in their specific context. This issue paper presents the results of expert discussions during the sixth InFoEx workshop in May 2020, which focused on recidivism. The ongoing restrictions imposed because of COVID-19 made it necessary to organize the workshop in a digital format. More than 30 international practitioners, researchers, and governmental officials working on tertiary prevention of Islamist extremism<sup>1</sup> from Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Sweden met online to discuss their experiences.

After outlining the insights provided by current research, this paper describes the challenges and good practices that were discussed during the workshop: prevention of recidivism in prison and after release, de-deradicalization efforts by extremist actors, psycho-social and other aspects of recidivism, and special considerations relevant to returnees from Syria and Iraq.

In a narrow sense, recidivism mostly refers to the re-arrest, re-incarceration, or re-conviction of a former convict for another terrorist or non-terrorist related offense.<sup>2</sup> However, a strategy for preventing recidivism also has to include dealing with individuals who reengage with extremist structures and narratives without being convicted a second time (Renard 2020). Civil society actors working in tertiary prevention do not focus exclusively on preventing criminal behavior and reducing security risks. Rather, their main objective is “to ensure individual capacity to act and enable social integration, in order to guarantee chances to model and expand your own life” (Möller et al 2019, p.18). Hence, efforts to prevent recidivism must also address the issue of making tertiary prevention work more sustainable.

<sup>1</sup> In the context of InFoEx, tertiary prevention of (violent) Islamist extremism is understood to mean all measures designed to support (violent) extremists in prison and in society in their efforts to leave their milieus, deradicalize, decriminalize, and reintegrate into society.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Hodwitz (2019) in his analysis of the recidivism rates of terrorist convicts in the United States finds that nine out of 561 inmates re-offended in prison or after release. However, their violations included forgery, illegal purchase of food stamps, or drug possession, leading Hodwitz to the conclusion that restrictive measures to monitor released terrorist inmates were not justified.

### Research on Terrorist Recidivism and its Implications for Policy and Practice

by Prof Andrew Silke, Cranfield University, United Kingdom

Over the past eighteen months, released terrorist prisoners have allegedly committed several serious attacks, including notably two separate knife attacks in London and a gun assault in Vienna. Such cases have understandably flagged former prisoners as a significant potential threat in future violent scenarios. They have also fueled grave concerns over the effectiveness of the rehabilitation interventions used for terrorist offenders and the ability of prison and probation systems to assess and manage the risk posed by these individuals.

Despite such attacks, research suggests that progress has been made in this area. According to recent reviews, there are 16 studies or government reports which report recidivism statistics for terrorist offenders, covering a wide range of countries across North America, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Collectively, they find that the average recidivism rate for released terrorist prisoners is 9 percent, with a median rate of 5.5 percent. These figures are much lower than the rates typically seen for non-terrorist offenders.

It is worth noting that in some cases the recidivism figures include details on both terrorism and non-terrorism related re-offending. Based on this, it appears that in approximately half of the cases of recidivism, the re-offending concerns “ordinary” criminal activity and is not politically or religiously motivated.

While the recidivism rates for released terrorists are unexpectedly low, critically, they are not zero. A small minority of released terrorist prisoners do commit further – and sometimes lethal – offences. As a consequence, serious attention is still needed on the interventions we use for prisoner rehabilitation as well as on risk assessment tools and frameworks. Encouragingly, early research suggests that most of the current prison interventions aimed at terrorist prisoners have at least some positive impact. The success rate is not a hundred percent, though it is worth noting that there is no intervention for any prisoner population which enjoys a hundred percent effectiveness rate.

The risk assessment frameworks used for terrorist prisoners inevitably also come in for criticism in the aftermath of an attack by a released prisoner. The past decade has seen significant developments in this area, and modern risk assessment tools such as ERG22+ and VERA2R are clearly much more suitable for terrorist prisoners than earlier generic models.

That said, serious challenges remain, and two important questions in particular need more attention. First, we do not currently have enough information on what distinguishes the recidivists from the rest of the released terrorists. How exactly do they differ in terms of background characteristics and risk profiles? Second, while there is some positive initial evidence, much deeper evaluations are needed on the impact of prison and probation interventions. In order to understand what works, we need to invest in expanding the evidence base.

As recidivism rates are relatively low but still existent, and with respect to the enormous repercussions that any incident can have, the following chapters aim to provide insights into existing challenges and good practices developed by experts working on detecting and preventing recidivism and reengagement.

## PREVENTING RECIDIVISM IN PRISON

To prevent recidivism in prisons, one researcher at the In-FoEx workshop argued that it was crucial to differentiate between different categories of prisoners and adapt measures accordingly. There are those convicted for carrying out terrorist attacks; those convicted for helping attackers, who may not have been radicalized as much as the attackers; those convicted for non-terrorism related crimes who have been radicalized, possibly even in prison; and finally, those whom the prison staff considers vulnerable to radicalization. Another researcher pointed out that there continues to be a lack of research and statistical data on recidivism. In his opinion, research should focus on how terrorist offenders are different from the general prison population and which factors can explain their lower rate of recidivism.

Not all of Germany's federal states have a sizeable prison population of terrorist offenders. But several practitioners said that even where they did, staff in some cases lacked basic knowledge of Islam and Islamism and could not deal with related issues. This was relevant because the prison staff often was the first point of contact for terrorist offenders, even in facilities that had exit programs with experienced staff. One practitioner, who carries out trainings, described a particular penitentiary facility where only two out of 70 staff members said they had some basic knowledge of Islam. Yet the situation was improving. In a growing number of German federal states, the structures were considered adequate.

Finally, while the actual connection between recidivism and spiritual welfare is not clear, several German experts reported mixed experiences with Muslim spiritual welfare in prison in Germany. One practitioner explained what the main difficulty with getting appropriate support by spiritual welfare or imams for inmates is: In Germany, most imams worked at mosque associations, which cooperate with the state ministries to be able to provide spiritual work in prison. But penitentiary institutions were often situated outside of the towns, visits there were voluntary, and welfare workers only received a low expense allowance if they do go. Many imams, the experts said, therefore preferred to stay with the members of their mosque community. In addition, many imams did not speak German well and thus needed a translator. Those imams who did speak German were often not associated with a mosque and would in some cases be excluded from cooperating with ministries and prison facilities. A government official added that it was difficult to find Muslim institutions that were both suffi-

ciently respected by the Muslim community and willing to establish a trust-based relationship with government agencies. In his opinion, it was a mistake to depict Muslim spiritual work mainly in terms of prevention of extremism. This was likely to deepen the mistrust of all involved actors, including inmates.

The following good practices were shared to address these challenges:

- **Separate terrorist offenders from other inmates (“containment”).**<sup>3</sup> This good practice was reported from the Netherlands, where numerous staff members work with this group of offenders, which made it easier to build relationships between staff and prisoner. Housing terrorist offenders separately also made it easier to gather information on their profiles and personalities and enabled the staff to separate leaders from followers. Another objective was to analyze the prisoner's position “within the Jihadist system” and identify which Imam and ideology had influenced him or her. This was considered especially important for female prisoners who had returned from Syria and Iraq. In those cases, the prison staff would also try to find whether their husbands were still alive. If the husband had been killed, the focus would be on gaging the influence exerted by the prisoner's family and friends. This knowledge could then be used to decide how best to help the prisoner leave the Jihadist system.
- **Be aware of mental health issues.** One Dutch practitioner argued that while terrorist offenders suffered less from psychopathology and trauma than was sometimes assumed, prison staff needed to know about specific mental health issues such as schizophrenia to be able to provide adequate support.
- **Help inmates develop action plans.** In Germany, a government funded program helps terrorist offenders to develop “action plans” with the support of exit counselors. These plans followed a holistic approach which includes reintegration. To this end, they defined specific goals, for instance for working on a conflict in the family, securing a job, or continuing one's education. Ideally, clients achieved all or at least some goals before release. Counselors supported this process for instance by doing role-play exercises for job interviews or family situations. The same counselor then accompanied the client after his or her release from prison and continued to evaluate the situation. If, for example, a client had learned to cope with encountering a former group member in a public place, it would not be as urgent to remove him or her from a potentially toxic environment.

<sup>3</sup> For a recent overview of extremist offender management in different European countries, see Basra & Neumann 2020.



• One concrete tool for helping terrorist offenders is based on the concept of KISSeS<sup>4</sup> (see box). While evaluating a counseling center in Bavaria, a group of researchers from the University of Esslingen translated the concept into a tool for social diagnostics and support planning. While its effectiveness has not yet been scientifically evaluated, this approach, according to first experiences, seems to be well suited to working with clients during detention and during the transition afterwards to prevent recidivism.

#### KISSeS as a Guideline for Social Diagnostics and Support Planning

Kurt Müller, Marion Lempp, University of Esslingen, Germany

Dealing with offenders who justify their crimes with a particular interpretation of Islam and who have an undemocratic or anti-democratic attitude requires specialized professional expertise. To achieve sustainable results in prevention and deradicalization work, experts must be able to customize their offers and interventions in accordance with social diagnostics. The focus here is on understanding the context of a person's life and the interpretation he or she gives to that context. Such an approach can be theoretically and empirically substantiated by the KISSeS concept (e.g., Möller et al 2016; 2019).

The German acronym KISSeS stands for six legitimate needs for shaping one's life: 1. to largely be in control over the conditions in which one lives, which makes for a tangible experience of self-efficacy; 2. to feel integrated into a group and a society (experiencing feelings of belonging, recognition, and participation as well as possibilities for identification); 3. to experience sensuality that can subjectively be appraised in a positive manner; 4. to be able to ascribe a sense to one's own life and to the issues one considers relevant; and 5. thereby to create experience-structuring representations as internal images of one's experience of oneself and the world; and 6. to be able to develop self-management skills and social skills through this complex of experiences.

A person who does not believe that he or she can satisfy these needs via socially accepted modes is more likely to turn toward un- and anti-democratic promises of fulfilment. Social diagnostics should therefore identify individually perceived KISSeS deficits. At the same time, it should detect personal and (infra)structural resources that allow forms of satisfaction which preserve equality and are compatible with democratic values. This makes it possible to offer functional equivalents (Böhnisch 2018) to replace the person's earlier attempts to draw on Islamism to satisfy KISSeS needs. Support can then be planned to address the root causes.

The KISSeS concept is also used as a theoretical basis in a number of other social and educational contexts, for example in the evaluation of youth work services (Lempp et al 2017) and in democratic education (Erfahrungsräume 2021).

- **Provide access to spiritual welfare and imams who speak your inmates' language and are familiar with their life situation.** One practitioner said imams familiar with the German language and with life in Germany made for positive experiences but were still the exception. Those imams either worked with a mosque cooperating with the government or had a good reputation working as independents. In this context, workshop participants pointed to the Institute for Islamic Theology in Osnabrück. Imams who had studied there were able to provide good support. A good practice from the southwest of Germany concerned the so-called "religion companions" (*Religionsbegleiter*) who, in contrast to spiritual welfare, did not have the right to refuse to give evidence.
- **Provide penitentiary staff with specific training and coaching,** for example on intercultural competence and reducing prejudices on both sides. Participants said that as external actors, prevention workers also considered it their goal to build bridges between their clients and the prison staff. To do this effectively, it would be helpful if penitentiary staff could integrate prevention workers more closely into processes at the prisons, for example concerning the release date.

<sup>4</sup> KISSeS is an abbreviation of the German terms Kontrolle, Integration, Sinnlichkeit, Sinn, erfahrungsstrukturierende Repräsentationen und Selbst- und Sozialkompetenzen which stand for the six legitimate needs for shaping one's life.



## PREVENTING RECIDIVISM AFTER RELEASE

The time just after a prisoner's release was considered the most delicate phase – a critical moment for preventing recidivism. This is confirmed by recent research that Renard (2020) did on recidivism rates among terrorist convicts in Belgium since 1990. He found that the first months after release pose the most acute risk for recidivism. Once inmates leave the structural routine of prison, daily life can suddenly seem very difficult to cope with. Several German practitioners confirmed that one of the biggest challenges for exit work with recently released inmates was to manage the transition between the prison environment and the 'outside.' In one of the German federal states, one single institution was responsible for the entire process, making transition management easier. There, the main challenge was to obtain enough information about Salafist "hot spots." Elsewhere, according to government actors, a frequent issue was the lack of a legal framework for sharing information between practitioners working inside the penitentiary system and those responsible for prevention work outside. Other counselors confirmed that it could be challenging to obtain continued access to the client after release.

In another contribution, one German practitioner described the specific challenges of working with refugees, asylum seekers, or displaced people: In some cases, he said, these clients did not have an adequate social network to turn to after release. Also, they were facing more restrictions – like having to obtain a residence permit – which were likely to complicate reintegration and stabilization. When clients knew that they would be deported after being released from prison, they had no perspective for integration into society, making any counseling very difficult.

Finally, one practitioner shared an insight into the importance of perceptions: Any assessment of a person as holding radicalized convictions and posing a security risk would only ever be changed reluctantly. Yet clients experienced the results of such a risk assessment partly as stigmatizing and hindering reintegration.

The following good practices for preventing recidivism after release were shared:

- **Establish contact with the inmate during his or her time in prison.** While in some countries, participation in deradicalization programs is mandatory, others insist on voluntary participation. In the latter case, inmates should be encouraged to participate in deradicalization programs. A German practitioner of prevention work argued that while the prison setting makes it possible to establish con-

tact and build trust, the client's actual development becomes clear only after release.

- **Be conscious of the release date and establish effective transition management.** German practitioners stressed the importance of preparing from very early on for a smooth transition between daily life in prison and after release. Other participants said that while every case poses individual challenges and calls for individualized measures, transition management should be based on a general, institutional framework and a network bringing together the relevant contact persons. To ensure continuity, a single actor should be responsible for dealing with offenders inside and outside the penitentiary system. This actor should be informed of the inmate's release date early on. He or she should then prepare for the release by establishing a network with locally integrated actors and by developing a help plan. In this context, one Danish practitioner stressed the importance of building trust: In the decades that the Danish crime prevention network (SSP) existed, it was able to create good relationships and habits of information exchange. German participants added that it was important to have clear rules for the exchange of sensitive information between agencies.

- **Help stabilize the client after release and support his or her efforts to set up a new social network.** This should include helping the client gain access to employment and, for example, sports. If possible, families should be involved when preparing for release. Positive experiences were shared from one state in Germany where several local Muslim communities had set up prevention projects to help released inmates stay away from their original environment. One Danish expert shared his experience that "the ones with positive family relations waiting for them and who have been willing to work with the programs in prison are the most likely to succeed. Those who become more religious or radicalized in prison are more likely to return to their former environments." A Swedish practitioner also argued that the most important part was to help released inmates build a new network, since their default behavior would be to return to their former social environment.

- **Provide access to mentors.** Participants explained that Denmark had achieved positive results with mentoring courses which aim to prevent re-entry into the extremist scene. Such courses often started in prison and continued with the same mentor after release. Mentors were helping their clients through individual capacity building, for example for getting access to housing, a job, medical assistance, and/or therapy. In prison, these tasks were coordinated by probation services and after release by the so-called Infohouse, which works in close coordination with police across the twelve Danish police districts. When an inmate was released, the prison informed the local police who in turn informed the head of the local Infohouse. The Infohouse representa-

tive and the local police then invited the released person to a meeting, either at the person's home, the police department, or at another location. The objective was to establish a positive dialogue, offer support to the former convict, and get a full picture of the case. This process could take three or four meetings. However, the workshop participants acknowledged that such close cooperation could be perceived as "too friendly." Different kinds of support could be offered to address specific needs of the client. Depending on the level of concern, an individualized exit program could also be offered.

- **Follow a multi-agency approach.** In the UK, actors from psychology, security services, social services, etc. worked together to prevent re-offending, as one expert explained. Prison officers monitor who inmates are in contact with, pass this information to the security services, and collaborate with them in the run-up to an inmate's release. After release, prisoners faced many restrictions on what they can do, where they can go, and who they may have contact with. However, the expert stressed that given the many different measures, it was difficult to determine which ones actually work and which do not.

- **Establish an effective liaison with security services.** In one of the recent attacks in London, police could respond quickly because intelligence was shared, one expert said. The attacker had been released with an ankle bracelet and was monitored around the clock. Another good practice from the UK concerned the MAPPA (multi-agency public protection arrangement), where police and the National Probation Service act jointly "to make arrangements for assessing and managing risks posed by sexual or violent offenders, and other persons who may cause serious harm to the public," for example by sharing appropriate information (UK Home Office 2005, p.2). In England and Wales, terrorist offenders are also monitored under MAPPA arrangements, involving monitoring and specific restrictions on personal contact, internet access, phones, etc. According to the expert, evaluations show MAPPA having a positive impact on recidivism. However, they cannot provide an explanation as to why recidivism is much lower among terrorism offenders than in the general prison population.

- **Be aware of which information is helpful and which may hamper the counseling process.** A German practitioner argued that it was important to understand the relevance of information and to decide whether it will help the counseling process or not.

- **Be informed of trends and "hot spots,"** such as Salafist mosques or private apartments. A German practitioner re-

ported that every inmate he had talked to knew of a specific mosque in the region – not as a place of worship but as a place of support former prisoners could turn to. As most clients were overwhelmed when they were released, they were tempted to turn to known places of support. Counselors should stay in close contact with clients after their release and be readily available to them to obviate the need to seek out extremist actors.

- **Establish relationships of trust by personalizing counter narratives and activities.** For example, in "biographic work," some German practitioners choose activities according to their client's personality. For some, this could mean going to a café or bar, while others would do better with outside activities. Making the right choice helped counselor and client engage in conversation and establish trust. The client was given the opportunity to share personal experiences, even if this could take months or even years. Biographic work was not so much about asking questions, but the actual exit work could only begin once the client had opened up. Other German practitioners added that in their talks with clients, they had come to understand that most of them did not personally experience discrimination but felt that there was collective discrimination of the Ummah (the Islamic community). In a prison setting, inmates could further experience stigmatization, discrimination, and isolation, all of which were considered risk factors for de-deradicalization. Therefore, providing the right environment for establishing a relationship of trust was considered crucial. In addition, practitioners said they wanted clients to feel that their counselor was authentic, interested in them as individuals, and not just trying to deradicalize them.<sup>5</sup>

- **Be available – especially during the first weeks and months.** Immediately after release, former inmates often face difficulties adapting to the 'outside world.' One practitioner said that a client had called in the middle of the night because he had been stopped by police and felt overwhelmed by this relatively normal event. In most cases, clients became more independent over time. Nevertheless, practitioners warned of clients developing dependencies and advised counselors to draw a line between their professional and personal contacts.

- **Stay informed about online trends.** Practitioners stressed the importance of staying informed of developments on social media and current online trends. Inmates should be encouraged to develop competences such as critical thinking when engaging with online content.

<sup>5</sup> In Germany, the Responsibility Pedagogy® Approach was mentioned as a tried and tested approach to prevention work that the Violence Prevention Network (VPN) in Germany uses on right-wing extremism in penitentiary institutions. For more information, see inter alia VPN 2021.

## DE-DERADICALIZATION EFFORTS BY EXTREMIST ACTORS

Extremist actors can attempt to influence the (former) inmate's process of deradicalization negatively, even though such efforts do not seem to be common. A practitioner from Denmark explained that he could not discern any specific pattern for re-recruitment by former associates. However, extremists from the inmates' former social environment would often reach out to former group members. They were likely to make a particular effort to try and re-radicalize persons who had built a new and non-extremist identity in prison. Practitioners from Sweden and southern Germany reported similar experiences. Practitioners from other German federal states said that female inmates would often receive letters from male Salafists writing about marriage prospects and from "sisters" sending words of encouragement. Inmates also received messages via Telegram or other messaging apps which were at least implicitly about (re)recruitment. This approach was not unlike "love-bombing." When people started engaging with a group, they would get a lot of attention including by letter, message, and call. Practitioners argued that especially people who feel lonely and isolated find it difficult to resist this form of attention and affection.

In prison, inmates could also face pressure from groups of extremist inmates to join. Prison staff and exit counselors had to decide if and how to keep inmates who are in the process of distancing themselves from extremist ideology away from their former associates.

Practitioners also pointed to other factors that can play in favor of de-deradicalization: Both within and outside of prison, former extremists struggled with the process of rebuilding a new social identity and restarting their lives. They could find it difficult to gain access to housing, employment, or education. Released convicts might also face stigmatization from moderate Muslim communities reluctant to take in former offenders. When former extremists were unable or unwilling to face conflict structures, they could become so isolated that they would be tempted to return to their former extremist support systems. Especially online offers could be highly attractive. In this context, practitioners believe that psychological factors and vulnerabilities need to be considered, for example when extremist actors target people with mental illnesses like Asperger's syndrome. Finally, some former extremists might only pretend to disengage but at the same time slip back into their former circles.

Given that former extremists will probably be confronted with re-recruitment efforts from extremist actors at some point, exit counselors shared the following good practices:

- **If necessary, take clients out of their environment.** In a prison context, this could mean moving them to another cell, tract, or even penitentiary institution. Outside prison, counselors could help clients to keep their distance from their former social environment and from Salafist hot spots.
- **Monitor the client's development and provide support before others do.** If a client actively participated in a de-radicalization program, counselors could monitor his or her development and share information within a multi-agency setting. This could mean for example involving the local imam or asking child support services for help. As mentioned in the previous chapter, released inmates may be tempted to turn to Salafist hotspots, which offer not only support but also social contacts to people with similar interests, for example in football. Some mosques follow this personalized approach. Exit counselors in Germany try to mirror this in their biographic work.
- **Tell your clients openly that extremists will be approaching them for re-recruitment.** Exit counselors should develop strategies with the client to deal with these situations and the emotions involved. One effective approach was to use role playing to address different possible scenarios.
- **Provide police protection for former extremists, if necessary.** According to one participant, Sweden has a successful policy of countering de-deradicalization or re-recruitment efforts by right-wing extremists by offering police protection where needed. Similar measures could be used to protect former Islamist extremists from their former associates.
- **Follow a holistic approach and establish a broad network to address as many challenges and needs as possible.** For example, involve the client's family and social institutions in his or her community because they can help stabilize the individual and counter feelings of isolation, loneliness, and fear after release.
- **Create real life situations that encourage flexibility of perceptions.** This includes offering new experiences to clients, for example by providing positive encounters with government structures to demonstrate how the government can provide support.
- **Provide long-term support to the client.** It was stressed that disengagement was a lengthy process. Hence, civil society and governmental partners must work together to develop long term strategies and support, for example online.

## PSYCHO-SOCIAL AND OTHER ASPECTS OF RECIDIVISM

Beyond the general difficulties of preventing recidivism, some specific challenges arise for terrorist offenders. Practitioners reported for instance that some individuals believe that God had given them a mission and that failing at carrying out an attack and going to prison was part of their pre-destined path. Obviously, such beliefs can contribute to recidivism.

One expert also stressed that every third or fourth inmate had a psychological anomaly and should be provided with relevant counselling. Prevention workers, according to one practitioner, generally do not have the expertise or mandate to diagnose mental health issues. Clients therefore needed regular access to psychologists or other experts. In some cases, offenders could also be victims of physical or psychological violence. Psychologists must then work on several dimensions of trauma.

Another issue was not having enough time to work with a client to identify misleading behavior, for example with clients who only pretend to be disengaging. Also, the predictive quality of risk assessment tools and the focus on risk rather than on needs and potentials was considered problematic by some participants. In addition, one participant objected to having the same person treat a client's disorder and carry out a risk assessment of that person.

The following good practices were shared to address these and other challenges:

- **Establish an effective transition management and have a close-knit support system of the involved institutions.** This was considered helpful to provide appropriate support as well as develop a common understanding about psychological treatment.
- **Provide stabilization in several areas.** Experiences from dealing both with right wing and Islamist extremists showed that stabilization can be achieved if the client can have an experience of being in control of his or her own life (in a democratic setting), receives help to rethink meanings and values, develops a sense of belonging, and enjoys stable social relationships.
- **If needed, discuss the inmate's 'God-given mission' to find out what needs it covers.** In addition, practitioners shared that with certain detainees, discussing their feelings of disillusionment or failure because they did not fulfill their "mission", such as carrying out an attack, was a good starting point.

## THE CASE OF RETURNEES FROM SYRIA AND IRAQ

Many challenges and good practices that were mentioned in the previous chapters likely also apply to individuals who joined the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq (IS) and have now returned to their home countries. But in comparison to other clients, returnees might have endured different (traumatic) experiences during their time abroad with a terrorist organization. In addition, the public attention for returnees made reintegration into society more difficult.

Malet and Hayes (2020) found that if returned foreign fighters were planning an attack, they would usually do so within six months of arriving back in their home countries. The authors argue that security and reintegration measures should focus on this critical period after return to considerably reduce the risk of recidivism or an attack. Renard (2020) argued that the fear of a possible recidivism of returnees may be bigger than the actual probability of radicalization. Based on experiences with returnees so far, the following good practices were shared:

- **Establish a framework for effective communication** between the different actors involved in dealing with the reintegration of returnees.
- **Find ways to establish contact with potential clients.** While a stay in prison has been described as a good opportunity to establish contact, not all returnees receive prison sentences. Pragmatic alternatives need to be found to engage with those potential clients.
- **Provide early and sensitive communication about returnee cases.** A crucial element of successful reintegration – and therefore the prevention of recidivism – concerned the attitude of the returnee's immediate social environment as well as of society in general. Early and sensitive communication about returnee cases was considered crucial. In addition, it was important to help stabilize the returnee's family situation as quickly as possible.
- **Take possible trauma into account,** especially for children. This was also considered a long-term challenge.

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- **Develop capacity of the governmental agencies involved.** Agencies such as social welfare and youth welfare offices, penal institutions, and probationary services as well as those working in psycho-social care already play an important role in the reintegration of returnees. To further develop their understanding of radicalization and prevention of extremism, it was considered helpful to strengthen their capacity to deal with relevant cases and enable effective cooperation with relevant actors. This was considered crucial to preventing reengagement and recidivism of returnees.

## CONCLUSION

Deadly attacks perpetrated by terrorist offenders released from prison – such as the alleged attackers in Dresden in October and in Vienna in November 2020 – prove, inter alia, the importance of prevention work. But as gruesome as these incidents are, they are an exception. So far, research indicates that most terrorist offenders do not commit further attacks. But while recidivism rates are relatively low, additional research is needed to explore the differences between those who re-offend and/or reengage with extremist networks and narratives and those who do not. Such findings are not only important for making decisions about sentencing, setting conditions after release, and defining the role of permanent structures (such as probationary services). They can also improve the overall understanding of what tertiary prevention of violent extremism can realistically achieve in- and outside of the prison context. The challenges and good practices highlighted in this issue paper show how important it is for counselors to use the time that offenders spend in prison to establish contact and identify their needs and challenges. At the same time, prevention workers need to work toward an effective transition management from the outset, ensuring that a close-knit support network is in place on the day of release. Prevention workers also need to be aware of local extremist hotspots and online trends. Finally, prevention work would benefit from sustainable structures provided by governmental actors – for example probation – and civil society actors that can provide long term support for released offenders and other former extremists.



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