

THE WORK WITH VIOLENT EXTREMIST OFFENDERS

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Returning to Extremism:

An Overview on
Terrorist Re-Offending
and Current Challenges

OUTLINE

- I. What recidivism data tells us
- II. New trends and challenges
- III. Practitioners experiences: cases of concern
- IV. Specific issues

I. WHAT TERRORIST RECIDIVISM DATA TELL US

- **Terminology:**
- **recidivism** (re-arrest or reconviction) or **reengagement** (returning to an extremist lifestyle)
- **Terrorist recidivism rate** (Renard, 2020; Silke & Morrison, 2020)



Terrorist recidivism:

0-10%

Regular criminal

recidivism: 40-60%

Gangs recidivism:

60-85%

Reengagement rates: 4.5-16%

- Conclusion of leading researchers: **”prison works”**
- Most released terrorist offenders disengage from violent extremism.

II. HOWEVER: NEW CHALLENGES AND TRENDS

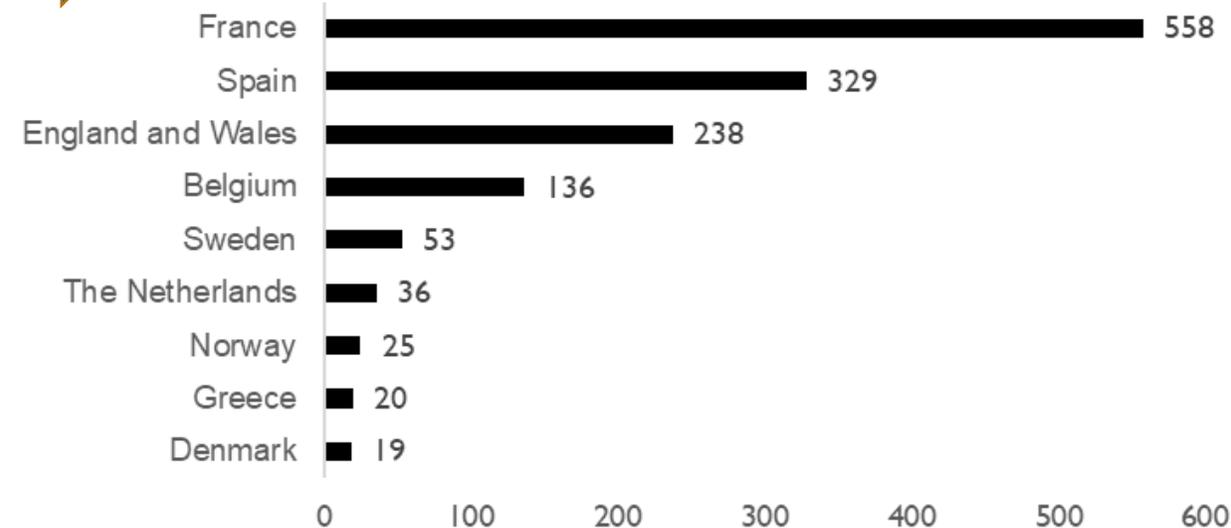
(BASRA & NEUMAN, 2020)

- **I. Rapid rise** in the number of terrorist inmates

- a) Currently ~1500 inmates convicted for terrorist offences in Western European prisons
- b) Additional ~1500-2500 'regular' prisoners are monitored for **suspicion or vulnerability to radicalization in prison**

To be released in the coming 2-5 years

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



Germany: combined estimated a)+b): 292 prisoners

II. HOWEVER: NEW CHALLENGES AND TRENDS CONT.

(BASRA & NEUMAN, 2020)

- **2. Diversification** in ideology, background, age, gender

Main trends: an increase in:

- home-grown right wing extremist offenders
- returning foreign terrorist fighters
- female violent Islamist offenders

3. Wider range of prison sentences

- Many relatively short term (e.g., for attempted travel to Syria)
- Not enough time for deradicalisation

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS CURRENT CHALLENGES

High case volumes:

- A **systemic addressing** of rehabilitation and reintegration questions as opposed to case by case management and **proactive adaptation** of processes

New trends and challenges:

- **Sharing knowledge** and inspiring practices between Member States
- **Proactivity** for countries who do not have a high case volume: Sometimes MS need to build capacities very quickly (e.g., Austria)

Learning from past mistakes:

- Practitioner workshops: **analysing re-offense cases**



III. PRACTITIONERS EXPERIENCES

I. Attempted travel to join ISIS is of concern:

A common characteristics in multiple re-offense case:

- attempted travel to Syria or Iraq
- short sentence (1-2 years)
- Collapse of the 'Caliphate': "strong sense of failure for not being able to fulfil their mission in Syria or Iraq. Some of them wanted to rectify their failure and decided to carry out attacks in Western Europe." (Dutch prison psychologist's observation on Dutch re-offense cases)
- Kujtim Fejzullai's reoffense case in Austria

2. Prisoners who will be **stripped of their citizenship** and required to leave the country after detention: are of concern

III. PRACTITIONERS EXPERIENCES CONT.

3. Underlying mental health issues and conditions:

Undetected mental health issues and conditions severely undermine reintegration efforts.

Multiple practitioners' observations:

- People with Asperger or autism spectrum disorder are more susceptible to (online) radicalisation
- Post-traumatic stress needs to be treated
- Alcohol and substance abuse
- Personal crisis needs attention

4. Stigmatisation

- Real or perceived stigmatisation by prisoners fuel hatred and further radicalisation
- It is important that all actors undertake every measure that offenders are not stigmatised, harassed or discriminated based on religious, ethnic backgrounds or gender.
- Staff working with terrorist offenders treat prisoners with respect and dignity: modelling behaviour

III. PRACTITIONERS EXPERIENCES CONT.

5. Social influences:

German practitioner's observation: radical Islamists reach out to people in prison and offer help and a place to stay after release. Most prisoners have nowhere to go, so they accept the offer.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRISON REHABILITATION

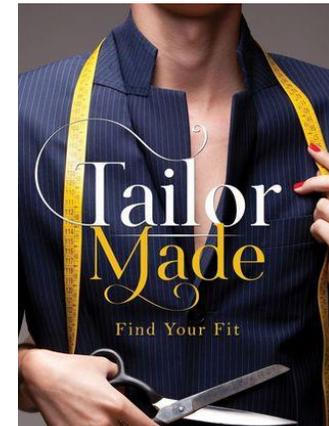
I. Shift from risk assessment to →

risk and **needs** assessment and **management**

- Identify and threat factors that could hinder readjustment to society
- Create individualized, **taylor-made multidisciplinary R&R plan** and provide access to a wide range of support

Assessing and providing for:

- **Mental health needs** (trauma, addiction, underlying conditions)
- **Cognitive needs:** assessing and supporting deradicalisation (e.g., faith-based counselling, enhancing critical thinking, CBT interventions)
- **Social reintegration needs:** identifying positive social networks and help (re-)building connections (involve family members, local communities, local religious leaders, etc.)
- **Functional reintegration needs:** provide job training in prison, create release plan: housing, facilitation of employment, etc.



SPECIFIC ISSUES

- I. Challenges of false compliance
- II. Use of assessment tools
- III. Challenges of information sharing and interagency collaboration
- IV. Challenges of transition management and probation

I. CHALLENGES OF FALSE COMPLIANCE

Questions of offenders' false compliance arouse in cases in France, UK, Austria

French prison officers' observations:

- Signs of radicalisation in prison have become more subtle
- Non-compliant prisoners now tend to keep a low profile
- Try to “use their time wisely” while in prison: learning psychology to become a better recruiter, study Islamic history to become a better ideologue, or learn how authorities operate.
- Complex question regarding **religious behaviour**: there is no simple answer (some prisoners re-discover their faith in prison as a positive outcome)



RECOMMENDATIONS TO MANAGE RISKS OF FALSE COMPLIANCE

(BASRA AND NEUMANN, 2020)

Starting point: It is very difficult for most offenders to sustain a lie for a long period of time.

- **1. Surveilling to find discrepancies** between what an inmate tells to prison staff and to their fellow inmates.
- **2. Using multiple** counsellors and psychologists to make **assessments**
- **3. Having an extended period** of evaluation in a **variety of contexts.**



2. USE OF RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS

Different agencies use different risk assessment tools

- Specifically designed for the extremist offender population (e.g., VERA-2R)
- Not enough data
- lengthy
- possibility to trick
- trained staff
- realistic expectations



RECOMMENDATIONS: USE OF ASSESSMENT TOOLS

1. Use as **ONE** of multiple sources of assessment
2. Staff has to be **well-trained**
3. **Cannot replace** regular information assessment by sources who have **ongoing personal relationship** with the offender (prison staff)
 - Instead of too much reliance on **tools and technology** →
 - Strengthening the **dynamic security approach**

3. CHALLENGES OF INFORMATION SHARING AND INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

Many of the successful re-offence cases involve

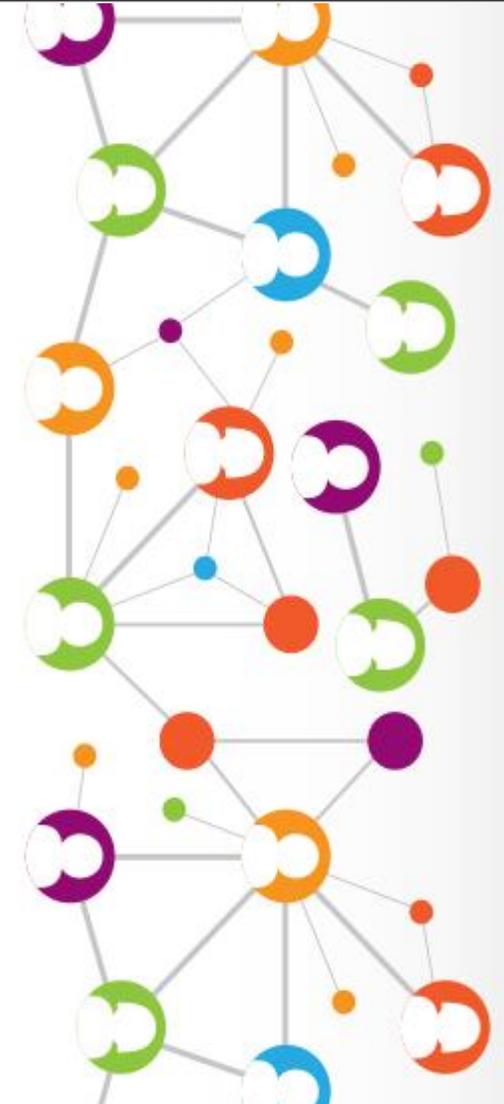
- insufficient information sharing amongst agencies and/or
- insufficient assessment of the security information and
- lack of safeguards

Example:

- Kujtim Fejzulai killed 2 and injured 23 people in a series of attacks in Vienna in 2020
- He spent 1 year in prison for attempted travel to Syria
- 1 year after his release he attempted to buy ammunition in Slovakia while he was on probation
- The Slovakian authorities notified the Austrian authorities

RECOMMENDATIONS ON INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

1. Establish **clear roles and responsibilities** between agencies
2. Establish **regular and clear channels** of information flow and routines
3. **Case manager** oversees all information and has the authority to take action, if necessary
4. Move from periodic meetings to **active, proactive case management**



INSPIRING PRACTICES: INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

1. **MAPPA (UK):** Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements
2. **Info-house: Aarhus model (Denmark)**
3. **Returnee coordinators (Germany):** model project “Coordination for returning FTFs and families from Syria and Iraq launched by the German Federal Office for Migration and Refugees

INSPIRING PRACTICES: INFORMATION SHARING

- **CeEx (Extremism Cell) (Belgium):**

CeEx 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 ‘CeEx regime’) of these inmates.” It has become one of the cornerstones of the Belgian approach to radicalisation in prison.

TRANSITION MANAGEMENT

- From a reoffending perspective the **first year after release** (9-12 months) is crucial
- **For sustainable results:**
 - Multi-stakeholder collaboration
 - Trust-building
 - Information transfer



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRANSITION AND RELEASE MANAGEMENT

- **1. MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION:**
- **2. TRUST-BUILDING:**
- importance of human relations, it takes time, early involvement of all stake-holders
- **3. INVOLVEMENT OF CSOs** as independent actors:
 - Easier to **build trust** as an independent, non-governmental entity / and finding a good match for the inmate
 - Sometimes they are the only actors that provide **continuity** (from prison to probation)
 - Specialized expertise in P/CVE
 - **24/7 availability and provide practical assistance** as well (transport from prison, accommodation, etc.) **CRUCIAL**
 - Well-connected to the receiving community (work with family or community)

INSPIRING PRACTICE: **SOCIAL NET CONFERENCING** (NEUSTART, AUSTRIA) IN RELEASE PLANNING

- **NEUSTART** is a non-profit organisation, set up as an association, funded by the Austrian Ministry of Justice in Austria. NEUSTART provides probation services in Austria. In addition, NEUSTART offers social work services in the fields of electronic home detention, victim-offender mediation, after-care services and community services. Since 2014, NEUSTART has also offered **social net conferences**, and therefore this method is also financed by the Ministry of Justice.
- **Social net conferencing** offers offenders in prison the chance to develop a mandatory plan for their future after their release. Offenders work together with their social network (or net) to create this plan, which is then sent to the judge, who issues orders according to the plan, at the trial. The probation officer supervises compliance with the orders, and therefore also implementation of the plan.
- The method benefits radicalised individuals by **helping them develop a strategy or plan** covering daily life, work, housing and so on, alongside their social network and associated professionals.

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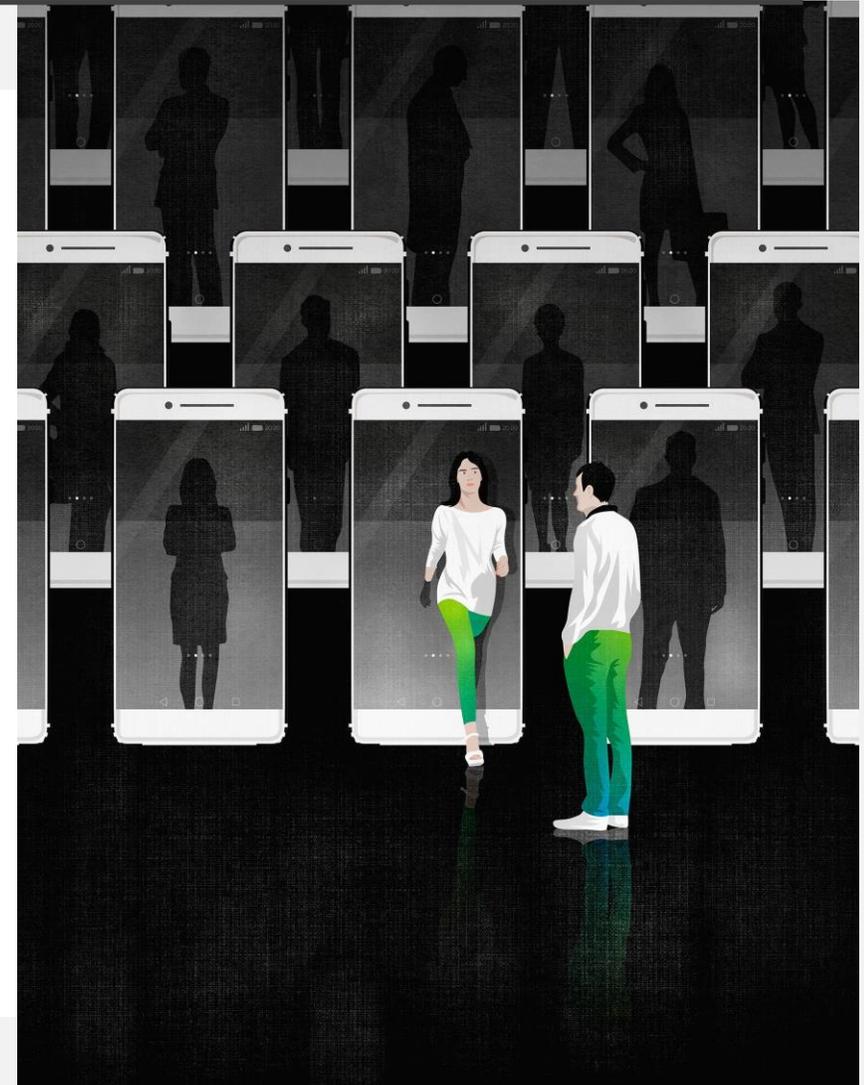
- The Social Net Conferencing
- Family/Community based solutions
- Client creates their own plan
- Client makes important decisions for themselves
- Shared responsibility
- Empowerment of client and family
- Strengthening of family bonds

Overall experiences:

- Variety of resources and motivation
- People participating who have a positive influence is vital
- The more people of the extended family and network the better the plans
- Binding and realistic plans
- Extended social control through family and friends
- New perspectives on family and client resources

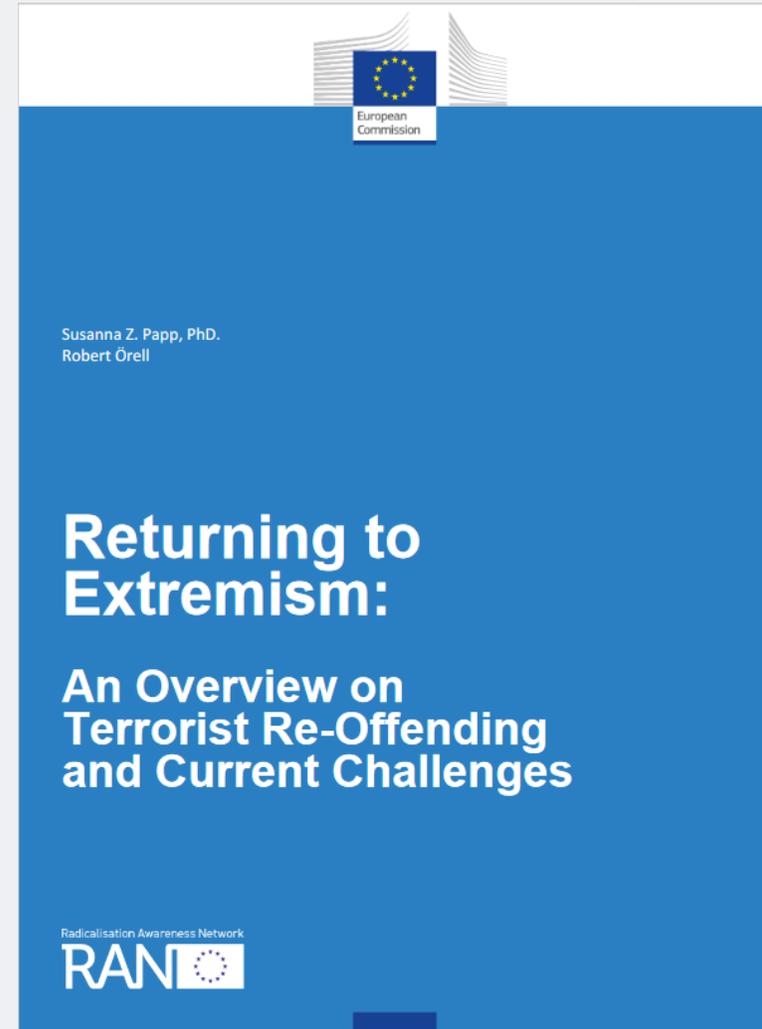
FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Too much reliance on tools and technology in monitoring
- Probation is about human relations
- In Prison Dynamic security



RECOMMENDED READING

RAN Consolidated Overview Paper on Terrorist Reengagement



THANK YOU!

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