

Additional Guidance on Aftercare and Reintegration Programmes for Violent Extremist Offenders

Note: This document aims to provide additional guidance to Members States in their efforts to develop rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for violent extremist offenders and to address violent extremism in prison settings. It summarizes the conclusions/findings of an expert workshop convened by UNCCT, UNICRI and the Government of Turkey in Istanbul, on 19-20 May 2014.

Holistic Approach

- Reintegration and aftercare programmes for violent extremists should form part of a more comprehensive approach to preventing crime and countering violent extremism.
- Reintegration requires a holistic and multidisciplinary approach, with strong coordination of the different stakeholders involved. Governments should engage a broad range of actors, including civil society organizations, the private sector, NGOs, families and communities.
- Reintegration programmes must take account of their cultural context and even if the majority of principles identified as good practices may be transferable, they should be tailored to specific national conditions and traditions.

General features of reintegration and aftercare programmes

- Reintegration and aftercare programmes are most effective where the penitentiary and criminal justice system are well ordered and respect human rights. Reintegration programmes should start at the point of detention, and the whole period of detention should reinforce their aims.

- Member States should have an effective classification system to identify different categories of violent extremist inmates (leaders and ideologues; middle-level; followers), as they require different interventions and approaches in preparation for reintegration.
- The reintegration programmes should aim to change the cognitive, behavioural and attitudinal characteristics of the inmate. To this end, critical thinking and problem solving skills are effective tools in resisting the propaganda of possible recruiters. Religious counselling is also of value, both for the inmate and for the family. Strengthening education and employment opportunities through basic courses and vocational training is also of fundamental importance.
- Governments should make particular effort to help ex-offenders to find jobs. This will often be difficult for them to do on their own, but will be an important step towards successful and long term social and economic reintegration. Governments should seek public/private partnerships in this context.
- During the aftercare period psychological and religious counselling should continue, as well as employment assistance and support to the family (including financial support if necessary).
- Counselling or other assistance should form part of a more general programme to monitor and evaluate changes in the attitude, behaviour and environment of the ex-offender.
- Full consideration should be given to the security requirements of all those involved in delivering the reintegration and aftercare programme.

Replacing the individual needs

- Very often violent extremist offenders, when they leave a full time and continuous engagement in the movement, need to focus on “something else”. The results are more positive when individuals are busy in the centre, involved in education courses and vocational training, religious and psychological sessions, sports activities, ceremonies, etc.
- Re-integration programmes should focus on reinforcing skills that ex-offenders already possess rather than solely try to impart new ones. Similarly, programmes should identify the motivation of ex-offenders to take up a new life and attempt to strengthen it.
- It is of crucial importance to show offenders an alternative perspective as well as to address their lack of reference to positive influences. Generally in the movement the individual is provided with a complete package of means to satisfy his/her needs (from clothes to attitudes, from music to behaviours). Programmes should foster a new sense of identity. They should identify the individual needs and replace them with alternatives. This will also require an understanding of the factors and conditions that led to the ex-offender becoming a violent extremist.

The role of governments

Governments are the main actors and – especially in the long term – have the responsibility to lead the rehabilitation and reintegration processes at the strategic level.

- Governments have the responsibility to ensure a proper legal framework to guide and regulate the design and implementation of reintegration and aftercare programmes, including the work and responsibilities of all stakeholders involved. Governments must ensure good governance and the protection of human rights, as well as an enabling environment to facilitate reintegration efforts, especially in the post-release period.
- Governments should identify existing practices and processes that may be adapted to deal with violent extremist offenders as well as consider new measures.
- The lead government agency in the reintegration programme should have a clear mandate and set objectives and the authority and resources necessary to achieve them. Its goals should be realistic and appropriate.
- Governments are responsible for designing and disseminating the main policies as well as for ensuring the correct application of the instruments foreseen. Reintegration programmes have to be planned with a vision and be well articulated in advance, taking into consideration both short and long-term objectives, the mechanism and instruments considered, and the responsibilities and duties of single actors. All these elements have to be defined and communicated clearly to all partners and stakeholder involved, including the public at large. In the design phase, it is important to ensure the availability of enough options and instruments to successfully address and respond to the needs arising from individual assessments.
- Programmes should be flexible enough to allow the reinforcement of their most successful features and the adjustment of those that are least effective.
- Governments should take the lead in framing the relationship with civil society organizations. It is suggested to have formal guidelines and protocols that regulate the relationship between NGO and governments. These agreements should be formalized in order to guarantee – mainly in countries with less developed political structures - the continuation of the programme also in case of changes in the government.
- Especially in conflict zones, before release Member States should carefully consider the issue of security for the released inmates and their families.
- Governments should also be responsible for encouraging and promoting research. There is particular need for additional research on the causes and on the process of individual

radicalization as well as on the role of prison environment in post-release violent extremism.

- Several programmes developed around the globe depend and rely on individuals their personal commitment and involvement. Programmes must be able to survive changes in government and the departure of single personalities. Programmes should be sustainable over a period of years.
- Governments should ensure effective monitoring and evaluation programmes that make clear what is to be measured and by whom.

The role of civil society and NGOs

- Governments alone will not be able to ensure a complete reintegration of individuals if society will not accept them. Aftercare is a domain where civil society actors can be extremely useful and they are crucial partners to engage with.
- Before starting to implement a programme, it is important to map the local context, the presence of NGOs, possible coordination issues and the need for partnerships and the effective exchange of information.
- Being part of a larger network of civil society actors can benefit both a NGO and the reintegration and aftercare programme as a whole, providing the beneficiary with different types of assistance in a coordinated manner. Cooperation should not be only between NGOs and governments, but also among NGOs.
- NGOs must be neutral and non judgmental in order to establish and maintain trust with ex-offenders, their families and communities.
- NGOs and civil society should also carry out independent research into reintegration and aftercare programmes

The role of families

- Families are vital partners in the reintegration and aftercare process and it is of critical importance to involve them from the very beginning of the programme, even before the release of the ex-offender.
- Families can also be privileged interlocutors between authorities, communities and beneficiaries and could play important monitoring functions after release. In the majority of cases, the family – after the release – will take the responsibility for getting the beneficiary back into mainstream society.

- At the same time families can be beneficiaries as well, and need support. Often the family's routine and dynamics have likely changed while the detainee was in prison, especially if the inmate was the only breadwinner. In these cases the family can become vulnerable and financial support may be needed. Families might also be intimidated by extremist movements and some protection measures should be planned.
- In some cases, the family can be part of the problem: family members can refuse to cooperate or hinder the programme's impact; they could support violent extremist movements and even transfer to them the financial aid received; the inmate may be seen as a hero or on the other hand be rejected, for instance through stigmatization and embarrassment. In these cases it is even more critical to involve and engage the family in the reintegration programme as early as possible.
- Among the different support programmes for families, religious counselling appears to be critical, in particular for women.

Tackling stigma and discrimination

- In order to create an enabling environment for reintegration and reduce stigmatization, educating society and public opinion is necessary to create social awareness and try to break barriers around ex offenders (prejudices).
- It is important to make a clear distinction between the act and the individual, stigmatising the action, but not the person.
- It is also best to use neutral terminology in describing the ex-offender and to separate –also with words – his/her past identity from his/her new one.
- Often inmates experience self stigmatization, and perceive themselves according to how they think they are viewed and treated by government and the other stakeholders who interact with them during the detention and post-release period.

The role of communities

- Successful partnerships between government and the community for the implementation of reintegration and aftercare programmes can lead to a better understanding between them across a range of other issues that may help to reduce the vulnerability of other members of the community to violent extremism.
- Government should seek to involve all sectors of the community in order to leverage all potential influences.

- In order to create an enabling environment for reintegration, it is important, where necessary, to change the cognitive, behavioural and socio-economic characteristics of the hosting community. In this framework community outreach (including talks, lectures and conferences) and social awareness activities can also be helpful.
- The community is often best placed to monitor the impact of the reintegration programme on the behaviour and attitudes of the individual.
- The roles of media and educational and religious institutions are critical, also on the preventive side.
- A significant issue is whether the community will trust the beneficiary and believe in his/her change. In this regard, the way government and society at large treat the beneficiary will have an influence on community attitudes. Also, in this context, formers may play a significant role.

The timing of reintegration efforts

- Rehabilitation process should start as soon as possible - ideally from the moment the inmate enters the prison. Reintegration needs to begin prior to release and to extend into the post-release period, merging into a carefully formulated and implemented aftercare regime.
- The first months after release are critical; during imprisonment, inmates often experience social and psychological conditions that pose further challenges for their reintegration. This is particular true for violent extremists who are following a rehabilitation process. Many of them, when leaving prison, lack basic support (including emotional, financial, or familial support) and are more vulnerable to the extremist groups – who could take the opportunity of this lack of support to fill the gap. In this stage, the design and implementation of individual plans are of critical importance.
- In some situations the rehabilitation efforts will continue for years after the release; they will need to include continuous monitoring activities as well as provision of assistance.

Building a relationship of trust

- Rehabilitation cannot be forced, it is a process that has to start from and inside the individual. To facilitate this process, aftercare specialists, social workers and counsellors need to build a relationship based on trust with inmates. This type of relationship is essential for being accepted by and then engaging with the beneficiary. The time needed to develop this kind of relationship will vary from person to person.

- The process of building a relationship based on trust starts in the detention phase, and it will be even more difficult to achieve it if in prison inmates are not treated with humanity and experience human rights violations. Aftercare programmes cannot be effective if they have to undo the negative effects of the prison experience.
- Also of key importance are the attitudes of social workers and aftercare specialists towards the inmate. It is critical to believe that people can change and “lost cases” do not exist. The effort of engaging the single beneficiary should continue on a constant basis, making clear that each individual counts.

Specialized training

- Governments should provide reintegration and aftercare specialists with specialized training related to their functions.

Role of other stakeholders

- The role of the private sector could be explored and enhanced. The security of private actors should also be addressed. Some may prefer that their involvement not be made public.
- In planning reintegration and aftercare programmes, governments should pay attention to both traditional and social media. They can have both positive and negative effect: for instance they could help to reduce stigmatization towards prisoners convicted on extremism related charges or, in reverse, to reinforce negative attitudes towards them; they could be used for counter narratives, but could also play a role in spreading propaganda.
- Particular complex is the opportunity to involve former extremists in reintegration programmes. While their voices could be used to educate the public and for developing counter narratives, their involvement in reintegration and aftercare programmes should be carefully evaluated. It should aim to reinforce the reintegration of the formers as well as those they are helping.
- In some cases, it may be better not to publicise the involvement of former extremists in order to protect them and their families.

Monitoring and Evaluation

- Programmes need to be continuously assessed and evaluated.
- Having an external, independent and knowledgeable evaluator is particular important.

- The acceptance of the programme by the beneficiary is a main indicator of potential reintegration.
- In some cases, monitoring may continue for an extended period after release and may involve religious and psychological counselling sessions for both the beneficiaries and their families. Regular reviews should decide if the monitoring needs extending or if the beneficiary is completely free. However the engagement and the assistance of the programme may continue until he/she can be independent.