

INSIGHT
NO. 2RISK ASSESSMENT, DISENGAGEMENT
AND REINTEGRATION PRACTICES AT
WORK

How are risk assessment tools, disengagement and reintegration methods used in practice? What are the lessons learned and what are the gaps? What about the training needs and the way ahead in optimising this work?

EUTEx partners have conducted **interviews with 47 practitioners** in prison, probation and NGOs working directly with terrorist and extremist offenders, in particular psychologists, social and exit workers, and similar. The interviews inquired into the practices used in disengagement, reintegration and risk assessment, as well as potential gaps in terms of new tools and training.

The specialised staff's approach in dealing with this category of inmates is to **build and add on existing expertise and methods**. Generally, terrorist and extremist offenders are not seen as a special type of inmate different to the regular ones. They are seen as displaying similar types of challenges and problems that ought to be solved, to which additional ones manifest as a consequence of their terrorist or extremist lives. Importantly, **knowledge about radicalised environments and radicalisation processes** is essential in order to adapt methods adequately. The staff further mentioned certain specificities for this group, such as **additional methods**, conducting (a certain type of) **risk assessment**, or **addressing particular aspects more intensively**. It is also estimated that such cases need a **longer and more intensive care and supervision**.

Disengagement and reintegration are technically separate concepts. In practice, however, **the methods used for the purposes of disengagement and reintegration overlap**. What is more, the output of one approach **can influence the other**. An example would be the focus on employment as a measure to foster reintegration; the same measure will potentially have an effect on disengagement, to the extent that it might conduce to the emerging of alternative social environments, and/or a meaningful occupation that can raise self-esteem and autonomy.

Underlying the approaches of rehabilitation and reintegration tends to be the **risk, needs and responsivity model**. In this context, practitioners identify areas of concern which are then worked on through various methods and an individualised approach.

While changing ideas might be difficult or even impossible in a short amount of time, the focus in prison and probation should be on **changing behaviour**, decrease aggression and committing to pro-social activities.

Important pillars of the rehabilitation and reintegration work in prison are **education, vocational training, and employment**.



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Practices **specific** for terrorist or extremist offenders are few in number, and they revolve around **mentorship** schemes and various approaches of working with the **ideology**. Some of the **general** practices mentioned in the interviews, and which appear to bear good results, are:

- **Working alliance**
- **Motivational interviewing**
- **Biographical work**
- **Cognitive-behavioural therapy**
- **Classic social work**

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In their concrete applications, these practices present a number of parallels across European countries, but also some specificities. To provide some examples, innovative methods such as schema therapy, holistic systems of working with the biography, reframing, and mirroring were mentioned. Some other methods focus on working with emotions, identifying the so-called 'lure moments' and environmental influencers, creating alternative life narratives outside ideological scripts, enhancing social skills, acting on personal and social deficits, working on cognitive distortions, or on family structures.

For interventions to work, it is important to first ensure individual stability and cater for **basic needs**. In this respect, classic social work is essential.

Establishing **rappport**, building a **relationship**, and building **trust** are crucial and something that the professional would primarily have to achieve. From the perspective of working to induce the understanding of and detachment from the criminal offence, challenges that practitioners need to work on include the nature of the offences, namely politically motivated and perceived double-standards between Islamist and other types of extremist activities.

While the necessity to conduct **risk assessment** has not been contested, the type of risk assessment, whether risk assessment tools are used or not, and which type of risk assessment tools are applied, varies from country to country. Apart from risk assessment tools designed specifically for extremist and terrorist offenders, practitioners also use other existing, in part actuarial tools, if deemed relevant. A perceived advantage of **structured professional judgement** tools is that they structure the biographical work and facilitate cooperation with others in the team. However, the use of current risk assessment tools alone is regarded as **insufficient for the purposes of the concrete rehabilitation and reintegration work**. Beyond risk assessment, **additional tools are needed to address aspects like needs, opportunities, and resources for rehabilitation and reintegration**. Risk assessment should be followed by the creation of an **individual plan** that should contain relevant interventions and programs, and which should be assumed by the inmate. Ideally, there ought to be continuity of the implementation of this plan after imprisonment.

In the context of **transition management**, the importance of information exchange and continuity of care is recognised throughout. It is not just about security considerations, but also about making sure that the individuals' needs are correctly identified during the inmates' stay in the correctional institution and that they will continue to be met after the prison period. A number of challenges are still present in this area, such as trust, timing, and continuity of tools and knowledge. There are several models and approaches to transition management, such as release conferences and local tables.

Generally, there appears to be a need for probation services to be engaged prior to release.

As part of transition management, **multi-agency cooperation** relates directly with the areas of intervention for social work e.g., finding an apartment or helping with the job search. Working relationships with the various institutions involved is crucial.

False compliance issues intervene especially in situations where there is a fairly routinised system of assessment. Practitioners use several psychological methods to identify and break the cycle of lies. Another aspect underlined is an approach to monitoring that is not immediately observable in the exchanges with inmates.



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**INSIGHT
NO. 2**

PREPARING THE FIELD FOR EUTEx – DESK RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

Several specific and general **training needs** were mentioned, not just regarding disengagement and reintegration practices, but also with regards to updated knowledge on extremist scenes, radicalisation, and disengagement. Specifically, practitioners argue in favour of a **tailored, systematic, and sequenced methodology** that allows to monitor progress over time and adapt interventions accordingly.

Gender aspects remain underdeveloped in disengagement and reintegration approaches. In the EU, female clients present specific and/or additional challenges, while approaches outside the EU usually avoid the criminalisation of female returnees. At the same time, approaches in consortium countries outside the EU display more elaborated reintegration programmes for returning **children**, which are focused on normalisation and non-discrimination.

The material collected as part of this activity, especially the detailed outlines of particular methods and approaches will be employed in conceptualising the EUTEx course with regard to radicalisation and deradicalisation, risk assessment, disengagement and reintegration.

EUTEx in a nutshell

What are the best practices that work in the disengagement and reintegration of terrorist and extremist offenders? How do they work and what are the challenges and gaps we are currently facing throughout Europe in this field?

The EUTEx project takes the hands-on, frontline approach that practices are understood as specific approaches and concrete methods below the level of initiatives, projects, and programmes. What does a psychologist in a Romanian prison or in an Austrian prison work on? What yields particularly good results in their experience? What new tools, training and knowledge are needed?

EUTEx focuses on specific professionals in prison and probation who work directly with terrorist and extremist inmates, principally psychologists, social and exit workers and similar. EUTEx develops for them a dedicated, specialized and in-depth course and training.

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