



PREPARING THE FIELD FOR EUTEX – DESK RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE

What do we know already about promising practices in the disengagement and reintegration of terrorist and extremist offenders, beyond the level of initiatives, projects and programs?

EUTEx partner, the Bremen Senate for Justice and Constitution, surveyed the field based on open-source data and found several types of specific approaches, as well as a number of concrete methods. They furthermore contextualised these findings within empirical, policy and technical developments in this field.

The main **approaches** currently in use in disengagement and reintegration work are as follows:

- the **classic social work** approach focusses on support in aspects related to daily and practical problems: housing, work, finances, relationships, social networking, the organisation of leisure time, and others. In its **socio-spatial** approach, the focus is especially on the social network and the community for the reintegration process;
- the **systemic** approach is focused not only on the client, but also their personal and social environment, the social field they live in, and how it needs to be re-structured. The work here is with the families, personal relationships, as well as professional relationships such as teachers for example;
- the **counselling** approach for **others** offers information and advice to family members and people close to the radicalised person;
- the **counselling** approach for **individuals** works on ideological aspects and offers counter- and alternative narratives;
- the **cognitive-behavioural** approach focuses on changing attitudes, cognitions, and values and thus a shift in their behaviour, and
- the **mentoring** approach is based on the presence of a mentor who participates in the reintegration process. Their relationship with the offender must be based on mutual trust. The mentor actively participates in drawing up a plan with the aim to facilitate reintegration and avoid recidivism.

Several methods are used both within these approaches as well as individually, namely: motivational interviewing; biography work or lifeworld approach; problem-solving; change talk; psychological or psychiatric therapy.

Deeper insights on these and other methods and approaches are to follow in our upcoming insight based on **in-depth interviews with over 30 specialised practitioners in prison and probation services** across Europe.



Disengagement and reintegration are two different concepts that can be located in space and time, with disengagement from the extremist or terrorist scene (before) vs. reintegrating back to society (after). Yet when talking about concrete methods, we note that they often overlap, can be the same for both, or a condition for each other; for example, when working on reintegration helps with disengagement.

While single initiatives addressing disengagement work with right-wing extremists already existed in some countries such as Norway or Sweden, the big boost to disengagement work in Europe came with the focus on Islamist extremism. Initially, much of the work involved counselling services, followed later by other secondary and tertiary prevention measures and increasingly also reintegration work. The latter was given particular attention due to the relatively large numbers of returnees from the Syrian conflict and considering the new situation of women and children returnees. In recent years, the rise in violent right-wing extremism has indicated the need to also advance disengagement and reintegration efforts beyond Islamist extremism in a more systematic manner.



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Who are the target group of disengagement and reintegration efforts in the case of terrorist and extremist offenders?

Legally, terrorist offences have been mostly applied in the context of jihadi terrorism, so the ‘terrorist’ population tends to be of this type. Within this category, a distinction can be made between returnees, (financial) supporters in the country, or indeed home-grown terrorists. The extent of the radicalisation process can vary greatly: from assassins to returnees from Syria, to radicalised, high-risk, vulnerable individuals and followers. While extremism per se is not a criminal offence, various violent and subversive acts with extremist motivations are punishable, and this category tends to be filled with right-wing extremist offenders. Finally, and especially in the first category, women have also been charged for membership in a terrorist organisations or war crimes.

Both **prison and probation have a crucial role in disengagement and reintegration efforts**. From a prison perspective, observing a number of principles can already pave the way towards success in these efforts; these are for instance:

- positive social contacts, establishing trust, relationships and contact building; these are also a basis for recognising early doubts, building up initial competences and showing alternatives;
- support in search for orientation;
- the availability of educational and entertainment offers;
- facilitating religious practices;
- good organisation of everyday life and a good social climate among inmates and between inmates and staff;
- transition management is crucial.

Three important **principles** guide disengagement and reintegration work:

First, **an individual, tailor-made approach**. There is a diverse target group, there are different situations in the different countries, very individual biographical paths, different social contexts or situations, individual case constellations, preconditions, and historical and cultural contingencies which render standardized procedures ineffective.

Second, the **multi-agency approach**. Several institutions usually work on a case: besides prison and probation, the intelligence services and police, social workers, schools and others are involved in the case. Inter-agency and inter-institutional cooperation require the observance of some basic rules in order to function and familiarity with the different logics of action, legal frameworks, procedures and tasks of the different institutions involved. The possibilities and boundaries of the individual institutions must be known, but also respected.

Third, the **involvement of civil society** in the process of preparation for release and integration back to society. This regards both specialised NGOs and civil society organisations more broadly, who can assist reintegration efforts. The advantage of such organisations is that they are not usually seen as ‘part of the system’.



If there is a trusting social environment, the prison itself can become a place for development and personal change.

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Disengagement and reintegration cannot be discussed nowadays without involving the component of **risk assessment**. Practitioners and researchers have considered four main approaches when carrying out individual (violence) risk assessments: unstructured clinical judgment, the actuarial method, structured professional judgement (SPJ), and a self-assessment questionnaire. SPJ is now recognised universally as good assessment practice and, what is more, it has been considered the best approach for the assessment of VEOs. It provides a flexible methodology and gives great importance to the role of the assessor, who is ultimately responsible for interpreting dynamic factors contained and rated in the tool. EUTEx will consider and assess more in-depth a selection of **tools** such as VERA2R and RRAP.

EUTEx in a nutshell

What are the best practices regarding 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 a hands-on, frontline approach, in that practices are understood as specific approaches and concrete methods beyond the level of initiatives, projects and programmes. How do psychologists in prisons across Europe work and 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 social workers, psychologists and educators. The aim is to develop and provide specialized and in-depth training of the train-the-trainer type.

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