

Workshop A – Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs), including women & children

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CATS

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Försvvarshögskolan

FTFs – Facts and Figures

- More than **42 000 foreign terrorist fighters** have travelled to join Daesh from **over 120 countries** (between 2011-2020). More than **5 000 FTFs have departed from Europe**.
- Around **1,600 adults have returned**, together with around **150-200 children**.
 - The average percentage of FTFs returning to Europe is around 30%, but the figure is higher for Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom. Nearly half of FTFs from these countries have returned.
- About **385-460 European adults** and **610-680 children were detained** in Northeast Syria.
- **Rate of prosecution of returnees vary:**
 - from 10 % or less in the UK or Sweden to 65 % or more in France and Belgium
- **FTFs as a complex problem**

ISIS-supporters in al-Hawl: returning?



Problem with returnees:

- 74,000 detained including 12,000 foreign (muhajirs) women and 8,000 children.
- 20,000 children come from Syria
- 24,000 children come from 62 different nationalities with 9,000 from Iraq.
- Radicalisation of a whole generation of children and youth – lost generation
- Legislation and convictions
 - War crimes?
- Security threat?

Challenges for FTFs coming back

FTFs made their way back through several routes:

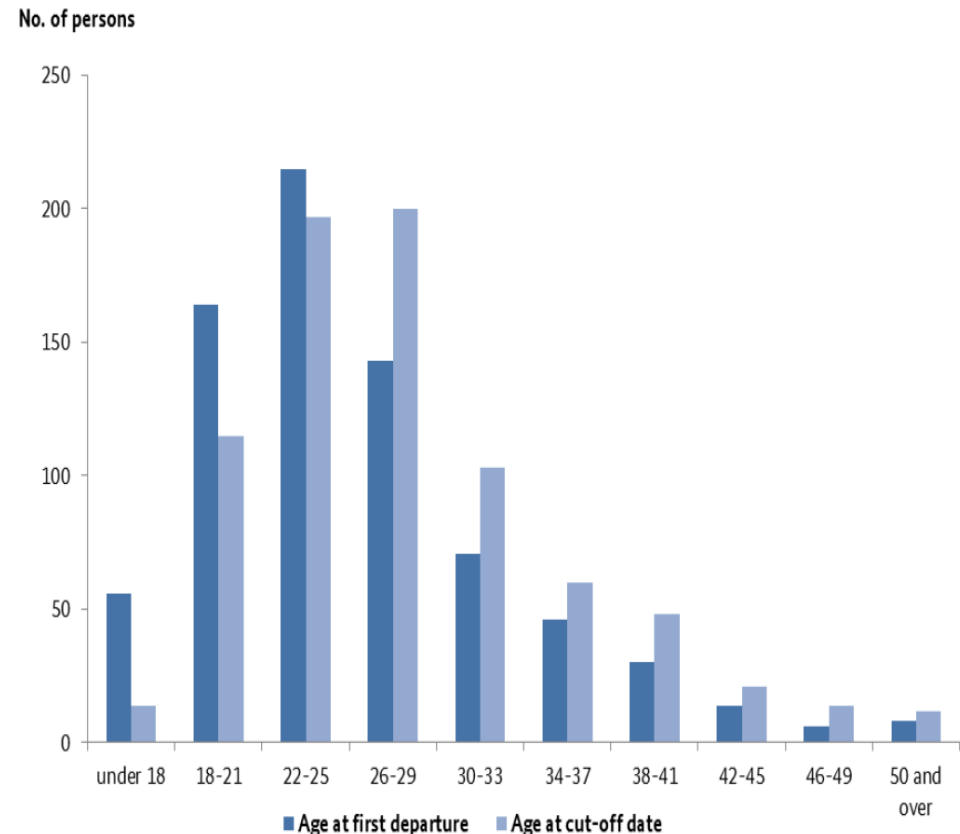
- some requested **consular support**, especially if they required new passports or assistance with children born in Syria or Iraq, others **travelled on false ID documents**;
- some travelled back directly through Turkey, once considered as the “highway” to Syria but also backwards to Europe;
- some made it back via **detours** through other European and non-European destinations;
- some travelled back through **clandestine routes**, notably using migrants’ flow and smuggling networks, via the Balkans or West and North Africa, notably;
- some were **captured by the Turkish or Iraqi authorities**, or by the **Kurdish forces**, and were then expelled or repatriated;



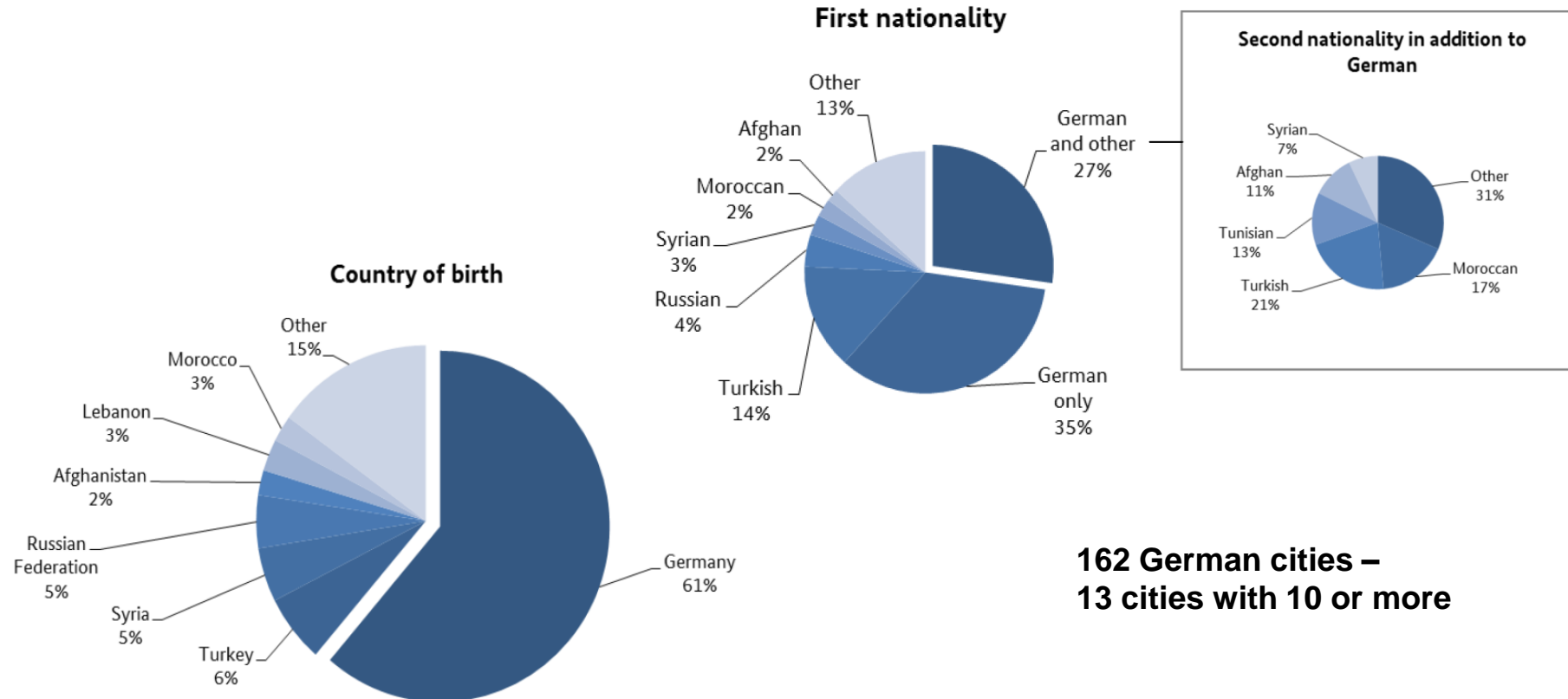
Part I
Foreign Terrorist Fighters –
evidence-based studies

Demographics – German foreign fighters

- **784** cases of FTFs
- **79%** male
- **21%** female
- Average age **26 years of age**
- **44% single; 28% married** according to German law; **22% married** according to Islamic rites
- **57 minors**
- **134 converts**
 - (2/3 younger than 22 years old)
- **2/3 known to police for criminality**



Nationality - German foreign fighters



**162 German cities –
13 cities with 10 or more**

Radicalisation factors

First radicalisation

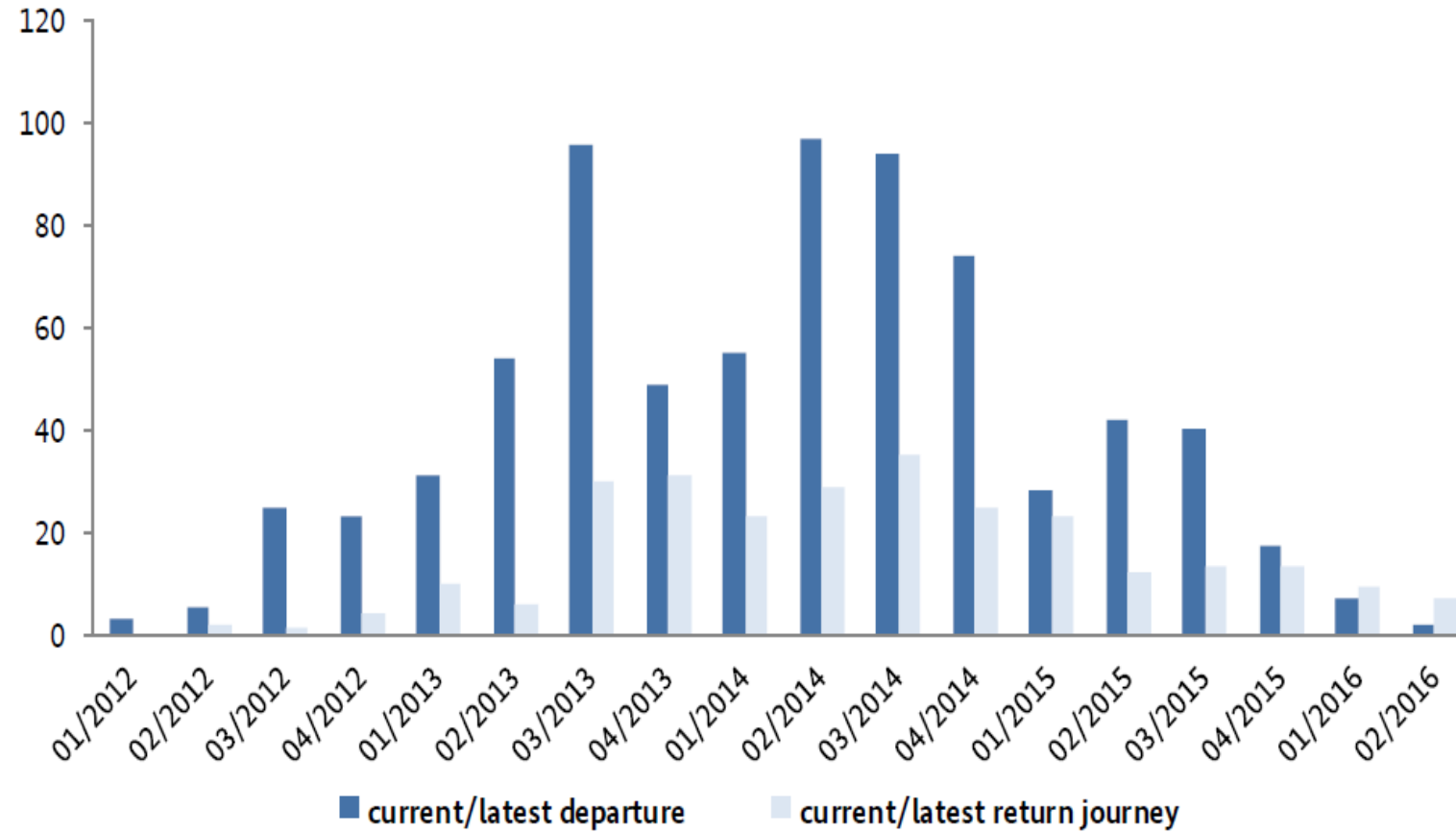
- **Friends** (54%)
- **Contacts at mosques** 48%
- **The Internet** (44%)
- **Islam seminars** (27%)
- **Koran distribution** (24%)
- **Family** members (21%)
- **Fund-raising** activities (6%)
- **Contacts at schools** (3%)
- **Prison** (2%)

Trajectory

- **32%** radicalised between **2011-2012**
- **55%** radicalised between **2012-June 2014**
- **12%** radicalised between **2014-2016**
- **One-fifth** radicalised in **6 month**
- **46% left** within **one year**
- **68% left** within **two years**

Overview of travel movements (per quarter)

No. of departures



German Foreign Fighter Returnees

Returnee patterns

- 35% (**272** persons) **back** in Germany
- **12%** in **prison**
- **18%** returned with **friends**; **24%** returned with **family members**; **29%** returned **alone**.

Motivations

- **10% disillusionment/**frustration
- **10% pressure** from **family** members
- **8% tactical** reasons
- **6% illness** or health problems.

Willingness to cooperate with authorities?

- 25% of returnees & 22% of parents were cooperating with authorities.
- More than 48% returned to extremist milieu.

BfV: 570 individuals are capable of plotting terrorist attacks.

German FTF: Gender dimension



- **33% converts were women** (17% were men)
- Women became **radicalised faster** (less than 12 months)
- Radicalised in the private sphere
- Close influence from **social environment**
- 54% with family members
- Women motives for leaving tended to be more **socially and family oriented**.
- Desire for new Islamic society vs. Islamist-jihadist motivation

German FTFs: Minors



- **56** minors left
- **57%** are German nationals. **Two-thirds** of them (**66%**) also have a **second nationality**
- **42%** radicalised less than a year.

Norwegian foreign fighters & extremists



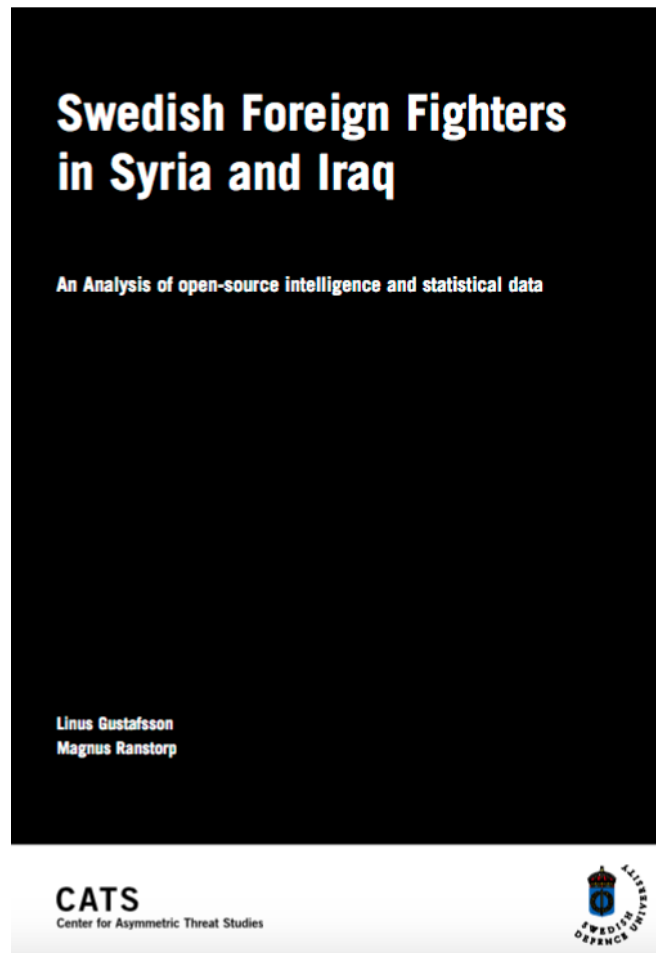
- Study of **137** individuals
- **86%** became radicalised after 2011.
- **88%** are men.
- **88%** are multi-ethnic (30 different ethnic groups)
- **Somalis and Pakistanis** are underrepresented given their size

Norwegian foreign fighters & extremists



- **61%** have immigrated to Norway in their teens.
- Only **21%** of those with minority background were born and raised in Norway.
- **17,5% lost their parents** in the course of childhood or youth (before age of 10)
- **68%** involved in **crime** (46% violence)

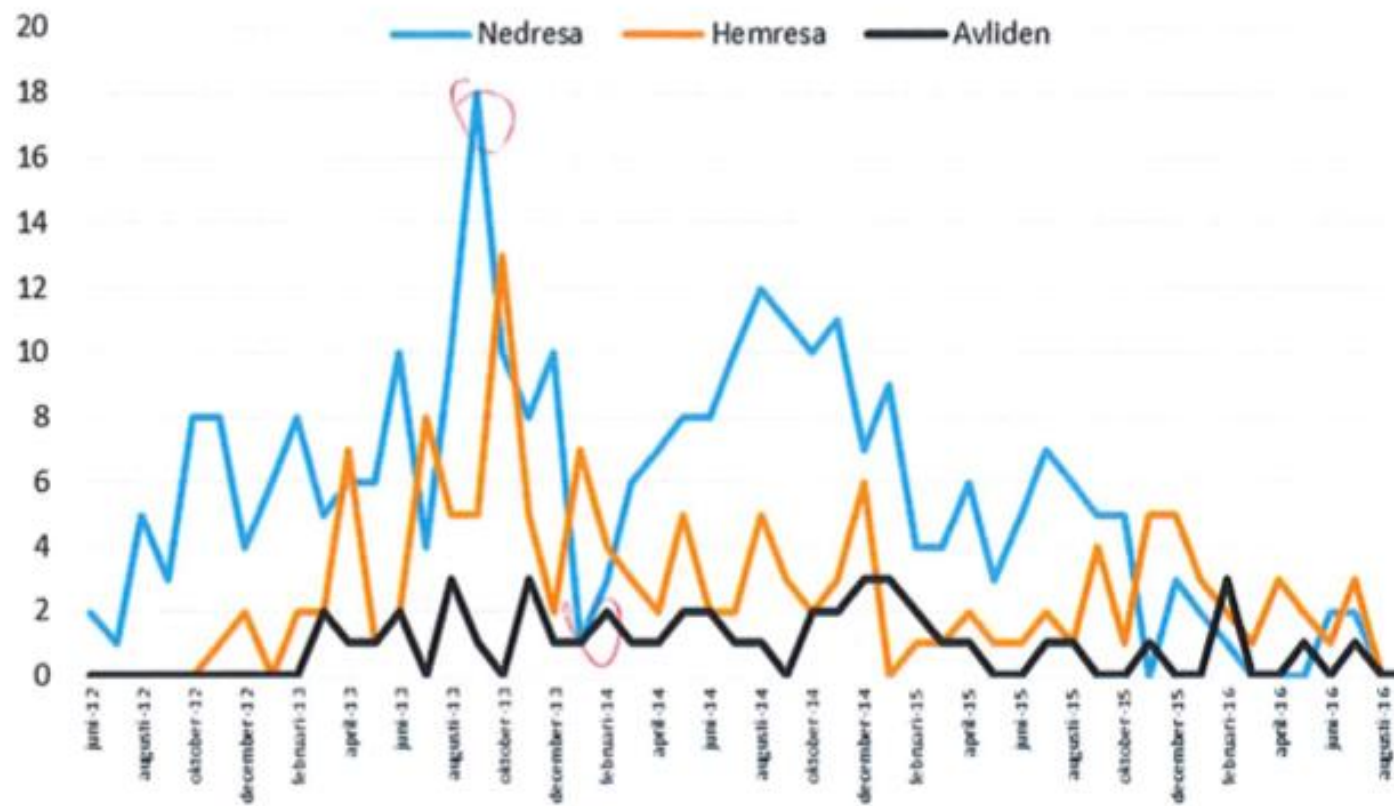
Swedish foreign fighters



Swedish FTFs (based on 267 out of 300):

- 76% are men and **24% women.**
- 18% are 19 years or younger
- **70% are resident in segregated areas**
- 80% come **from four cities**
- 75% are Swedish citizens and 34% born in Sweden.

Diagram: Antal resor, hemresor och avlidna över tid



Blue: outbound travel
Orange: return travel
Black: deaths

Financing of FTFs



- Mobile loans
- Hawalha
- Crowd-funding
- Bank fraud
- Student loans
- Charities/Gulf States foundations
- Insurance fraud
- VAT scams (cell-phones)
- Corporate fraud
- Benefit fraud

FTF trends (1)

- **Most left 2013-15 period**
 - Differences in attachment to society at large – 61% were born in Germany while 34% in Sweden and 21% were born in Norway.
- **Gender dimension:** (Average 80% men & 20% women)
 - Women radicalized faster
 - Radicalised in the private sphere (social environment)
 - Around 50% left with family members
 - Motives for leaving more **socially and family oriented.**
- **Average age:** 26 years old
- **Geographical Hot spots:** 162 German cities but only 13 cities with more than 10 FTFs
- **Prison** as source of radicalisation

FTF trends (2)

- **2/3 known to police for criminality**
 - 40% involved in violence
 - **Unemployment high**
- **Issue of dual nationalities**
- **Internet** important but not decisive. Accelerator.
- **Unwillingness to cooperate with authorities:**
 - GER: 25% of returnees & 22% of parents were cooperating with authorities.
 - More than 48% returned to extremist milieu
 - NL: 28% psychological illness, failure & 1/10 homeless

Part II
Foreign Terrorist Fighters
Returnee Challenges



Foreign Terrorist Fighter Returnee Challenges

- **Desensitisation to the use of violence**, combined with the **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** plus **humiliation, frustration, brutalisation, trauma and loss**.

Challenges for female returnees:

- deep commitment to the '**caliphate**' **ideal** and to Daesh;
- **peer pressure** from Daesh-women support groups at home;
- being able to leave the house and actually doing so, as Daesh rules aim to keep women cloistered inside their homes; breaking this rule also means breaking the taboo of **gender segregation**;
- **stigmatisation** within the community;
- dealing with the violence and restrictive movements witnessed / experienced;
- **child protection issues** as children may also be radicalised.

Challenges for child returnees (I)

- **proving parenthood and nationality** (possibly through DNA testing)
- **physical and psychological problems**
- dealing with **severe stress and trauma**; the effects of which may manifest themselves through loss of speech, aggression, intense fear and signs of post-traumatic stress disorder;
- **combat experience and subjection to violence and punishments** as part of everyday life;
- **indoctrination** (children are taught at a young age that anyone not observing the correct and strict interpretation of Islam is a *kufar* (unbeliever) and must be killed)
- dealing with **participation in executions**;

Challenges for child returnees (II)

- dealing with previous involvement in terrorist missions or **collecting targeted information** in the West and other intelligence useful for Daesh;
- experience of **arranged marriages and sexual abuse**;
- physical suffering through previous **beatings, torture and rape**;
- **injuries** sustained through punishment or fighting;
- **detachment from their parents** — training camps are designed to do this;
- **vulnerability to influence** by the attitudes and behaviour of the parents;
- **stigmatisation** as a ‘terrorist’ at school;
- broken kinship ties and **altered lines of loyalty**, particularly among children who were seeking a liation and identity;
- lack of familiarity with EU society and norms.

Mental health issues

- Many FTFs suffer from **asocial psychological disorders**, which manifest itself in low impulse control, anger management issues, aggression and violence in social relations. Understanding mental health issues and the multiple layers of complexity in trauma and psychiatry is important.

Challenges

- **Dealing with returnees and specifically children returnees?**
- **Few disengagement programmes & prisons as hotbeds for violent extremism.**
 - Validation of screening tools?
- **Connection to refugees & issue of failed asylum seekers?**
- **Entire salafi-jihadi ecosystem and not individuals**
 - Conveyer belt organisations
 - **Clusters of local networks**
- **Crime-terror nexus and microfinancing**
- **Risk assessment tools**
- **Different legislation thresholds and prevention strategies**
 - Expulsion
 - Digital battlefield evidence
 - Different sentencing for terror crimes states
 - **Removing citizenship**
 - **Monitoring**

Multiagency coordination

- Rehearse procedures and ISPs using scenarios & cases
- Establish which agency takes the lead
- Establish contact with the returnee and their family ASAP
- Ensure cooperation between social welfare service/police
- Build relationship with family (focus on siblings)
- Ensure access to mental health specialists
- Focus on risk assessment AND care & resocialisation
- Multiagency team need to establish and maintain relations with NGOs
- Establish process-orientated and individualised Action Plans



Thank you!

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