

EUROPEAN JIHAD: FUTURE OF THE PAST? From Criminals to Terrorists and Back?

Final Report



AUTHORS

Kacper Rekawek, Head of National Security Programme, GLOBSEC

Viktor Szucs, Junior Research Fellow, GLOBSEC

Martina Babíková, Junior Research Fellow, GLOBSEC

Enya Hamel, GLOBSEC

DESIGN

Juraj Karáčoň, GLOBSEC

The sole responsibility for the content of this publication lies with the authors.

Austria: Daniela PISOIU, Jorg Peschak

Belgium: Wim Hardyns, Thom Snaphaan

Bulgaria: Rositsa Dzhekova, Nadya Stoyanova

France: Olivier de France, Damien Saverot, Pierre Colomina

Germany: Matenia Sirseloudi

Greece: Eleni Fotou

Ireland: Orla Lynch

Italy: Marco Lombardi, Giovanni Giacalone, Nicolò Spagna

Netherlands: Bart Schuurman

Spain: Fernando Reinares, Carola García-Calvo, Álvaro Vicente

United Kingdom: John Morrison, Aleksandra Łojek

The project is funded under PMI IMPACT, a global grant initiative of Philip Morris International to support projects against illegal trade. GLOBSEC is fully independent in implementing the project and has editorial responsibility for all views and opinions expressed herein.

Cover photo from Al-Hawl Camp in Syria
Getty Images / Reportage Archive / Veronique de Viguerie

TABLE OF CONTENT

Project Summary	4
Executive Summary	5
Future of the past: introduction	7
Foreign terrorist fighters:	
Tactical and narrative force multipliers	9
European jihad:	
Of recidivists and not-so distant prison releases	11
European jihadi women: not mere brides	13
Who are the european jihadis? An update	14
<i>Demography</i>	16
<i>Crime-terror nexus</i>	18
<i>Radicalisation</i>	21
<i>Homegrown</i>	22
<i>Foreign fighters</i>	23
<i>Solo actors</i>	23
Conclusions	24
Notes	25

PROJECT SUMMARY

The most well-known ISIS terrorist atrocities in Europe, including the 2015 Paris and 2016 Brussels attacks, saw individuals who in the past had been involved in organised crime and illegal trade graduate to the ranks of the world's most successful terrorist organisation. It is now widely assumed that Europe's terrorists are no longer radicals first and foremost but criminals who turned to political violence at some stage throughout their ordinary crime careers. Thus, the threat emanating from this "crime-terror nexus" hangs over Europe.

GLOBSEC, an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental organisation that aims to shape the global debate on foreign and security policy, responded to this threat by developing, with funding from the first round of the PMI Impact initiative,ⁱ a research and advocacy project aimed at addressing the "crime-terror nexus" in Europe. The project, titled From Criminals to Terrorists and Back?, will:

- ▶ collect, collate and analyse data on terrorism convicts from 11 EU countries with the highest number of arrests for terrorism offences (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the UK). The project team will investigate whether these individuals had prior criminal connections and, if so, whether a specific connection to illegal trade is a precursor to terrorism and to what extent this trade funds terrorism. In short, the study will check whether the crime-terror nexus exists and how strong it truly is.
- ▶ disseminate project findings at high-profile GLOBSEC Strategic Forums (GLOBSEC Bratislava Forum, TATRA Summit, Chateau Bela conferences) and other internationally acclaimed gatherings that attract decision-makers, experts, private sector, and law-enforcement representatives while also incorporating their expert-level feedback into our work.

help shape and strengthen European counterterrorism efforts by providing tailor-made solutions to combat the crime-terror nexus and terrorist financing via education and awareness and advocacy efforts involving decision-makers and security stakeholders in the 11 examined countries. This line of activity directly links the project to the widely acclaimed work of the GLOBSEC Intelligence Reform Initiative (GIRI), which is led by former U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff and involved in developing and promoting more effective transatlantic counterterrorism solutions.

ⁱ This publication was funded by PMI IMPACT, a grant award initiative of Philip Morris International ("PMI"). In the performance of its research, the Grantee maintained full independence from PMI. The views and opinions expressed in this document are those of the Grantee and do not necessarily reflect the views of PMI. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in this publication lies entirely with the Grantee. Neither PMI, nor any of its affiliates, or persons acting on their behalf may be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the **final report of the GLOBSEC's From Criminals to Terrorists and Back?**, a two year advocacy and research project funded under PMI Impact, a global grant initiative of Philip Morris International to support projects against illegal trade (GLOBSEC is fully independent in implementing the project and has editorial responsibility for all views and opinions expressed herein).

It picks up from where the previous report, titled "Who Are The European Jihadis?," published in September 2018, left off (See: <https://www.globsec.org/publications/who-are-european-jihadis-from-criminals-to-terrorists-and-back/>). The report's launch was covered by the media in 20+ countries, including quotes in The New York Times, BuzzFeed, Le Parisien, Bild, HLN, de Volskrant, Gazeta Wyborcza, SME, 444.hu, Sky News Arabia, and others. That report's findings were based on a unique dataset of 197 European jihadis from 2015, the peak year of European jihadis. Thanks to the work of the research teams based in 11 countries (including the personnel from IRIS, France; University College Cork; Leiden University; Ghent University; Catholic University of the Sacred Heart, Italy; University Rey Juan Carlos and Elcano Royal Institute, Spain; and Center for the Study of Democracy, Bulgaria), GLOBSEC was able to study 120+ variables related to each and every individual included in the dataset and was consequently able to provide a 360 degree outlook on who European jihadis truly are, where they come from, how they had been radicalised and where, how networked they are within the broader jihadi milieu in Europe, etc.

This report takes the work further as it is based on an updated unique dataset of 326 European jihadis (from 2015, the peak year of European jihadism) who have all either been **arrested for terrorism offences (with 199 later convicted), expelled from a given country because of their alleged terrorism links (39 individuals), died while executing terrorist attacks abroad or in one of the 11 EU countries (50; Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, and the UK, i.e., those that reported more than 20 terrorism arrests reported to Europol that year), or are still at large and are sought by security authorities (38).**

The individual stories of the European jihadis often point out to the long-term nature of their jihadi

involvement and the fact that many of them will be released from prison in the upcoming years. In this sense, the report points to the "future of the past" of European jihadism.

The report consists of two parts: **the first offers GLOBSEC's National Security Programme take on three burning issues we estimate are of key importance to the current European counterterrorism effort**, namely: a) the seemingly ever-present phenomenon of **(returning) foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs)**; b) **(terrorism) recidivism**; and c) **the role of women in European jihadism. The second offers an update on data GLOBSEC published in September 2018**, and updated GLOBSEC's take on the issue of who European jihadis are.

Re 1a) **FTFs** subset constitute 33% of the overall dataset (107 out of 326). **They are more likely than the other European jihadis to have had a previous career in crime and enjoy longer jihadi careers which relatively often result in their being jailed for terrorism offences on more than one occasion.** They are extremely **well networked within the jihadi milieu**, as they often know individuals from previous generations who also partook in other "jihads." Upon returning from the battle zones, they often play the role of **jihadi entrepreneurs or charismatic cell or network leaders**, or individuals to whom their comrades look up to. In effect, they are European jihad's **force multipliers, both practically and via their inspiring life stories, including hardships while imprisoned in e.g. Iraq or Syria, which will continue to animate future generations of jihadis.** GLOBSEC anticipates that the swifter their repatriation or conclusion of court proceedings are in their cases, the lesser is their "narrative" value for the jihadi milieu in Europe.

Re 1b) European jihad is no stranger to perennial criminals and involves **a significant number of individuals who have had long-term terrorist careers and perpetrated numerous terrorist crimes throughout it. They are also likely to continue doing so after their releases.** Out of the 199 individuals arrested for terrorism offences in 2015 included in GLOBSEC dataset, **57%, will be released from prison by the end of 2023. As many as 45 have already been released from prison**, as they had received relatively short sentences. GLOBSEC

anticipates that the release of these individuals from confinement, a seemingly past issue constitutes and will constitute a challenge for the security authorities in the future.

Re 1c) **Female jihadis are not simply “jihadi brides.” GLOBSEC dataset includes cases of attack planners, active female jihadi recruiters, propagandists, etc.** Moreover, the women in the subset are also very well networked into the jihadi milieu, and many wish to, albeit few successfully complete the process, travel to a conflict zone. This strongly disproves the theory of a lack of female agency within the larger jihadi milieu. GLOBSEC anticipates that in the future they might play even more significant roles in further development of European jihad, and the European CT strategies should; therefore, go beyond the “bride” paradigm and prepare for more terrorist challenges animated by or orchestrated by females.

Re 2) The phenomenon of European jihad is **mostly male, involves young but not teenage or adolescent individuals; homegrown in nature, but to some extent involves naturalised individuals and immigrants; infested with former, but not necessarily “petty,” criminals; financed by a variety of means, but surprisingly legal in this sphere; concerned with travelling to and returning from foreign conflicts; slow to mature as the radicalisation fuelling often takes years; is a family affair and team effort; is performed by unemployed and uneducated individuals.**

Europe clearly “has not won its war on terrorism”—a detailed study of individuals involved in European jihad in 2015 demonstrates that the threat will be

making its presence felt in Europe for years to come and the longevity of the threat is demonstrated by three of the issues discussed in this report: the role of foreign fighters as force multipliers; the issue of recidivism amongst terrorism prisoners and their pending releases; the potential for the growth of the standing of women within terrorism networks.

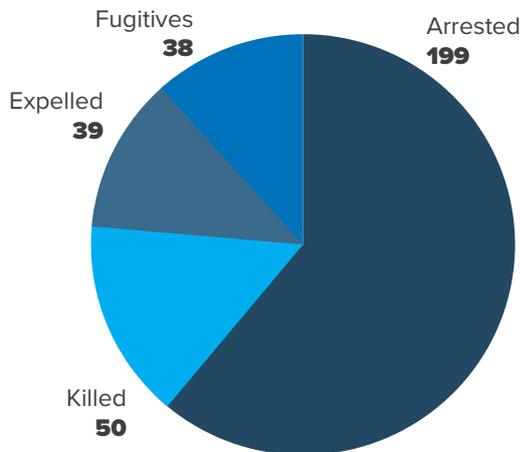
Simultaneously, **the crime-terror nexus** in Europe truly is a **“poor man’s crime-terror nexus”** as its representatives are former, and relatively unsuccessful, criminals whose jobs do not amount to bringing in a sizeable skillset to their new terrorist patrons. If, however, **a given criminal career takes place in an area with a history of jihadi activities, and the individual’s family and friends are known to the security authorities for their radical activities, involvement and sympathies,** then adequate resources should be utilised to ascertain the extent to which the individual could be progressing along **a private crime-terror continuum.** While establishing if that is the case; however, the authorities should refrain from generalisations and ensure a wider understanding of the phenomenon at hand is developed. This necessitates investment in long-term projects devoted to what we could call the phenomenon of **“football buddies.”** By such “buddies” GLOBSEC means, e.g., individuals who have known the radicals in their area, spent time with them, in some cases were also radicalised but never opted for terrorism involvement. Such projects would therefore also look at criminals and former criminals who could, but never did, move farther along the crime-terror nexus axis. Clues as to what radicalisation entails and how it truly operates could lie within the answers provided by such endeavours.

FUTURE OF THE PAST: INTRODUCTION

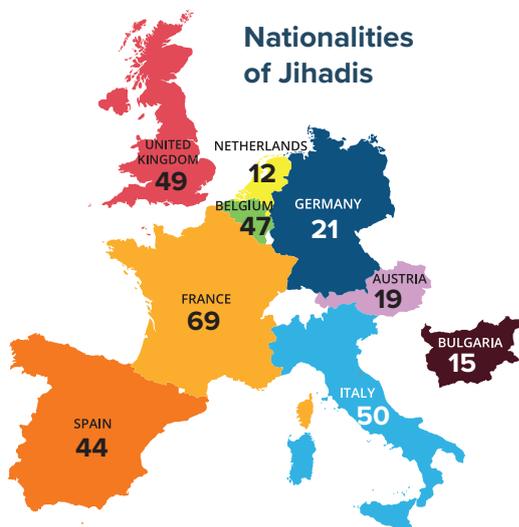
The findings of this report are based on a dataset of **326 cases of individuals** about whom the authors were able to collect open-source data between September 2017 and July 2019. All are jihadi terrorists arrested for terrorism offences in 2015 (and later convicted), expelled from a given country because of their alleged terrorism links, or who died while executing terrorist attacks in one of the 11 countries—Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, or the UK, i.e., those that reported more than 20 terrorism arrests to Europol that year.

The states with the highest number of reported jihadis are, just like a year earlier in the project (reflected in our Midterm Report released in September 2018), France, the UK, Italy, and Spain, this time joined by Belgium, with 40+ cases each.¹

Fates of 2015 Jihadis



Nationalities of Jihadis



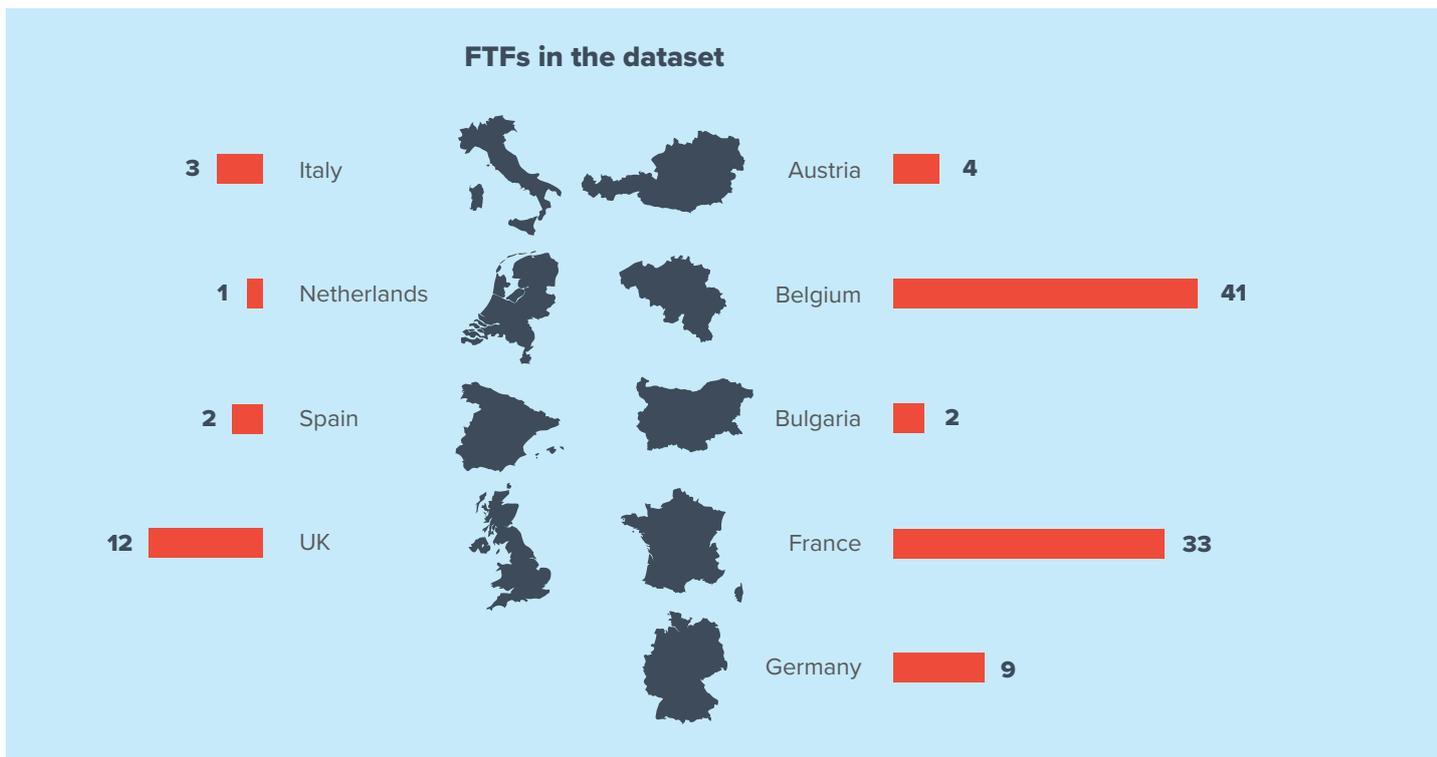
The report consists of two parts:

1. **the first** offers GLOBSEC's National Security Programme take on three burning issues we estimate are of **key importance to the current European counterterrorism effort**, namely: a) **the seemingly ever-present phenomenon of (returning) foreign fighters**; b) **(terrorism) recidivism**; and c) **the role of women in European jihadism**. The data discussed in these subchapters is derived from our larger dataset as we are of an opinion that a unique collection (326 cases, more than 120 variables) could be of use when discussing the most prescient terrorism-related topics. The choice is subjective but the prescient nature of the three issues was ascertained via our discussions with the members of our international research teams, which includes experienced members from the University College Cork (Ireland), University of Leiden (the Netherlands), King Juan Carlos University and Real Instituto Elcano (Spain), the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs, Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (Italy), the Centre for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria) and others, and feedback we have received during our public speaking engagements where we presented our research results (20+ such engagements over the last two years) to various audiences of security stakeholders from 11 European countries. Finally, the authors of the project also thematically analysed the topics covered by the 2019 Society for Terrorism Research annual conference, held in Oslo in June, where they also had a chance to unveil their research findings. The three issues were prominently featured at this conference, potentially the biggest annual gathering of non-practitioner experts on terrorism. We are hopeful that this will prevent us from being accused of bias or pandering to research "stereotypes," "generalisations," or "assumptions", or of having "tunnel vision."² In our view, **our analysis of European jihadism's past, related to individuals involved in it in 2015, has ample relevance to its present and future. As we look at the individual stories of the 326 jihadis, we note the long-term nature of their jihadi involvement and the fact, as will be shown, that many of them will be leaving prisons in the upcoming years. In this sense, we observe that a report such as this one points to the "future of the past" of European jihadism.**

2. **the second** offers an update on data we published in September 2018 when GLOBSEC published *Who Are The European Jihadis?*, effectively our crime-terror nexus' project midterm analysis.³ This report centred on the issue of whether European criminals were turning to crime. Moreover, it also dived into the profiles of European jihadis and looked at their socio-economic backgrounds, their roles and careers within jihadi cells and structures, whether they travelled to fight in foreign conflicts and how networked they had been in the broader jihadi milieu. The aforementioned report provided data on 197 jihadis but since then, the size of the dataset has grown to 326. Consequently, this part of the current report effectively constitutes a "who are the European jihadis" vol. 2, a wider snapshot of European jihadism.

We share Petter Nesser's assessment that Europe is still very much threatened by jihadi terrorism.⁴ His argument was that even though the number of attacks is down, the number of foiled plots has seen a markedly less severe drop. Consequently, one can assume that the threat only seems lower because jihadis are still constantly trying to attack Europe with new terrorist plots, which, in time, might be more successful. The same could be said about the individuals included in our dataset: **they might have finished their careers in the "peak year of European jihadism," i.e., 2015, but, as will be shown, many might be returning to the terrorist fold by 2023. Moreover, the jihadi ranks include hardened veterans who have already gone through more than one terrorism conviction and are intent on repeating their feats. Thus, Europe clearly, to paraphrase Nesser, "hasn't won the war on terror." The past offers ample evidence to the contrary and, consequently, the future will see Europe continue in its struggle with jihadi terrorism.**

FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS: TACTICAL AND NARRATIVE FORCE MULTIPLIERS



It would be fair to argue that the issue of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) has preoccupied the broader counterterrorism community since 2012/2013.⁵ At first, the issue was the travels or attempts to travel by Westerners to the war zone in Syria. Consequently, as ISIS's so-called "Caliphate" crumbled, the attention turned towards the returning FTFs, or returnees. The project on which this report is based looked at the year 2015, the "peak year of European jihadism" and one in which individuals would still be travelling to join the "Caliphate" but in declining numbers, admittedly influenced by the establishment of the Global Coalition Against Daesh and the first major ISIS defeats. At the same time, Europe had by that time seen a lot of the original FTFs return home, with some in 2015 staging ISIS's best known European atrocities, i.e., the Paris November 2015 attacks. The threat that there would be many such individuals lurking in the wings galvanised the European counterterrorism community in the

subsequent years. Moreover, this worry was later largely transposed onto the issue of jihadis stuck in Syrian Democratic Forces-run camps in Syria as, e.g., "jihadi brides" managed to escape from one such facility.⁵ The debate of "repatriate or reject"⁷ has been playing out in the open throughout 2019, with different countries arguing for all sorts of approaches and non-Western European countries often praised for their willingness to repatriate fighters and/or their families,⁸ and in the meantime, to some extent also altering their positions.⁹ More recently, Julian King, the outgoing EU Commissioner for the Security Union, indicated that the Commission's estimate was that "5,500 foreign terrorist fighters left European countries to travel to the conflict zones in Iraq and Syria. Of those, two-thirds were men and a quarter women." King also estimated that 1400 were killed, 1600 returned, with the remaining 2500 unaccounted for.¹⁰ **Given that our dataset includes 100+ individuals who had, at some point in their**

lives, actually been FTFs, then it was only natural for us to scrutinise the data at hand to contribute to the analysis of this phenomenon that has captured so much attention in Europe in the last 6-7 years.

Our dataset of 326 individuals includes **107 FTFs** (travelling to different “jihad,” 85 to SYRIA, 7 to IRAQ, 4 to PAKISTAN, 2 to SOMALIA, 2 to LIBYA, 1 to YEMEN, 3 to ALGERIA, with some overlaps by certain individuals who travelled to more than once to a “jihad” of their choic destination)—nationals or inhabitants of 9 countries, with 41 from Belgium, 33 from France, 12 from the UK, 9 from Germany, 4 from Austria, 3 from Italy, 2 each from Spain and Bulgaria, and 1 from the Netherlands. The dataset also includes 22 “wannabe” or unsuccessful FTFs, intercepted at some point along the way to a particular “jihad.”

101 of the FTFs are male (94% of the subset) and 6 are females (6%). The FTFs are on average younger than the totality of jihadis in the dataset (26.5 years versus 29 years old). Interestingly, **the FTF subset manifested more criminality than the whole dataset**, with 34 of the FTFs (32%) having criminal careers prior to their arrest, death, expulsion, or trial in absentia in 2015. **6 had reoffended before 2015 and 10 had been involved and jailed for terrorism offences before that year.** 1 individual is both a repeat criminal and a repeat terrorist offender at the same time. **The FTF subset also includes a lot of charismatic and influential jihadi individuals**, as 18 of them (17% of the subset) could be termed Nesser’s “jihadi entrepreneurs”, i.e., individuals who “recruit, organise, train, and direct attack cells.”¹¹ The degree to which the FTF subset had networked is also significant, which strengthens the assumption of their often more than ordinary roles in the wider jihadi milieu in Europe: **86 had friends involved in terrorism and 58 conducted more than one trip to a given warzone**, which would have only increased their standing amongst their jihadi comrades. Moreover, 100 of them also openly declared allegiance to a terrorist entity, mostly ISIS, with some playing the role of that organisation’s propaganda “poster boys.”

These statistics point to the fact that given the right conditions, FTFs could act as tactical **force multipliers** for any jihadi entity savvy enough to first properly attract or recruit them, and then successfully redeploy them to a preferred locality. Of course, after ISIS lost territorial control in Iraq and Syria, much changed in this respect, as fewer European jihadis have embarked on international journeys to fight in foreign wars. At the same time, their potential repatriation (or sentencing to death in Iraq)¹² and perhaps, later attempts to reintegrate them will once again reignite the debate as to what the best

policy of tackling the threat from them should be. Their war exploits or “mistreatment” at the hands of their captors could be turned into a **narrative force multiplier** and a powerful recruitment tool for future generations of European jihadis who will revere the original ISIS fighters, defenders of the “Caliphate.” In this sense, their pasts will illuminate jihadis’ futures.

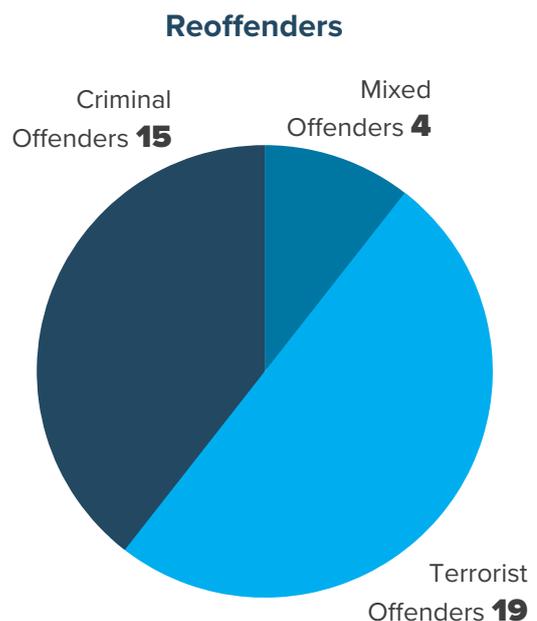
EUROPEAN JIHAD: OF RECIDIVISTS AND NOT-SO DISTANT PRISON RELEASES

It would be an understatement to claim that prisons generate a lot of interest in relation to the threat of terrorism and counterterrorism policies of given European states. Our Midterm Report also stressed this point with “prisons still [...] a prominent role as the place where many criminals graduate towards political violence.”¹³ Later on, we also emphasized that more must be done to help stakeholders better understand prison radicalisation, which in practice is less straightforward than previously thought (with examples of individuals phoning into prison to radicalise inmates or doing so during prison visits).¹⁴ We appreciate that this issue continues to preoccupy terrorism experts and researchers and note that the recent debate on this issue features exchanges on **recidivism, reintegration of prisoners, and the possible (lack of) returns of European ISIS members held in camps controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces.**¹⁵ Some argue that “the seeds of ISIS 2.0 reside in the prison population being held in detention by coalition partners in areas liberated from ISIS”, which would effectively see Europe’s concern related to prison radicalisation mutate while in the Middle East and then return to haunt the Old Continent.¹⁶

The widely shared European consensus on reconviction and re-offenders amongst terrorism prisoners is that few actually do re-offend upon their release from prison.¹⁷ Such findings are recently supported by research focusing on the situation in the US¹⁸ (but contradicted by Israeli results), which find that the “recidivism rate of terrorism offenders is higher than that for ordinary criminal offenders.” The Israeli study stresses that “for repeat offenders, recidivism to a new terrorism offence increases with the number of prior terrorism-related incarcerations and decreases with the number of additional incarcerations for regular criminal offences.”¹⁹

Our results, derived from a dataset that includes “only” 98 criminals turned terrorists (i.e., individuals arrested at least twice in their lives—before 2015 and in 2015 for a terrorism offence), do not support the first statement on the low reoffending rates but dovetail with the recidivism findings of the aforementioned studies. **The criminal subset**

includes as many as **38 re-offenders**, 23 of whom had been jailed at least twice before their 2015 terrorism arrest and 19 who had been jailed for a previous, pre 2015, terrorist offence, with an overlap of 4 between the two categories. **In short, there are many re-offenders in our subset, including a high number of terrorist re-offenders (19/98, 19% of the subset). This means that European jihad is no stranger to perennial criminals and involves a significant number of individuals who have had long-term terrorist careers and perpetrated numerous terrorist crimes throughout it. They are also likely to continue doing so after their releases or even before**, as might have been demonstrated by a recent alleged plot in France to target prison officials by a three-man cell consisting of an FTF “returnee,” a convert, and a former military man.²⁰ Such partly surprising figures neatly underline Andrew Silke’s comment that “not all terrorist and extremist prisoners are the same,” as many in our subset stray from the seemingly conventional truths about reoffending and recidivism.²¹

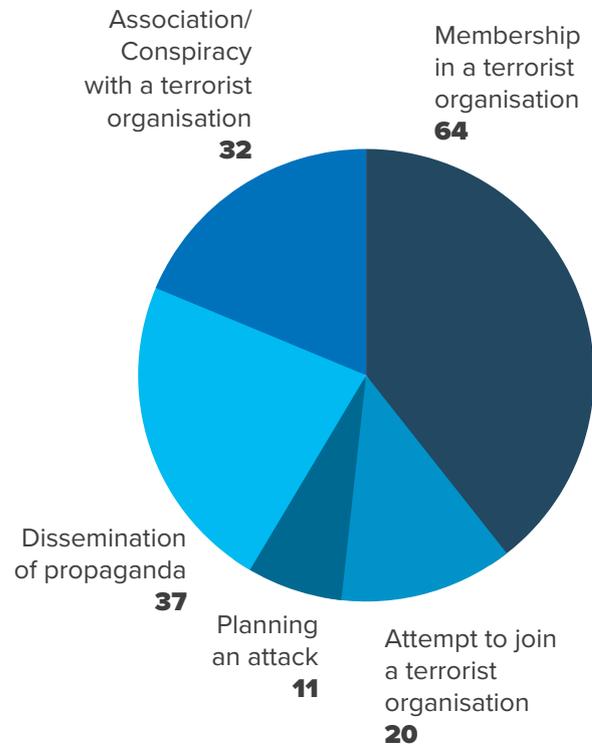


Out of the 199 individuals arrested for terrorism offences in 2015, 113, i.e., **57%, will be released from prison by the end of 2023. Even more worryingly, at the time of writing this report, 45 of them (40% of arrestees to be released based on the aforementioned data) have already left prison, as they had received relatively short sentences. An additional 56 will follow in the next 4 years. It goes without saying that the release of these individuals from confinement, a group comprising just one year of all of the terrorism arrestees in Europe (albeit the peak year), constitutes and will constitute a challenge for the security authorities.**²² At the same time, not all of them will automatically return to their pre-2015 terrorist ways, as some might emerge from prison disillusioned or outright scared of the consequences of future involvement in illegal activities. Thus, individual assessments will have to govern the state's approach to its former terrorist prisoners.

Available data on the sentencing of the 2015 terrorism arrestees could offer some clues as to the potential of the arrestees' potential return to the terrorist fold. **31 of the individuals in our dataset were either sentenced for attempting to join a terrorist organisation** (in this case, an attempt to travel to a foreign war and become an FTF in the ranks of a proscribed organisation; 20 individuals) **or involvement in the preparation of a terrorist attack** (11 individuals). Their pre-2015 terrorist activities suggest a higher degree of a radical commitment than, e.g., those of the individuals who were arrested for **membership in a terrorist organisation** (64 individuals), **association with criminals in relation to a terrorist enterprise** (32 individuals), and especially **dissemination of terrorist propaganda** (37 individuals). However, the aforementioned categories are broad and in relation to some of the studied countries offer very little actual insight into the totality of the terrorist activities of a given individual. In short, **in certain countries, those prosecuted for membership of a terrorist organisation may not have been less radical or dangerous than their colleagues arrested while preparing a terrorist attack. They simply may not have progressed towards attack preparation in their activities or simply had different, more logistical roles in a given terrorist network.** As we demonstrated in our 2018 report, there is no one single crime-terror pathway that would, in a rational way, allocate criminals with given skillsets to comparable roles in terrorist organisations.²³ The same could be true for former terrorist prisoners with those previously involved in attack planning or foreign terrorist fighting not necessarily more prone to terrorism reengagement than those sentenced to

prison terms on the back of their dissemination of jihadi propaganda.

2015 Terrorist arrest

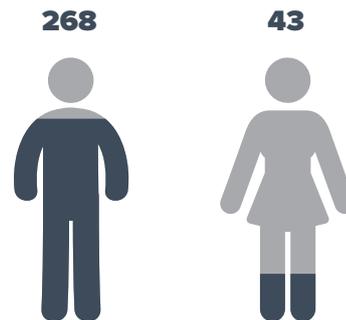


EUROPEAN JIHADI WOMEN: NOT MERE BRIDES

As demonstrated in the Midterm Report, there is growing interest and a body of literature on the roles of women in the ranks of jihadi organisations.²⁴ This is not surprising given that some of the recent sources estimate that up to 13% of “all foreign Islamic State [ISIS] affiliated persons (men, women, and minors)” were women. As recounted by Joana Cook and Gina Vale, some of the “women have been prosecuted upon return [...] Yet, this route remains challenging as the type of evidence obtained against men, such as recordings of their direct involvement in Islamic State activities, is more limited for women, who rarely appear in propaganda.”²⁵ **Nonetheless, this year saw a shift away from treating these women just as “jihadi brides,” effectively without agency or mere followers of men, to, e.g., holding them to account for their terrorist activities while abroad, such as Sabine S., the first female returnee recently convicted in Germany.**²⁶ Our dataset still reflects the reality of the age of the “jihadi brides,” personified by Abdelhamid Abaaoud’s female cousin, who helped him evade authorities in the aftermath of the Paris 2015 attacks.²⁷ **Nonetheless, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that the 40+ women included in the dataset are not mere “brides”, as the role they play in terrorist networks is more sophisticated and demanding.**

We reiterate our conclusion from our Midterm Report published in September 2018 that European jihad is a male effort. **“Only” 43 of the 326 jihadis in our dataset (13%) are women.** This does not mean, however, that their role, as often assumed, is relegated to that of “jihadi brides.” Our dataset includes **cases of attack planners, active female jihadi recruiters, propagandists,** and what effectively could be called **a logistical officer,** who assisted in giving shelter to the FTFs. Moreover, the women in the subset are also **very well networked into the jihadi milieu, as 25 of them had either family members or friends involved in terrorism activities. 16 of the 43 wanted to travel to a conflict zone but only 11 managed to reach their desired destination.** All of the above strongly disproves the theory of a lack of female agency within the larger milieu—their exposure to jihadism might have come through family links but we are yet to see evidence of their being coerced or “brainwashed” into their roles.

Gender of European Jihadis



Interestingly, the female subset hardly manifests criminality—only 3 out of the 47 had been arrested prior to 2015. 2 had families involved in crime—the first had sons who were arrested for dealing drugs, involuntary manslaughter and child abuse while the second had her father and ex-husband arrested for narco-trafficking and a brother killed for staging a terrorist attack. Another had her friends involved in crime and 6 others saw their family members also going down the criminal path. **It is interesting to note that in total, 22 out of the 43 women had family members involved in terrorism.** There is 1 repeat “ordinary” criminal offender and 1 terrorist offender amongst them.

In terms of their terrorist futures, **14 will have already been released from prison after 2019 (due to their short sentences for terrorism offences),** one will be released later on in 2019, and 10 others will regain their freedom later—7 by 2023, with the last, the aforementioned attack planner, leaving jail in 2040.

Looking at these numbers, and, e.g., comparing them with those of the recidivists, all male, who will be leaving prison (see, subchapter on recidivism), **one could state that the future of European jihad will not belong to women. At the same time, the fact that between one-tenth and one-sixth of the European jihadis are female warrants treating such statements with caution.** The backdrop of events such as an attempt by a female cell to bomb Notre Dame in 2016²⁸ and the recent successful crowdfunding campaigns by imprisoned European female ISIS members,²⁹ demonstrates that **as much as the 2015 jihadi women were not mere “brides,” their successors might play even more deadly and significant roles in European jihad’s future.**

WHO ARE THE EUROPEAN JIHADIS? AN UPDATE

This section of the report is meant to update the midterm results of our research, which were published in September 2018.³⁰ Our caseload has increased by almost two-thirds—dataset included 197 jihadi terrorists in September 2018 but now stands at 326. An additional 39 cases effectively constitute a control group in the project—far-left or nationalist Greek terrorists, Irish dissident republicans, and PKK members of white supremacists. **This report concentrates on the aforementioned 326, who have all either been arrested for terrorism offences in 2015 (with 199 later convicted), expelled from a given country because of their alleged terrorism links (39 individuals), died while executing terrorist attacks abroad or in one of the 11 EU countries (50; Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the UK, i.e., those that reported more than 20 terrorism arrests reported to Europol that year), or are still at large and are sought by the security authorities (38).** As will be shown, **the findings of this report confirm the midterm results from 2018. Thus, the phenomenon of European jihad is mostly male, involves young but not teenage or adolescent individuals; homegrown in nature (but to some extent involves naturalised individuals and immigrants); infested with former, but not necessarily “petty,” criminals; financed by a variety of means but surprisingly legal in this sphere; concerned with travelling to and returning from foreign conflicts; slow to mature as the radicalisation fuelling it often takes years; is a family affair and a team effort; and is performed by unemployed and uneducated individuals.**



European jihad is

male.



about travelling to and returning from a foreign conflict.

young but not teenage or adolescent.



slow to mature as radicalization fueling it often takes years.

homegrown and naturalised, but also coming from outside of Europe.



a family affair + a team effort.

criminal but not "petty" criminal.



unemployed.

financed by a variety of different, and predominantly, legal means.

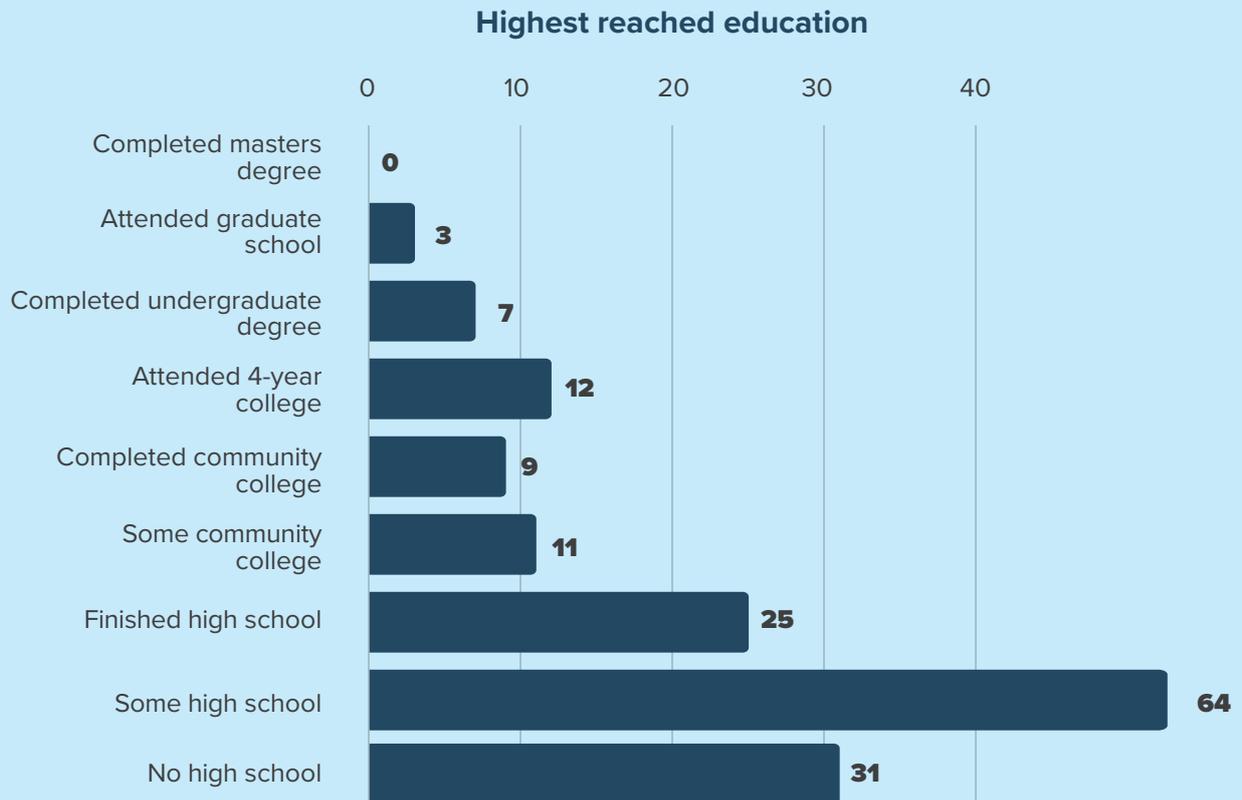
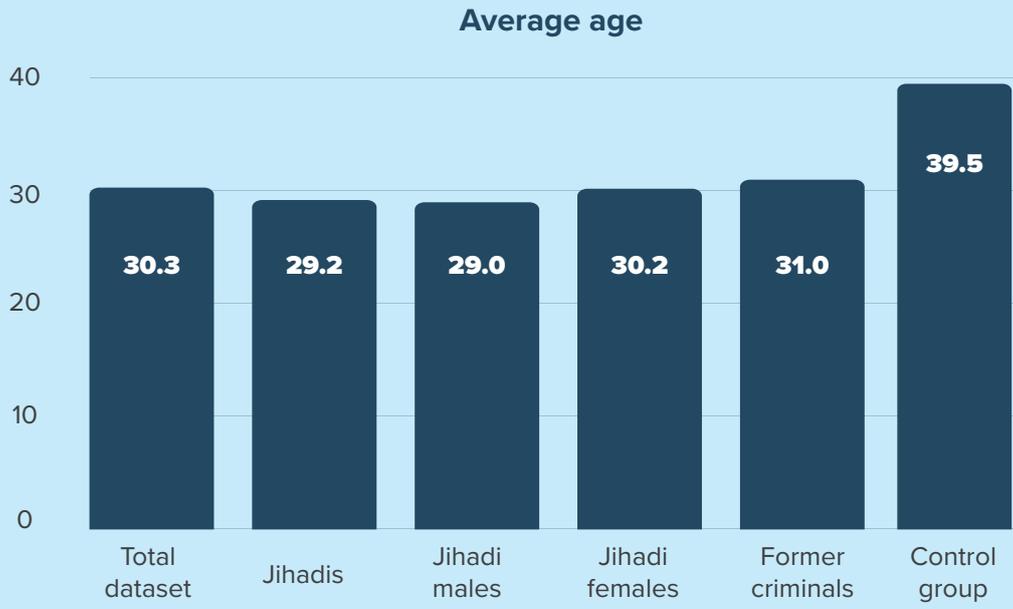


uneducated.

Demography

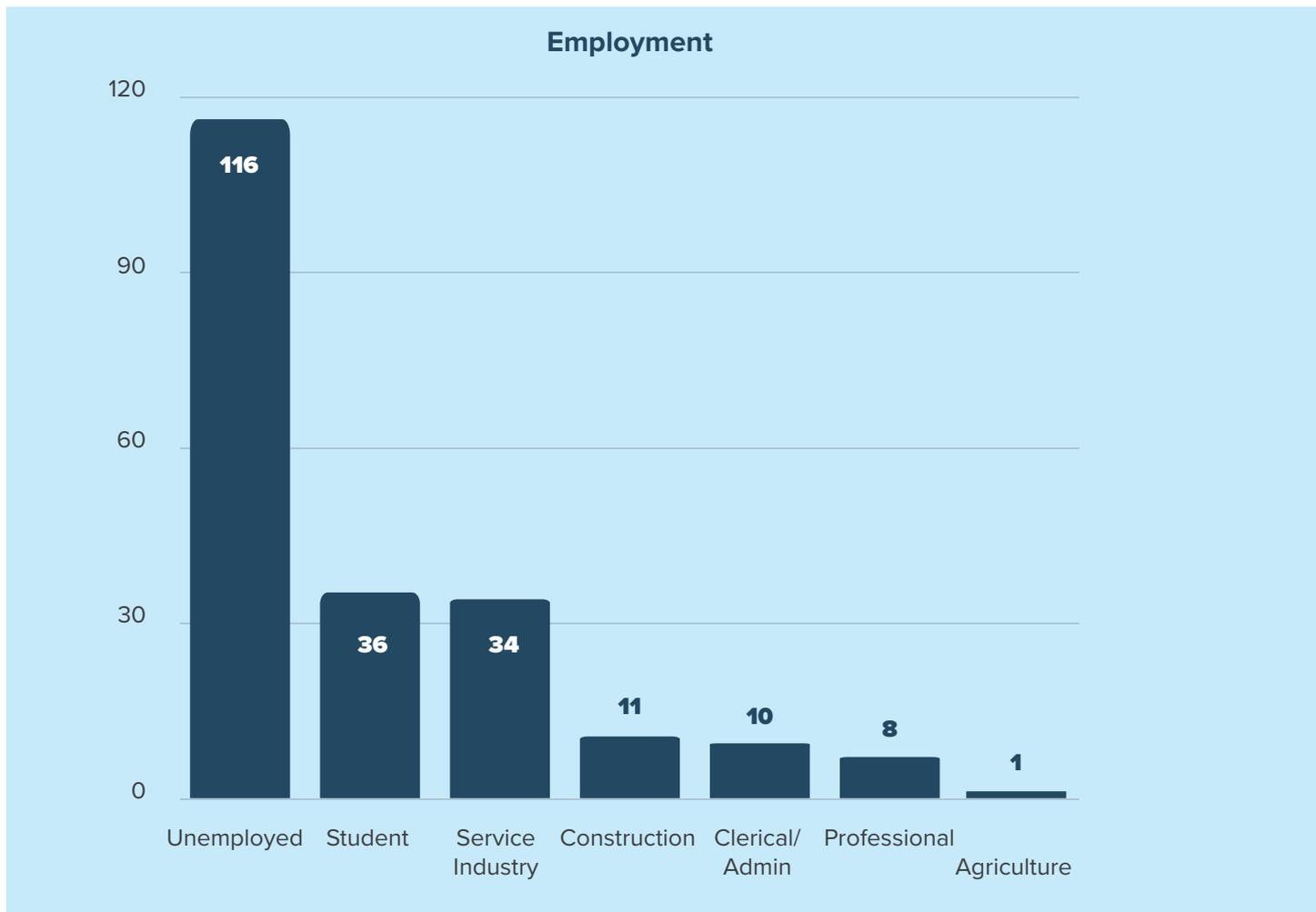
European terrorists are predominantly male (83%, 268 of 323). Females are older, with an average age of 30.2, compared to the males, which average a year younger (29). The age of the criminals turned terrorists (i.e., individuals with a history of a previous,

pre-2015 arrest) averages 31. European jihadism is thus not teenage rebellion, as more than 79% of the European jihadists were born in either the 1980s (45%) or the 1990s (34%).



The European jihadis are uneducated. As many as 31 have no high school experience, a further 64 (or one-third on whom we have data in this category, n=177), have “some high school experience,” with 7 (4% of the 177) with undergraduate degrees. This last number has significantly increased since last year, when in September 2018 the database included only 3 such individuals.

The European jihadis are not successful in their non-terrorist professional careers—40% had been unemployed at the time of their 2015 terrorism arrest, death, or expulsion. Further 35% had been employed, which is an increase in the statistic from September 2018 when 28% of the then total dataset had been in different jobs. At the same time, 57% of the criminals turned terrorists on which we have data had also been unemployed when arrested or killed in terrorist attacks or counterterrorism operations.



The graph displays a breakdown of various fields of employment where the information was available. For further 49 there were no details on kind of employment.

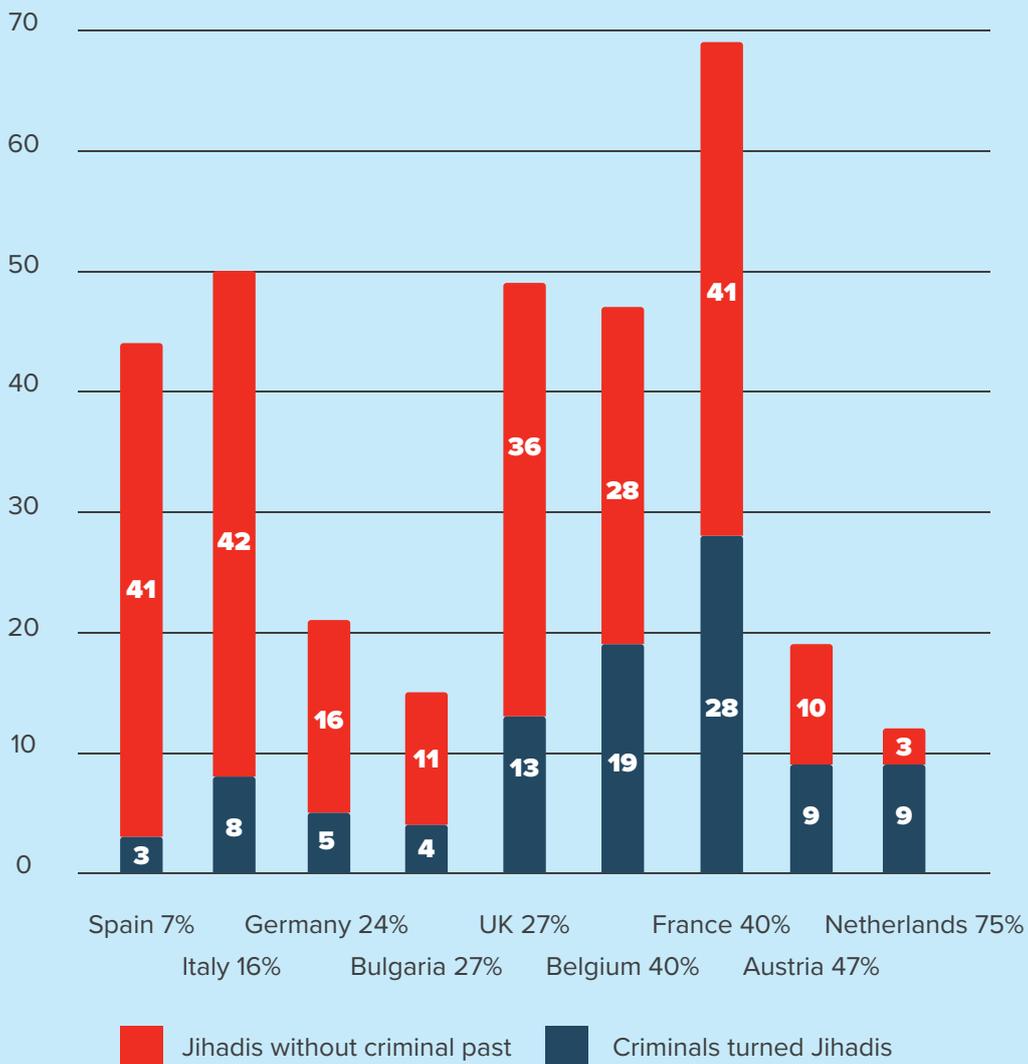
Crime-terror nexus

We see no major change in relation to the percentage of criminals turned terrorists in the ranks of European jihadis—last year, their share stood at 28% (56 out of 197), this year, it remains almost the same with 98 out of 326 individuals (30%) in the dataset having had a history of a previous, pre-2015, arrest. **However, there exists an interesting subcategory within the group of criminals turned terrorists, i.e., terrorist recidivists (19 individuals). These individuals do not neatly fall into the crime-terror subset as they are not known for their prior “ordinary” criminal exploits (although this group also includes individuals who had committed both terrorist and “ordinary” crimes before 2015). Most**

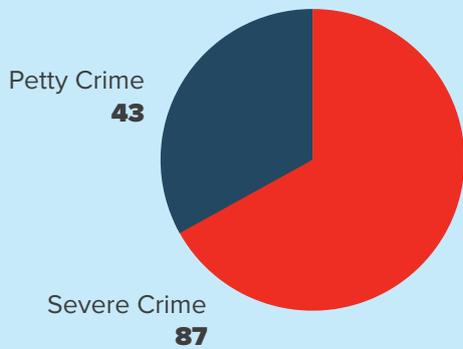
of the terrorist recidivists were arrested for crimes related to membership in a terrorist organisation, conspiracy to commit terrorist acts, or travel to join a terrorist group. Interestingly, we have information that 6 were released early for good behaviour.

Percentage-wise, the Dutch subset remains the most criminal at 75% but is a relatively small subset of 9 out of 12 individuals on which we have data. Of the major subsets, i.e., 40+ individuals, the French group remains the most consistently “criminal” with 28 criminals turned terrorists out of 69 individuals (40%), followed by Spain with “just” 7%.

Crime-Terror Nexus by country



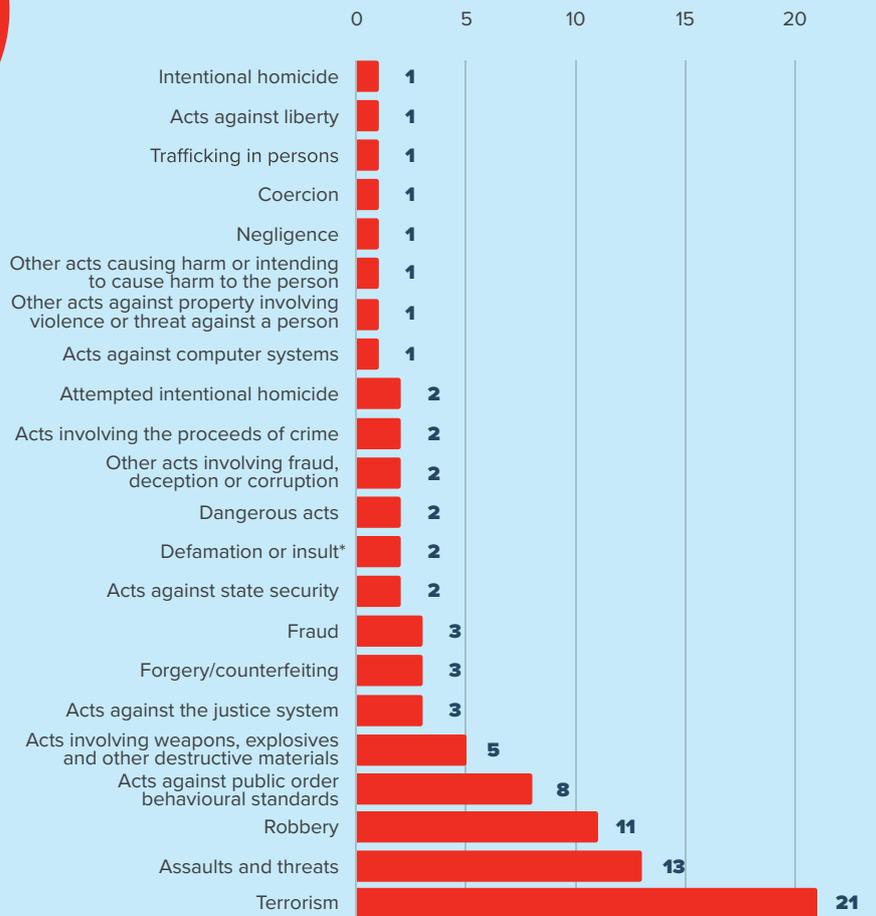
Petty vs Severe criminality



Petty Crime

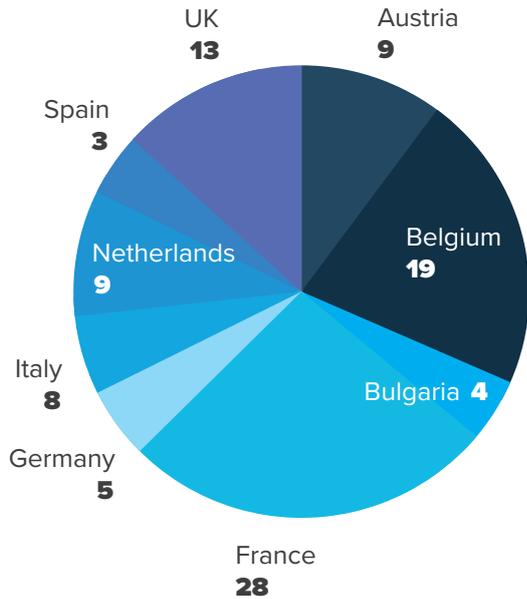


Severe Crime



*individuals committing defamation were also arrested for illegal possession of weapons or explosives
 Petty crime in blue, severe in red, all crime coded in Level 2 of the ICCS by the UNODC.³¹

Criminals turned terrorists by country



Out of the 98 criminals turned terrorists in the current dataset, 55% or 54 individuals—less than the 70% in the sample of 56 individuals in last year’s Midterm Report—had, as a result of their pre-2015 arrest, been sentenced to a prison term. They had completed their sentence and in 2015 were either jailed for a terrorism offence, killed while staging a terrorist attack, expelled from a given country on the back of their presumed terrorist connections or were fugitives from justice because of their terrorist activities.

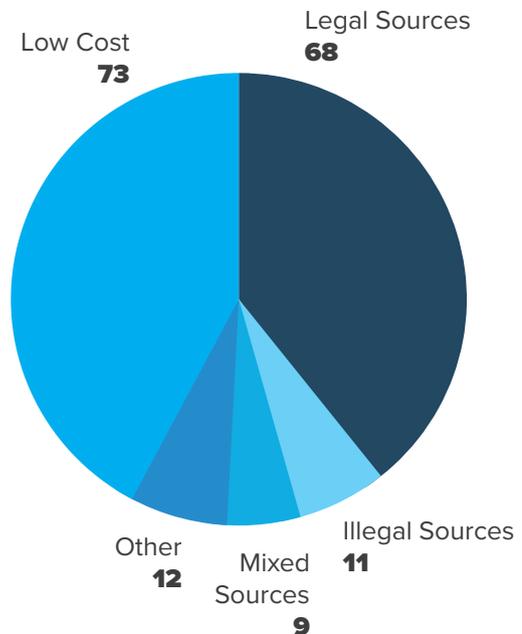
Last year’s Midterm Report claim that severe criminality has so far been underappreciated in deliberations on the crime-terror nexus still holds, as the dataset includes comparable numbers of “just” petty criminals (40) and “just” severe criminals (32) with 15 who were involved in crimes of both types.

The quantitative analysis of the prior criminal history of the individuals coded in the database leads to a definite conclusion that petty and hardened criminals have a very similar representation. If one moves away from individuals to specific crime records, the prevalence of severe criminality (87 instances as opposed to 43 of petty criminality) is in fact strongly pronounced throughout the dataset. Furthermore, the discovery of repeat offenders underlines the severity of the “ordinary” criminal experience within the ranks of the crime-terror nexus. Consequently, at times, it looks as if there exists a severe crime-terror nexus but, as we stated in our Midterm Report, one should not discount the possibility that petty crimes will always be underappreciated in such studies. The researchers, and frankly, the police, will never

be able to account for each and every instance, e.g., of drug pushing, by a given individual.

As with last year’s findings, we stand by the assertion that terrorism financing in Europe is to a larger extent legal in nature with 68 individuals included in the dataset (of 173 cases on which there are data, or 39%, or, alternatively, 21% of the total caseload) using legal sources, mainly salaries, savings, and benefits to support their terrorist careers. Much smaller numbers, 11 and 9 individuals respectively, either utilise illegal or mixed legal/illegal sources to finance their terrorist endeavours. At the same time, it is important to mention that actually **the largest category by number (73, 42% of 173 cases on which there are data, or 22% of the total caseload) are those who did not seek additional sources of funding while attempting to progress into terrorism, effectively pursuing low-cost terrorism (preparation of attacks with widely available tools, e.g., knives or the distribution of terrorist propaganda through their private or secret social media channels).** In this sense, the cost of such activities is mostly associated with the fact that during the time they devoted to terrorist activities, they were unable to earn money via other, also legal, activities.

Financing of terrorist activities



Radicalisation

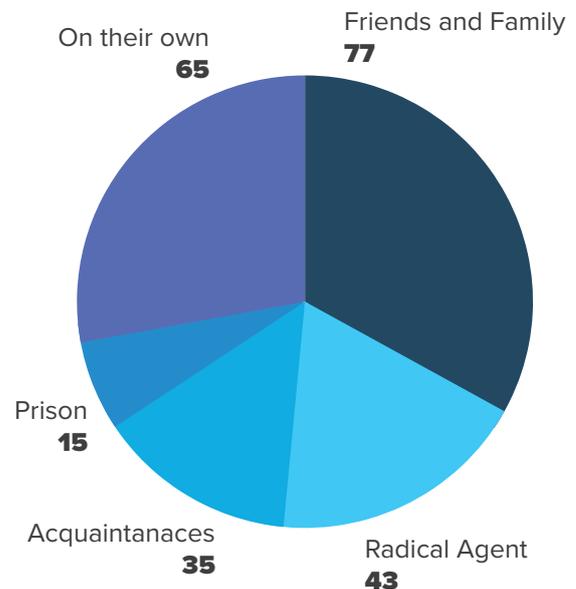


An individual’s experience with European jihadism is predominantly a mid- to long-term process, with 167 of the 178 individuals on whom there are data first exposed to radical ideology at least more than 6 months before their 2015 arrest, death in a terrorist attack, or expulsion for alleged terrorism association. **Amongst the 167, the largest group (55 individuals) had begun their radicalisation more than 5 years before 2015. More (91 others) began this process more than a year prior to 2015.**

Our research demonstrates that prison is not necessarily the key ground for radicalisation with only 15 of the 235 on which there are data radicalised during their imprisonment (6.5% or a mere 5% of the total caseload). This, given that the dataset contains more than 54 individuals who had been imprisoned prior to their 2015 terrorism arrest, death in a terrorist attack, or expulsion for alleged terrorism association, and the focus given to prison as a potential hub of jihad in Europe,³² is an underwhelming result. At the same time, in 77 cases (33% of this subset or 24% of the total), family and friends played a role in a given individual’s radicalisation, in 43 cases, a mentor, or a jihadi entrepreneur, played the main role, and in 35 cases, acquaintances played the dominant role.³³ In 65 cases, the individual sought out exposure on his/her own. The authors consider it important to note

that radicalisation can be a result of a mix of various factors and it holds true for this dataset too. Different combinations of radicalising agents were registered in 53 cases. However, clean-cut categories prevail, with 179 cases of only one of the above-mentioned factors acting as the vehicle through which radicalisation was conducted.

Radicalisation factors

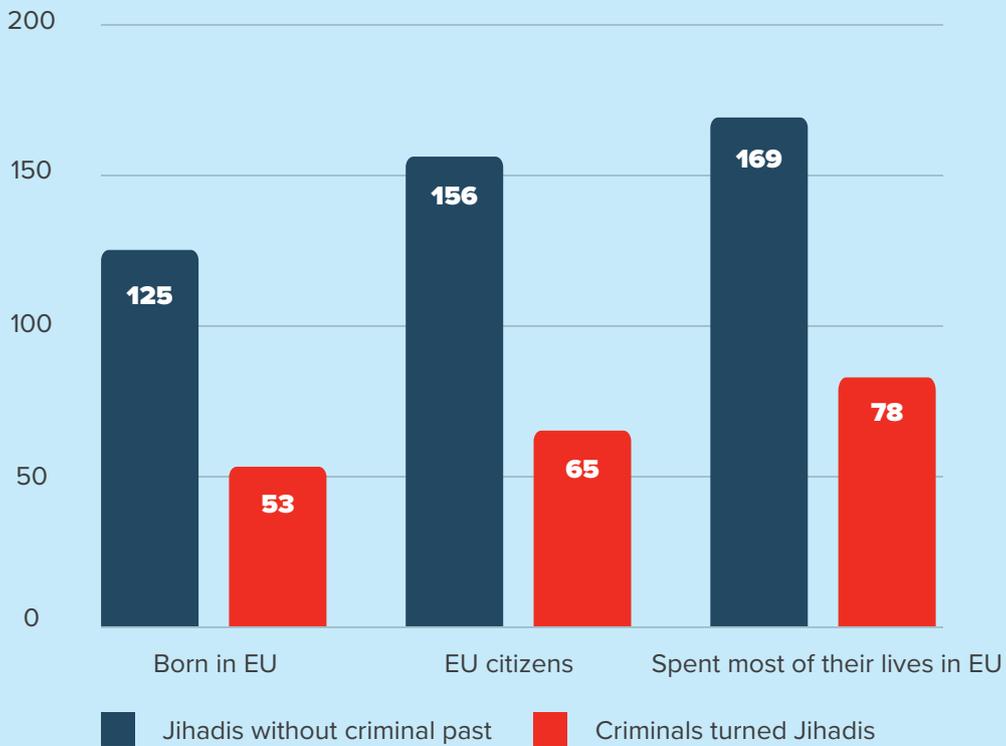


Homegrown

European jihad is a homegrown phenomenon with 75% of the total dataset consisting of individuals who spent most of their lives in the EU, including 80% of the criminal subset (78 out of 98). Additionally, at least 178 jihadis included in the dataset (55% of the total) were born in the EU and 221 (68%) had been EU citizens. However, that also means that there exists a significant group of European jihadis who are not EU citizens (87) or who had been naturalised

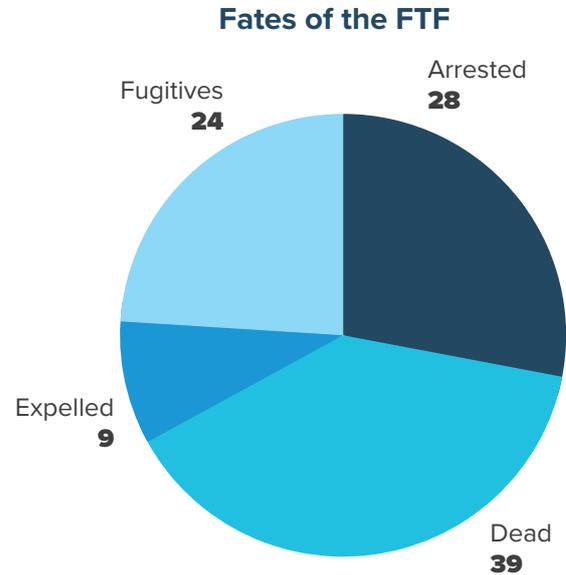
later (18 people). These two subsets—in total 109 people out of 326—point to the fact that **while European jihadism is truly European as far as its adherent and supporters are concerned, it is also partly animated by external factors and inputs by individuals from the broader MENA or South Asia.**

Homegrown phenomenon



Foreign fighters

European jihadism has certainly been about foreign fighting in a non-European jihad with as many as 107 individuals included in our dataset with such experience under their belts. We are conscious, however, that with the territorial demise of ISIS, this high ratio will not hold for other subsets of European jihadis, and in fact, would have been lower had the study covered the years 2016-2019. **At the same time, we are not of the opinion that travelling to foreign wars will cease to exist, as the formative experience of European jihadis in the dataset includes individuals who travelled not only to Syria or Iraq but Pakistan, Yemen, and North Africa.** It is therefore likely that the emergence of any new jihadi battlefield could attract some Europeans. Interestingly, 37 of the FTFs included in the dataset (35%) also belong to the criminals-turned-terrorists subset and have a history of a pre-2015 arrest. 24 of these committed severe crimes and 11 had been arrested for terrorism prior to 2015. As many as 24 are fugitives from justice and 39 are dead.



Solo Actors

Our previous report also focused on the issue of lone-actor terrorism. At that time, we found 3 who could possibly be called “solo actors”, but this number has been reduced to 1. All of this despite the fact that 107 of the 326 individuals were arrested alone (33%) and not in a large counterterrorism raid “netting” numerous arrestees. This might have suggested a more solo-oriented approach to terrorism but proved not to have been the case when referenced with other variables in the dataset, i.e., family members or friends, or close associates aware of their activities or directly involved in terrorism or that the individual was in direct contact with ISIS.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Europe clearly **“has not won its war on terrorism”**—a detailed study of individuals involved in European jihad in 2015 demonstrates that the threat will be making its presence felt in Europe for years to come.
2. The longevity of the threat is demonstrated by three of the issues discussed in this report: the role of foreign fighters as force multipliers; the issue of recidivism amongst terrorism prisoners and their pending releases; and the potential for the growth of the standing of women within terrorism networks.
3. The fall of the “Caliphate” seemingly minimises the risk to Europe from FTFs who, to some extent, lost their travel destination. Some of them, however, will seek new conflict zones, as was the case with the jihadis of 2015 and earlier, and others will return or be repatriated to Europe. Their life stories will be deployed as **narrative force multipliers** for a future generation of jihadis. This could mean that in certain cases, the swifter their repatriation or conclusion of court proceedings in their cases, the lesser their “narrative” value for the jihadi milieu in Europe.
4. A surprisingly high number of jihadis who are imprisoned in Europe are **recidivists** and amongst them, one would find a subcategory of **terrorist recidivists**. Their presence in the jihadi ranks indicates that in the future, given their relatively early prison releases, such individuals are likely to return to their pre-arrest activities and once again attempt to engage in terrorism. Special attention must be paid to them both while in and outside prison.
5. Women were said to play a distant second fiddle to men in European jihadism. Given the roles they play, however, which are certainly **not that of “jihadi brides,”** serious potential for growth in their standing in jihadist networks exists in Europe. European CT strategies should, therefore, go beyond the “bride” paradigm and prepare for more terrorist challenges animated by or orchestrated by females.
6. The crime-terror nexus in Europe truly is a **“poor man’s crime-terror nexus” as its representatives are former relatively unsuccessful criminals whose jobs do not amount to bringing in a sizeable skillset to their new terrorist patrons.** Moreover, evidence suggests that the terrorist organisations or networks employing them do not necessarily take full stock of their experience and utilise them in different roles, i.e., not employing their criminal specialities in terrorist activities. If, however, **a given criminal career takes place in an area with a history of jihadi activities (be it recruitment, plots, proselytizing etc.), and the individual’s family and friends are known to the security authorities for their radical activities, involvement and sympathies, then adequate resources should be utilised to ascertain the extent to which the individual could be progressing along a private crime-terror continuum.**
7. While establishing if that is the case, however, the authorities should refrain from generalisations and ensure a wider understanding of the phenomenon at hand is developed. This necessitates investment in **long-term projects devoted to what we could call the phenomenon of “football buddies.”** By such “buddies” we mean, e.g., individuals who have known the radicals in their area, spent time with them, in some cases were also radicalised but never opted for terrorism involvement. Such projects would therefore also look at criminals and former criminals who could but never did move farther along the crime-terror nexus axis. Clues as to what radicalisation entails and how it truly operates could lie within the answers provided by such endeavours.

NOTES

- ¹ The Bulgarian subset includes 7 individuals arrested in the late months of 2014 or early months of 2016. These cases are included in the dataset as they were related to other arrests in 2015. However, in other cases, very little is known of the arrestees as, e.g., they were intercepted on the way to the Middle East via Bulgaria, and hardly constitute outright “Bulgarian” cases. Consequently, Bulgaria does not qualify as a top 11 terrorism arrestee EU country (as listed by Europol’s TE-SAT report of 2016, see: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2016>).
- ² See: B. Schuurman, “Topics in terrorism research: reviewing trends and gaps, 2007-2016,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2019, pp. 463-480 for an excellent rundown of trends in terrorism research.
- ³ See: https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GLOBSEC_WhoAreTheEuropeanJihadis.pdf.
- ⁴ See: <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-hasnt-won-the-war-on-terror/>.
- ⁵ See: <https://icsr.info/2015/01/26/foreign-fighter-total-syria-iraq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/>.
- ⁶ See: <https://www.vrt.be/vrtnws/en/2019/05/25/belgian-jihadi-brides-escape-from-kurdish-detention-camp/>.
- ⁷ See: <https://www.france24.com/en/20190611-repatriation-families-islamic-state-group-jihadists-children>.
- ⁸ See: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo-syria/kosovo-brings-back-fighters-families-of-jihadists-from-syria-idUSKCN1RW003>.
- ⁹ See: <https://icct.nl/publication/the-need-to-maintain-control-over-militant-jihadists/>.
- ¹⁰ See: <https://euobserver.com/tickers/145534>.
- ¹¹ See: <https://ctc.usma.edu/military-interventions-jihadi-networks-terrorist-entrepreneurs-islamic-state-terror-wave-rose-high-europe/>.
- ¹² See: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-48414670>.
- ¹³ See: note 2, p. 25.
- ¹⁴ See: <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/The-Input-Pathways-to-Jihad.pdf>.
- ¹⁵ See, e.g.: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/10/iraq-seeks-multibillion-fee-to-receive-isis-prisoners-from-syria>.
- ¹⁶ See: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/unsustainability-isis-detentions-syria>.
- ¹⁷ See, e.g.: Andrew Silke’s presentation at the 2019 Society for Terrorism Research Annual conference on this very topic and Liesbeth van der Heide, Bart Schuurman, “Reintegrating Terrorists in the Netherlands: Evaluating the Dutch approach,” *Journal for Deradicalization*, Winter 2018/2019, nNo. 17, <https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/governance-and-global-affairs/isga/reintegrating-terrorists-in-the-netherlands.pdf>.
- ¹⁸ See: Omi Hodwitz, “The Terrorism Recidivism Study (TRS): Examining Recidivism Rates for Post-9/11 Offenders,” *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 13, no. 2 (April 2019), https://www.jstor.org/stable/26626865?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents.
- ¹⁹ Badi Hasisi, Tomer Carmel, David Weisburd, Michael Wolfowicz, “Crime and Terror: Examining Criminal Risk Factors for Terrorist Recidivism,” *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, June 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-019-09415-y>.
- ²⁰ See: <http://www.leparisien.fr/faits-divers/un-projet-d-attentat-fomentee-en-prison-dejoue-31-07-2019-8126709.php>.
- ²¹ See: Andrew Silke, “Risk assessment of terrorist and extremist prisoners,” in Andrew Silke (ed.), *Prisons, Terrorism and Extremism: Critical Issues In Management, Radicalisation and Reform*, London: Routledge, 2014.
- ²² Marc Hecker, an authority on jihadism in France, claims that between mid-2018 and the end of 2019, 50 individuals convicted of terrorism offences plus an additional 450 deemed radical will be released from French prisons. See: https://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2018/07/12/jihadi_prisoners_the_fear_of_recidivism_112842.html.
- ²³ Who Are the European Jihadis..., p. 17.
- ²⁴ See: https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GLOBSEC_WhoAreTheEuropeanJihadis.pdf, p. 19.
- ²⁵ See: <https://ctc.usma.edu/daesh-diaspora-challenges-posed-women-minors-fall-caliphate/>.
- ²⁶ See: <https://twitter.com/bjoernstritzel/status/1147062826458079232?s=12>.
- ²⁷ See: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/how-the-mastermind-of-the-paris-attacks-was-helped-by-one-woman-and-turned-in-by-another-a6978541.html>.
- ²⁸ See: <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/europe/article/2018908/three-french-women-charged-terror-offences-over-notre-dame-gas>.
- ²⁹ See: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-syria-camp-al-hol-paypal-telegram-online-crowdfunding-a9021006.html>.
- ³⁰ See: https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GLOBSEC_WhoAreTheEuropeanJihadis.pdf.
- ³¹ The breakdown of crimes described in the figure “Petty vs Severe criminality” has been organised according to the International Classification of Crimes for Statistical Purposes (ICCS) developed by the UNODC. The reason for choosing this classification is twofold. First, it solves the challenge of unifying the various terminology of national legislation by providing an international standard. And second, it has provided a framework to categorise the various pasts of the studied individuals into blocks of petty, hard, and mixed criminals. For the purposes of a unified classification, Level 2 of ICCS was used.
- ³² See: Who Are The...?, p. 25.
- ³³ These categories overlap in some cases.





▶ Polus Tower II
Vajnorská 100/B
831 04 Bratislava
Slovak Republic

▶ +421 2 321 378 00
▶ info@globsec.org
▶ www.globsec.org