

1 Extremist Offender Management in Belgium

Thomas Renard, Egmont Institute

The presence of terrorist convicts in prison is not a new phenomenon in Belgium. In the 1980s and 1990s, several individuals were jailed in connection with far-left terrorism, such as the Communist Combatant Cells, and Islamist terrorism, notably linked to the Algerian Armed Islamic Group and the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group. This was a small number of individuals overall, and essentially never more than a dozen inmates linked to terrorism at any moment in the 1990s and 2000s. In contrast, in the context of the unprecedented mobilisation for the Syrian jihad, the number of terrorist convicts and ‘radicalised inmates’ has increased significantly in the past decade, from less than 30 in 2013 to over 200 in 2017.

Recruitment and radicalisation may have been occurring in Belgian prisons during the previous waves of terrorism, particularly with the first jihadist convicts in the 1990s. However, that phenomenon was less visible, or at least less observed as it was simply not a priority for the authorities and security services at the time. In fact, very little was done to monitor violent extremists in prison before 2015. As it will be argued in this paper, it is only in the context of the threat linked to Islamic State (IS) that Belgian authorities developed specific policies and tools to address this challenge.

Prison Radicalisation: An Overview

There were 165 inmates linked to terrorism and radicalisation at the end of May 2020, according to the penitentiary administration, the Directorate General of Prison Establishments (*Direction Générale des Établissements Pénitentiaires*, DG EPI).¹ This figure might be higher according to the State Security Service (VSSE), Belgium’s domestic intelligence service, which adopts a broader understanding of radicalisation. In 2018, the VSSE considered there was up to 450 inmates ‘radicalised’ or ‘vulnerable to radicalisation’; almost twice as many as the count of DG EPI at the time.² However, these inmates remain marginal compared to the overall prison population, representing 1.7% of all 9,634 inmates³ (or slightly more if one uses the data from the intelligence service). Except for five individuals connected to far-right extremism, all ‘radicalised’ inmates are linked to jihadist terrorism.

¹ Email exchange with CelEx, 29 May 2020.

² ‘450 détenus considérés comme radicalisés en Belgique’, *Belga*, 29 May 2018.

³ Many inmates have benefited from an early release or a suspension of sentence during the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, just before the pandemic reached Belgium, there were still 10,825 inmates.

The inmates monitored by the penitentiary administration's Extremism Cell (*Cellule Extrémisme* CelEx), hereafter named 'CelEx inmates', are divided into five categories:⁴

- *Category A*: Terrorist convicts (individuals convicted based on a terrorist offence, according to the penal code)
- *Category B*: Terrorist assimilated (individuals who were either convicted in a case linked to terrorism or whose behaviour is clearly linked to violent extremism)
- *Category C*: Terrorist fighters (this includes foreign fighters and homegrown fighters)
- *Category D*: Radicalised (individuals convicted for non-terrorism related crimes, but who show signs of radicalisation)
- *Category E*: Hate preachers

As of February 2020, among 177 CelEx inmates, category C was by far the largest group, with 77 inmates (44%). This indicates that the unprecedented magnitude of radicalisation in prison is linked to the unprecedented mobilisation for the jihad in Syria and Iraq. In addition, there were 41 inmates in category D (23%), 25 in category B (14%), 28 in category A (16%), and 6 in category E (3%). It should be noted that category A is underestimated since convicted terrorist fighters and preachers remain in the respective categories C and E.

Originally, returning foreign fighters represented a significant share of the CelEx inmates and a serious cause of concern, triggering increased policy attention on terrorism and radicalisation. With time, however, returnees have come to represent only a small fraction of the CelEx inmates, reflecting an evolution of the terrorist threat and a shift in the concern of authorities towards radicalisation and homegrown terrorism (see Figure 1). As of May 2020, there were 33 returnees still in prison (29 men and 4 women). In total, 76 returnees (63 men and 13 women) have been incarcerated at one point, even if sometimes just for a few days in preventive detention. Among the 135 Belgian returnees, about 70% have been convicted. Of the remainder, 10 have died (mostly during attacks), a number are detained abroad, some are still free but awaiting trial, while others were minors and therefore could not go to prison.

Regarding sentences, about 50% of the CelEx inmates were sentenced to less than 10 years in prison, which means that they are eligible for probation relatively soon. 20% were convicted to less than 5 years.⁵ The vast majority of returnees were sentenced to 3–5 years in prison, with an average sentence of 6.6 years for men and 5.8 years for women.

In terms of socio-demographics, CelEx inmates are mostly males (96%) in their twenties (29%) or thirties (48%).⁶ As of December 2018, 61% of the CelEx inmates had Belgian citizenship (with most having a second nationality and/or being of immigrant descent, mostly from Morocco), while individuals from the Maghreb represented the majority of the non-Belgians (16% from Morocco, 7% from Algeria).⁷ Of the

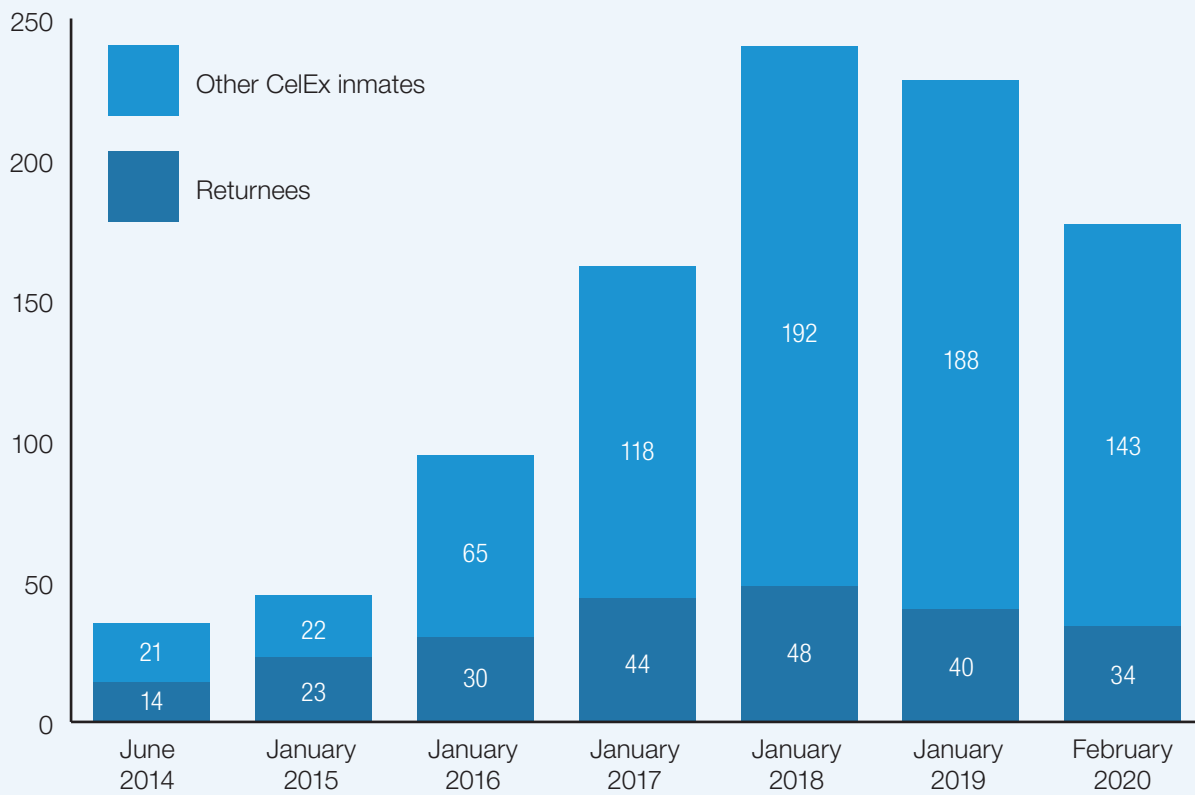
⁴ As of 2020, CelEx is using nominal categories for inmates, distinguishing between terrorist convicts, foreign fighters, homegrown fighters, hate preachers, radicalised or assimilated inmates, as well as any potential combination of these categories. However, since CelEx had been using the five categories referred to in the text since 2015, we consider it relevant and useful to continue referring to these categories.

⁵ Information shared by the Coordination Unit for the Threat Analysis (CUTA) with the author, June 2019.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Fabienne Brion, 'Qui sème le vent...Vers une évaluation du plan d'action contre la radicalisation dans les prisons', in Fabienne Brion, Christian De Valkeneer & Vincent Francis (eds.), *L'effet radicalisation et le terrorisme* (Brussels: Politeia, 2019), pp. 57-81.

Figure 1: Composition of CelEx inmates, 2014–20



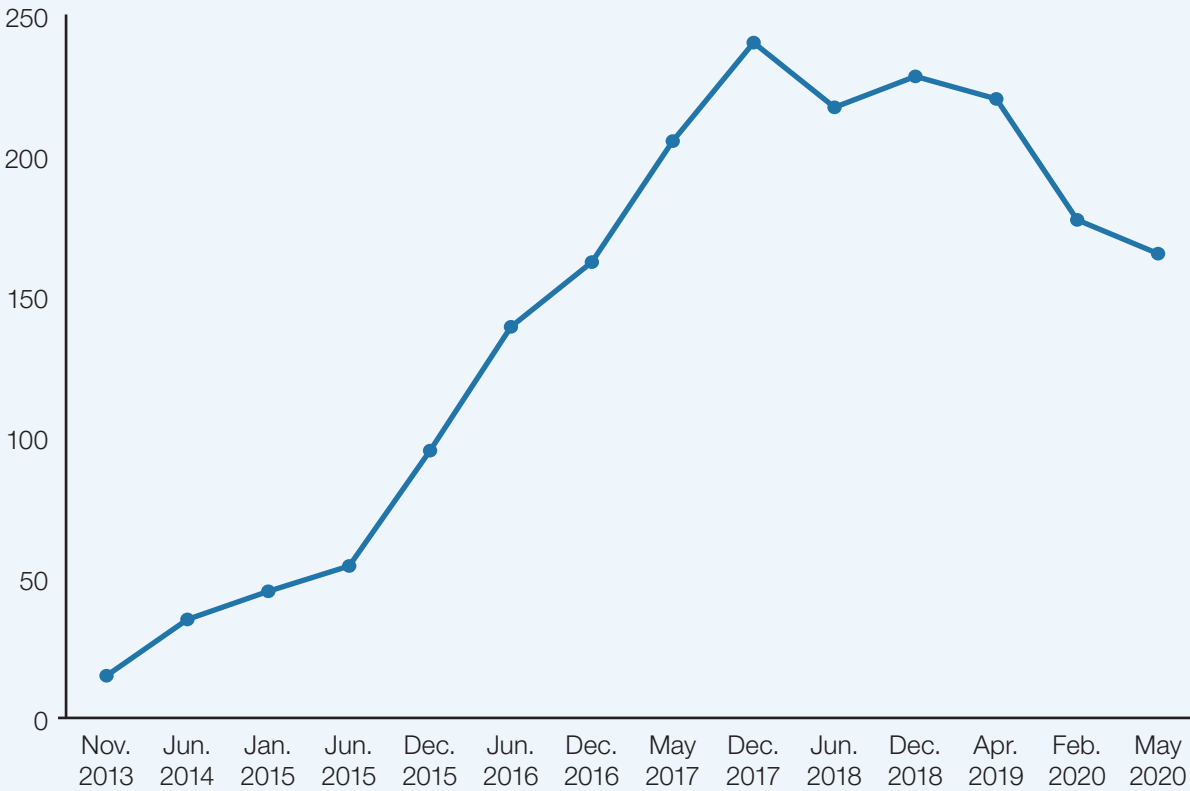
Source: Thomas Renard, based on CelEx data and CUTA data

foreign inmates, a good number of them (about a third of categories B and C) were either deprived of their right to stay in Belgium, or that right was under examination.⁸

In terms of their psychological profile, a DG EPI study on a small sample of CelEx inmates (N=52) found that a very significant majority had a form of mental disorder, mostly antisocial or narcissistic personality traits. Some individuals were diagnosed with psychiatric troubles, notably forms of psychoses or temper issues. Furthermore, a majority of the sample had been or was still confronted with drug or alcohol consumption. Finally, half of the sample suffered from at least two concurrent issues (e.g. a personality disorder and substance abuse), and one in ten suffered from three simultaneous issues. However, it should be highlighted that the sample is too small to draw any definite conclusions, and it is unclear how much these rates differ from the ordinary prison population, given the lack of data-driven study on these aspects.⁹

⁸ Ibid.
⁹ Information shared by the Coordination Unit for the Threat Analysis (CUTA) with the author, June 2019.

Figure 2: Number of CelEx inmates, 2014–2020



Source: DG EPI (CelEx) & VSSE

Future Trends

There are some signs that radicalisation in prison may be slowing down or becoming more latent (see Figure 2). The number of CelEx inmates is decreasing since 2018, notably as a result of the release of terrorist convicts and radicalised offenders (33 CelEx inmates will be eligible for release in 2020, and 27 in 2021).¹⁰ This natural decline is further complemented by a somewhat less attractive jihadist narrative to vulnerable inmates in the post-caliphate era, and fewer proactive recruiters in prison compared with a few years ago.¹¹ Indicative of the effect of these combined trends, security services and the penitentiary administration revised the list of individuals considered to be ‘vulnerable to radicalisation’ (category D) from 68 in April 2019 to 41 in February 2020.¹²

This downward trend is not irreversible. A resurgence of IS, al-Qaeda or any other group could revive the jihadist narrative, while more foreign fighters could still return from Syria and populate Belgian prisons. Before the Turkish offensive in northern Syria in October 2019, there were 54 Belgian adult foreign fighters (20 men and 34 women)

¹⁰ This includes 16 CelEx inmates reaching the end of their sentence in 2020, and 17 in 2021 (Email exchange with CelEx, 29 May 2020).
¹¹ Interview with CelEx, 5 February 2020.
¹² Interview with CelEx, 5 February 2020; ‘Moins de condamnés pour terrorisme et de personnes radicalisées dans les prisons en 2019’, *Belga*, 10 January 2020.

detained there by the Kurdish forces.¹³ Some of these foreign fighters are known to be hardliners who could seek to use Belgian prisons for recruitment or networking purposes.

It is impossible to predict how many will actually return. The Belgian government has consistently refused to repatriate foreign fighters, but a partial change of position cannot be entirely ruled out given the evolving situation in Syria (where instability creates higher risks of escapes or releases), the public statements of key Belgian counterterrorism stakeholders in favour of repatriation (such as the Federal Prosecutor or the Head of the Coordination Unit for the Threat Analysis),¹⁴ as well as recent court decisions forcing the Belgian State to repatriate several families in 2019.¹⁵ Meanwhile, some Belgian foreign fighters escaped Kurdish camps in late 2019,¹⁶ amid the chaos of the Turkish offensive, and may return home to Belgium.¹⁷ At least one other Belgian woman reportedly escaped in April 2020, although she was later recaptured.¹⁸

Though the return of every male fighter would not dramatically affect the ratio of violent extremist offenders in prison, the return of all female IS members could be more challenging. Indeed, while there are only nine women among the 165 'radicalised' inmates (as of May 2020), the return of about 30 women detained in Syria would result in jihadist females representing 9.1% of the total female prison population of 427 inmates. Furthermore, some of the women who remained with IS until the last battle in Baghuz have been proselytising in the Kurdish camps (chiefly in al-Hol), and they could seek to achieve the same in Belgium. The ability of female penitentiary institutions to properly handle these returnees (in terms of monitoring or differentiated detention regimes, for example) would largely depend on the pace of returns: a massive return would be much more challenging than a progressive, limited inflow of returnees.¹⁹

The Penitentiary Response

Belgium did not adopt specific policies to deal with terrorism and radicalisation in prison until recently. As highlighted in a report of the oversight committee of the Belgian intelligence services ('Comité R'), in the early 2000s terrorist convicts were neither monitored in prison nor after their release, notably due to a lack of resources.²⁰ As a result, little information exists on the possible cases of recruitment or radicalisation during these years. Although prisons had been identified as a priority axis of intervention in the country's 2006 action plan against (violent) extremism, 'Plan Radicalism', this resulted in little action or initiatives. In his testimony to the Parliamentary investigative Commission on the 2016 Brussels attacks, the Head of the State

13 Thomas Renard & Rik Coolsaet, *New figures on European nationals detained in Syria and Iraq*, Egmont Institute, Research Note, 2019. A few more foreign fighters were known to be still fighting in the region of Idlib, Syria.

14 'Retour des djihadistes: "Quand on juge des crimes contre l'humanité, il faut parfois 30 ans"', *RTBF*, 14 October 2019.

15 'Un juge ordonne un nouveau rapatriement d'une djihadiste et son enfant', *Belga*, 4 December 2019; 'La Belgique doit rapatrier une mère belge et ses enfants de Syrie', *Belga*, 30 October 2019.

16 In the case of two women detained in the camp of Ain Issa, they were released by the Kurds and did not escape. However, escapes have been reported in other camps, notably al-Hol.

17 'Deux femmes belges de combattants de l'Etat islamique en Syrie passent en Turquie avec leurs 6 enfants', *RTBF*, 20 November 2019; 'Belges en Syrie: la veuve d'un combattant du groupe État islamique tente de rejoindre la Belgique', *Belga*, 21 November 2019.

18 Guy Van Vlierden, 'Weer een Belgische IS-vrouw op de loep in Syrië', *HLN*, 7 April 2020.

19 Interview with CelEx, 5 February 2020.

20 Comité R, *Rapport d'activités 2012*, Report from the Permanent Oversight Committee of the Intelligence Services, 2012, pp. 28-33.

Security Service recognised that not enough attention had been given to the phenomenon of radicalisation in prisons, certainly until 2015.²¹

The year 2015 was indeed a turning point for counter-terrorism in Belgium. Two main incidents fundamentally transformed the threat perception: the May 2014 attack against Brussels' Jewish museum by Mehdi Nemmouche, a French returnee fighter; and the January 2015 police raid against a terrorist cell in Verviers, which took place only a few days after the *Charlie Hebdo* shooting and *Hyper Cacher* siege in Paris. Many laws and policy measures were decided in the aftermath of those events as well as after the November 2015 Paris attacks. Prisons became a natural priority as more individuals were convicted for terrorism and sent to jail, while concerns over the risk of radicalisation in prison started to emerge in Belgium and across Europe.²²

Three significant prison-related policy developments followed. First, the federal government adopted an 'Action Plan against radicalisation in prison' in March 2015.²³ The plan – the first of its kind in the country – set two main objectives: to prevent the radicalisation of inmates, and to develop a specialised follow-up process for radicalised inmates. Second, a specialised unit (CelEx) was created within the central penitentiary administration in March 2015, which now has eight staff members,²⁴ to coordinate the implementation of the Action Plan. CelEx is tasked with centralising all relevant information from prison staff and external partners (police, intelligence services, prosecutor's office) to facilitate the detection or evaluation of radicalised inmates, and to make informed recommendations for the placement and detention regime (the 'CelEx regime') of these inmates. In a few years, CelEx has become one of the cornerstones of the Belgian approach to radicalisation in prison. Third, the State Security Service created a special unit (called CEGP), responsible for intelligence gathering in relation to (violent) extremism in prisons, in mid-2015. This unit grew from two to 12 staff members in three years. It can use all traditional intelligence-gathering techniques and feeds relevant information to other services such as CelEx.²⁵

Upon detention, and at least once every two months, potential CelEx inmates are screened, relying on information provided by penitentiary services (e.g. psychosocial services) and partner services (e.g. intelligence agencies). Specific instructions were circulated to guide and encourage the observation of certain behaviours. Psychosocial services use the VERA-2R risk-assessment tool to evaluate radicalised inmates. Based on these various sources of information, CelEx makes recommendations on detention regimes (such as a transfer to separated units) and individual security measures (such as more frequent cell or body searches, or restrictions on contacts with external visitors or other inmates), although the final decision is taken by the prisons' Director General.

With regard to the detention regime, Belgium favours a dispersal approach 'as much as possible'.²⁶ While terrorist inmates were originally dispersed among a small number of institutions (called

21 *Troisième Rapport Intermédiaire, Sur Le Volet 'Architecture De La Sécurité'*, Belgian Parliament, Doc 54 1752/008, 2017, 15 June, p. 228.

22 *Rapport d'activité 2017-2018, Veiligheid van de Staat (VSSE)*, 2018, pp. 16-17.

23 *Action plan against radicalization in prisons*, Federal Public Service Justice, 11 March 2015.

24 Several individuals were recruited in 2019.

25 *Rapport d'activité 2017-2018, Veiligheid van de Staat (VSSE)*, 2018, pp. 16-17.

26 *Action plan against radicalization in prisons*, p. 12.

'satellite prisons'), where penitentiary staff had been trained in priority (starting in 2015), CelEx inmates are now dispersed across prisons of the entire country. These inmates represent at most 6% of a specific prison's population (in Ittre).²⁷ Although dispersed, CelEx inmates are often subject to specific, individual security measures. Following her country visit to Belgium, the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, Fionnuala Ni Aolàin, criticised the lack of transparency leading to the imposition of such measures.²⁸

In April 2016, two special sections were opened in the prisons of Ittre and Hasselt for inmates seeking to proactively recruit for violent extremism or propagate their ideology. These so-called 'D-Rad:Ex units' can host up to 40 inmates in total. However, they have never reached their full potential, illustrating the preference of the penitentiary administration for the dispersal approach, and the use of separated units only as last resort. As of February 2020, 12 CelEx inmates were in D-Rad:Ex (including seven returnees), down from 22 in January 2018. While the penitentiary administration believes that these units were helpful to isolate individuals that had a clear profile of hardcore jihadist recruiters, it is unclear what role these units will play in the future, as these profiles have become much rarer recently.²⁹

Rehabilitation

The 2015 Action Plan against radicalisation in prison presents deradicalisation and disengagement as two possible options to be pursued. However, in practice, most efforts have been geared towards disengagement programmes. While some Islamic counsellors can engage in ad hoc deradicalisation efforts, there are no official 'deradicalisation' programmes as such in Belgium. Disengagement programmes, on the other hand, have been developed in a more organised manner.

In the Belgian federal context, the assistance and support to inmates (under which disengagement programmes fall) is a competence of the federated entities (the 'communautés') and not of the federal government. On the Dutch-speaking side, two members of the Flemish administration have been working with terrorist convicts or radicalised inmates since 2016, and two additional experts were recruited in 2019. On the French-speaking side, a specific institution, CAPREV (*Centre d'Aide et de Prise en charge de toute personne concernée par les Extrémismes et Radicalismes Violents*, Centre for the Assistance of People concerned by any Radicalism or Extremism leading to Violence), was established in 2016 to deal with radicalisation and violent extremism in general, including in prison. As a new institution, it took some time for the CAPREV to develop programmes and become active in prison, which did not begin before 2017. At the end of 2019, the Flemish experts were working with 31 inmates, while CAPREV was working with 33.³⁰

²⁷ Fabienne Brion, 2019.

²⁸ *Visit to Belgium – Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism*, Human Rights Council, United Nations, A/HRC/40/52/Add.5, 27 February 2019.

²⁹ Interview with CelEx, 5 February 2020.

³⁰ 'Een jaar na vrijlating verspreidt Jean-Louis Denis opnieuw zijn radicale visie', *De Morgen*, 9 December 2019; Email exchange with CAPREV official, 10 December 2019.

Dutch-speaking and French-speaking inmates can therefore receive different forms of support. However, both approaches offer voluntary, tailored programmes for each inmate, with a multi-disciplinary (touching on psychological support, trauma, individual resilience, religion, professional skills and reintegration projects) and multi-agency perspective. As a result, 'disengagement' programmes can in fact include aspects of 'deradicalisation'.

It is too early to evaluate the effectiveness of these programmes. Furthermore, not every CelEx inmate has benefitted from them: some had already exited prison before any of these programmes were on offer, while others simply refuse or are unable to take part in these voluntary programmes. In 2019, only 29% of the CelEx inmates (64 of 220) were participating in disengagement programmes. Nonetheless, an evaluation from Belgium's counterterrorism fusion centre, the Coordination Unit for the Threat Analysis (CUTA), concluded that about 44% (15 of 34 inmates) of the returnees in prison in 2019 were showing some signs of disengagement, while 64% (9 of 14 inmates) of the inmates who were prevented from travelling to Syria were similarly in a process of disengagement.³¹ These conclusions should be treated with caution: disengagement is a long, hazy process that is extremely difficult to measure. Furthermore, no correlation can be established between these results and the disengagement programmes initiated. That notwithstanding, these results are encouraging.

Thus far, no specific incidents – such as terrorist plots or attacks – have been linked to CelEx inmates within prison. The few incidents reported were 'ordinary' altercations between prisoners and guards, linked to the specifics of life in prison, such as when a returnee assaulted several guards in 2018 during the meal distribution, rather than because of political or ideological motives.³²

After Prison

Between 2012 and February 2020, 368 CelEx inmates were released (109 category A; 64 category B; 126 category C; 51 category D; and 18 category E).³³ All released offenders were linked to jihadist terrorism, except eight individuals linked to right-wing extremism. Sixty more CelEx inmates will be released in 2020 and 2021.³⁴

Their rehabilitation and reintegration are a key concern for the authorities. For instance, intelligence services are wary of a new wave of violent extremism resulting from released terrorist convicts (a 'recidivism surge'), noting that 'numerous' terrorist convicts from 2001 to 2011 travelled to Syria over the past few years.³⁵ However, a recent study based on all terror-related trials in Belgium since 1990 identified no more than 27 terrorist convicts who re-offended into terrorism, out of 557 terrorism convicts (4.8%).³⁶

Low rates of terrorist recidivism are further supported by the apparent disengagement of most released CelEx inmates. Two distinct studies by CUTA concluded that 84% of the 44 male returnees, 95% of the

³¹ Interview with CUTA official, Brussels, 16 October 2018; Email exchange with CUTA official, 21 November 2019.
³² 'Cinq gardiens de prison blessés par un "returnee" à Hasselt, le personnel en grève', *Belga*, 27 September 2018.
³³ Interview with CelEx, 5 February 2020.
³⁴ Lars Bové, '60 terroristen en geradicaliseerden verlaten dit en volgend jaar gevangenis', *De Tijd*, 6 May 2020.
³⁵ VSSE, 2018, p. 17.
³⁶ Thomas Renard, 'Overblown: Exploring the Gap Between the Fear of Terrorist Recidivism and the Evidence', *CTC Sentinel* 13:4 (April), pp. 19-29.

20 women returnees,³⁷ and 73% of the 64 ‘failed travellers’³⁸ have been showing signs of disengagement since their release.³⁹ However, a low risk of recidivism still is a potentially serious risk. As a result, the scrutiny of the security services remains essential to identify and monitor the minority of released terrorist offenders deemed of ‘high concern’ who could recidivate.

One particularly significant incident in this regard was the killing of two police officers and a passer-by in Liège on 29 May 2018. The perpetrator, Benjamin Herman, was a Muslim convert and multi-recidivist criminal who was on temporary release from prison. While he was known to be ‘radicalising’, his behaviour did not seem to justify placement on the CelEx list or monitoring from the intelligence services. The oversight committee of the intelligence services concluded in its annual report that the information available to the services did not indicate an imminent threat from Benjamin Herman.⁴⁰ The Liège attack nevertheless led to serious introspection among the penitentiary administration and increased vigilance from security services, but not to a fundamental shift of policy.⁴¹ Indeed, so far, none of the released CelEx inmates have been directly involved in a terrorist attack or plot.

In any case, CelEx inmates are not left unchecked upon release. They are often released under probation, which includes a set of conditions to be respected, such as participating in disengagement/deradicalisation programmes or meeting with psychosocial workers or the police. Probation measures are designed to help released offenders reintegrate into society while offering some security guarantees. At the end of 2019, eight former CelEx inmates were meeting with Flemish disengagement experts as part of their probation, while CAPREV was mandated to work with 34 former inmates.⁴²

Some inmates, however, are not offered probation, or even they are, refuse it. They are then released at the very end of their sentence, without conditions. This scenario can be concerning if it indicates continued jihadist engagement or confrontation against the authorities. Nevertheless, the absence of probation does not imply a lack of security measures. Indeed, every released terrorist offender, under probation or not, continues to be monitored through a combination of security and socio-preventive mechanisms. On the one hand, they are monitored individually through the so-called ‘Local Task Forces’, gathering representatives from the security services (CUTA, intelligence services, and police) at the judiciary district level, who can decide on tailored security measures.⁴³ On the other hand, former inmates can also benefit from socio-preventive counsel and support, either at their own request or as part of probationary measures. In this case, their evolution will also be discussed within the ‘Local Cells for Integral Security’ (LCIS), gathering municipal socio-prevention services (such as local police officers, officers for the prevention of

37 In a previous version of this study (2018), this figure was lower, at 75%, confirming the positive evolution of most returnees after their release over a longer period.

38 For ‘failed travellers’, the disengagement rate of men and women is similar, according to the study.

39 Interview with CUTA official, Brussels, 16 October 2018; Email exchange with CUTA official, 21 November 2019.

40 Comité R, *Rapport d'activités 2018*, Report from the Permanent Oversight Committee of the Intelligence Services, 2019, pp. 21-33.

41 Interview with CelEx, 5 February 2020.

42 ‘Een jaar na vrijlating verspreidt Jean-Louis Denis opnieuw zijn radicale visie’, *De Morgen*, 9 December 2019; Email exchange with CAPREV official, 10 December 2019.

43 LTF can have ‘strategic’ discussions, as well as ‘operational’ ones. In ‘operational’ configuration, LTF members discuss the situation of specific individuals, and practical measures to be adopted or discontinued – such as regular police visits, discrete surveillance, wiretappings, etc.

radicalisation, social workers, street educators, representatives from sports clubs or schools, etc.) under the chairmanship of the Mayor.⁴⁴

Importantly, most stakeholders in these two distinct platforms, as well as probation services, can have access to CUTA's 'common dynamic database', which contains consolidated information on most (but not all) former CelEx inmates.⁴⁵ As a result, their decisions can be informed by the necessary contextual information about the behaviour and evolution of these individuals before, during and after detention.

Conclusion

Radicalisation or terrorist recruitment in prison are not new phenomena in Belgium, but they have reached unprecedented magnitude in the aftermath of the Syrian conflict and the mobilisation of foreign fighters from Europe. This has created serious concerns among Belgian security services and policymakers, who since 2015 have adopted a series of measures to improve the monitoring of terrorist and radicalised inmates as well as minimise the risk of radicalisation of other inmates.

The overall Belgian approach is becoming more comprehensive, seeking to bridge security concerns (rehabilitation) and socio-preventive ones (reintegration), focus on disengagement without ruling out deradicalisation, and develop coherence between prison and post-release measures. The country's approach is also becoming more multi-agency, relying on the cooperation of a broad range of stakeholders inside and outside of prison. Furthermore, it requires cooperation between different layers of governance in the Belgian federal landscape, notably between the federal security and penitentiary services, the regional services in charge of disengagement and support to inmates (in prison and afterwards), as well as the municipal socio-preventive services (who may be mobilised after the release as well). Finally, the Belgian approach relies on an improved system of information-sharing between all relevant stakeholders, facilitated by the role of CelEx and CUTA's 'common dynamic database'.

The building of this type of multi-agency and multi-level cooperation is still work in progress. It inevitably takes time, and is burdened with legal and political difficulties. Perhaps this was too slow in the making, resulting in an absence of proper follow-up for a number of inmates who have already been released. Several specific aspects of the Belgian approach have also been criticised,⁴⁶ and there is always room for improvement. Overall, penitentiary policies remain the poor child of public policies, and much more could be done on rehabilitation and reinsertion of inmates – whether extremists or not. Yet, despite these legitimate criticisms, there are signs that policies are moving in the right direction, such as the decline of radicalisation in prison, disengagement among a majority of released terrorist offenders,

⁴⁴ Like LTFs, LCIS can have 'strategic' and 'operational' discussions. Operational discussions focus on specific psycho-social support that can be offered to radicalised individuals, as well as support for reintegration and resocialisation.

⁴⁵ CUTA's database contains information on foreign fighters, homegrown fighters, terrorist convicts, hate preachers and 'potentially violent extremists'. As a result, some inmates from categories B ('assimilated') or D ('radicalised') may not always be included in CUTA's database.

⁴⁶ See, notably, Fabienne Brion, 2019; and *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism*, 2019.

or low rates of recidivism. These positive evolutions are not necessarily a result of these new policies alone, as they are also linked to the declining attractiveness of the Islamic State, but this combination of a more able counter-terrorism approach with a more favourable context creates a window of opportunity to structurally weaken jihadism in Belgium.