

# 'Radicalised and terrorist offenders released from prison: involving and preparing communities and families'

This is an infographic of the recommendations on rehabilitation processes of radicalised and terrorist offenders as given by policymakers and practitioners during the Policy and Practice event on 'Radicalised and terrorist offenders released from prison: involving and preparing communities and families' of 19 September 2019 in Helsinki.

These recommendations will feed into the upcoming Rehabilitation Manual, which provides a more extensive overview on the topic.



## What can be the potential role of informal stakeholders like communities and families in the rehabilitation process?

- Informal actors such as families and key communities can be included in **assessing needs** in order to reduce, among other things, stigmatisation.
- Family and community members can both help to provide offenders with a **reality check** on the receptiveness of society and their community to their release, and be supportive actors in the rehabilitation process.
- Family members with a positive influence can help to identify key communities and serve as a connection between them and should therefore be the **first point of focus** in the rehabilitation process.
- Practitioners should ensure a **relationship of trust** between the family and communities and the offender and **prepare them on how to act and what to say to families, friends, peers and communities**. This can be done in an **open space discussion** with the involved social workers, prison/probation staff and a psychological team.
- Keep looking for windows of opportunity to involve positive individuals from families and communities. Accept this takes time as they need the trust in you and in their old environment.

## Challenges

- Information sharing between practitioners can be challenging:  
How can we involve informal actors within closed structures?  
How can we share information without causing stigmatisation?
- If the offender keeps on holding off early release, both formal and informal actors cannot do anything.
- If the family does not accept the offender, communities may feel that they should not do so either.

## What ways are there to facilitate and stimulate the role of communities and families in the rehabilitation process, and how is it possible to establish mutual trust between communities & families and institutions & authorities?



Creating an open mindset of communities to receiving released radicalised and terrorist offenders needs to be tackled on local, regional and national levels and may therefore be a long-term effort. How a community responds can be determined by, among other things:

- the national response and attitude in society towards welcoming foreign terrorist fighters and released terrorist offenders;
- framing of the media.

In order to facilitate the role of communities and families and establish mutual trust between them and institutions and authorities, the following things can be done:

- Establish a **city/local strategy** with a short and clear vision on reintegration of these offenders and translate this to several **tailored action plans**: for the released offender, the actors around him/her (with baseline information and on what support is available), and a wider action plan (how to ensure public safety).
- Authorities should have a **dynamic communication strategy**: show they do more than just communicating they understand the fear of society in having a released offender in their community. Different target audiences need different messages and different objectives need to be communicated on different levels
- Actors within the multi-agency setting can assist in the development of **tools** such as the Family Network Conferences, which can provide informal actors with a role in the rehabilitation process.
- Work on **sensibilisation campaigns** in areas of opposing forces to positively stimulate the environment that released prisoners will return to and focus on how to live together.
- Dealing with the media:**
  - prepare and counsel families and communities by for example, preparing statements with them;
  - consider getting in touch with trustworthy journalists to share the offender's testimonial of his/her new life;
  - consider inviting trustworthy media to (parts of) multi-agency meetings as well, to inform the society about the actions that are going to be taken.
- When communicating, do ensure that the **essence of the messages is aligned**, so **all authorities provide the same information**.
- The **size of the community matters** in the way that communities and families can be involved. A structured discussion format such as an **open dialogue forum (e.g. open library Q&A)** can help authorities of smaller communities to communicate their vision clearly and provide community members with an opportunity to express their feelings. Community workers and informal leaders can help to bring together relevant communities. Authorities should not deny or mitigate the problem but listen to their fears and try to mitigate these.

## Challenge & Inspiration

Having **one point of contact** within a multi-agency structure who is responsible throughout the rehabilitation process is important to build bridges with informal actors and to make sure their ideas and signals are shared within the group. However, in most EU Member States there is no clarity on who is responsible for the rehabilitation of radicalised and terrorist offenders.

**Inspiring practice in the RAN Collection:**  
Social Network Conferences Austria



## What ways are there to ensure community and family acceptance?

Apart from the basic needs of the offender (e.g. housing, work and education), a key element of effective reintegration and rehabilitation is that the relevant informal actors are accepting him/her. This can be stimulated by the following means:

- Conflict resolution methods such as **mediation** and **restorative justice processes** with an external mediator can stimulate a (healing) dialogue between parent and offender: discussing difficult topics and uneasy questions can help to identify potential worries of the family. Begin with this when the offender accepts changing his/her life or shows remorse. Start with separate discussions with the parents, siblings and the offender to rebuild the relationship gradually.
- While mediation and restorative justice is often difficult to start in prison, one can already start with systemic counselling in a safe space. Help the offender to empathise with the setting he/she will return to by posing the following questions:
  - What do you want?
  - What do your parents think?
  - What does society think?

- Make sure to **counter signs of polarisation** within society by:
  - selecting credible individuals (e.g. social workers or representatives of relevant communities) who could influence the wider public about false prejudices;
  - organising events to provide people with information and listen to their concerns.

- Work with key powerbrokers/change agents/role models to disengage the offender rather than working with the whole family or community. These are reliable partners with a personal connection to or similar background as the offender. It can be helpful to work with various powerbrokers:
  - Within the family: identify the person who has the power to rehabilitate the offender in the eyes of the family.
  - Within communities: identify someone who can advocate to make society more receptive.

- Ask the offender to **write a letter of apology** to his/her parents or community to send or as a way of reflecting on the consequences of past behaviour.

## Challenge & Inspiration

Working with the informal actors around the offender should be key in every approach, but sometimes relationships with the family or community are **too damaged to be restored**. In this case, a direct encounter between the parents and the offender will probably not work from scratch. Indirect ways to restore the relationship might be better, such as involving siblings or doing restorative justice with the victims (if possible). If this does not work, do not push but work on a positive self-image of the offender and allow them to make a new start in a different context.

**Inspiring practice in the RAN Collection:**  
Hayat Germany