

# The Reintegration of FTF Returning Children in the European Union

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## 1. THE CASIS PROJECT

The 'Counterterrorism And Safeguarding in response to Islamic State' (CASIS) project aims to critically analyse and map states' responses to young returnees from Islamic State, to understand differing state responses. It explores how states have acted towards minors seeking return from Iraq and Syria, with particular focus on repatriation and citizenship deprivation, as well as considering the wider impact this has on European solidarity and polarisation towards migration, and the challenge that counterterrorism policy poses to democracy and human rights.

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## 2. INTRODUCTION: RETURNING FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS' FAMILIES

Since the beginning of the conflict in Iraq and Syria<sup>1</sup>, approximately **5 000 individuals** from the EU have travelled to join fighting groups in these countries. Depending on the EU Member State, between **20 % and 50 %** of all these 'travellers' are reported to have **returned**.

There are also hundreds of Europeans currently being held in detention camps in northeast Syria<sup>1</sup>. Several reports<sup>2</sup> have emerged in recent years about the **dire living conditions in displacement camps** in Syria and Iraq, such as al-Hawl. The camps hold individuals who have fled Daesh territory, as well as those who were and sometimes still are connected to the terrorist organisation. **Al-Hawl** is currently (as of 2020) hosting over **68 000 people**. Approximately **11 000** of them are **women and children** from 62 countries<sup>3</sup>.

There is **no single, comprehensive profile** for FTF families, but some **general characteristics** can be identified according to the timing of their return.

The **first cluster** of individuals returned, mainly to the Balkans region from Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2018. For the most part, female returnees in the cluster have been **re-absorbed** into their micro-communities, while child returnees from this cluster have been attending school.

The **second cluster** of returnees were, for the most part, forcefully repatriated to their respective countries between 2019 and the summer of 2021. These **deportations** included a total of 196 men, women and children, with most of the latter having been born in the conflict zone. Reintegration efforts for this cluster have introduced a number of **security and socio-economic challenges**: from issuing birth certificates, to residency and citizenship, accommodation for mothers and children, access to health care and schools, as well psychosocial counselling and job opportunities. From a threat perspective, the vast majority of these returnees were captured and detained following the fall of Baghouz in March 2019, the last ISIL stronghold in the country. Based on the available evidence, it is assumed that these individuals would never have opted for a voluntary return, and many may remain ideologically affiliated with ISIL<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> EUROPOL, 'Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019 (TE-SAT)', 27 June 2019, p. 40; and EUROPOL, 'Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2021', 22 June 2021, p. 18.

<sup>2</sup> RAN FC&S multi-meeting, Conclusion Paper- [Dealing with returning children and their mothers from Daesh: taking stock and going forward](#) 11 June 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Christian Vianna de Azevedo, "ISIS Resurgence in Al Hawl Camp and Human Smuggling Enterprises in Syria", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 14:4, pp. 43 – 63, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Hoffman, Adam, and Marta Furlan. "Challenges posed by returning foreign fighters." Washington, DC: George Washington University, 2020.

Currently, a **third cluster** of more than 400 men, **women and children** is scattered across camps, detention centres or remaining at large in the **Idlib province**, bordering Turkey and in Syria. After almost three years in detention facilities and refugee camps, their rehabilitation and reintegration cases may prove even more challenging than for the previous two clusters of returnees. Up to eight percent of the current returnees are now recorded as women, and up to **20 percent as minors**<sup>5</sup>. These numbers are hard to gauge as each country records their returnees differently (e.g.: disaggregation by sex), and some do not make the figures publicly available. Despite not knowing the precise figure, however, these numbers give us an idea of the important dimension and considerable amount of children who will be falling under this category.

While a number of Member States have already repatriated children from Northern Syrian camps, **the majority of children from the EU** are still there. This means that significantly more resources will have to be mobilised in the eventuality of their return<sup>6</sup>. For all these reasons, it is important to **avoid a misrepresentation of the phenomenon**, and appreciate the nuances in needs and challenges that both women and child returnees pose.

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<sup>5</sup> Joana Cook and Gina Vale, "[From Daesh to 'Diaspora' II: The Challenges Posed by Women and Minors After the Fall of the Caliphate](#)," *CTC Sentinel* 12:6, pp. 30-46, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> RAN Practitioners, Conclusion Paper, [Small-scale expert meeting on Training for practitioners on dealing with returning children](#), 30 September 2021, online.

### 3. CHILDREN RETURNEES: KEY FINDINGS

According to a 2018 estimation, around **1000 children left together** with their parents for Syria and Iraq since 2012, and that some **600 were born there**. Importantly, the ratio of children returning is much **lower** than of women: around **1400 out of 1600** are estimated to remain in camps (not considering war and famine casualties)<sup>7</sup>.

For children and young people, **(re)integration, prevention and (if necessary) de-radicalisation** measures are particularly significant, as is cooperation between local authorities in these cases. The long-term outcome of the reintegration of children will largely depend on how the process is further managed and sustained. Tailored efforts are required to address trauma, compensate for the lack of formal education, navigate complex family arrangements, determine nationality and custody and address potential stigma and social alienation.

The main goal of DRR programmes is to provide child returnees with **safety** and **wellbeing** and to facilitate their **reintegration** into society. In terms of immediate needs, returnee children are in need of **safe housing** (undisclosed to the public), provision of legal **guardians** or host families if the mother is detained, **health-care** and **psychological support**, among other things. One of the most important needs of child returnees is **education**, which at the same time is the best tool to combat further radicalisation. Therefore, many reintegration plans start with education, even while children are at the camps, and activities that support **immediate schooling** and learning are strongly recommended. This helps the children and their mothers, by providing them basic skills in their (new) country, but also a **daily routine** and occasion to (re)build their confidence. Other needs can relate to **safe housing**, for example, which has to be made available, and kept undisclosed to the public.

The overall approach to the child returnees and their mothers is based on **trauma-informed work**. Trauma work focuses on **trust building**, openness and **transparency, empowerment** and acknowledging someone's life situation in the past and present<sup>8</sup>. Mental health practitioners must **continuously monitor** the children for signs of possible traumas that may show up at any time: immediately

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<sup>7</sup> Renard, Thomas & Coolsaet, Rik: [Children in the Levant: Insights from Belgium on the dilemmas of repatriation and the challenges of reintegration](#), Egmont Security Policy Brief, n 98, July 2018.

<sup>8</sup> RAN Practitioners, Conclusion Paper - "[Study Visit to Helsinki: the management of child returnees](#)", 1 December 2021, online.

upon arrival or after a few years. This approach calls for long-term commitment in both policy and practice.

An important difficulty in addressing the trauma suffered by these children is the role of the **father**. Practitioners have to acknowledge the **absence of a child's father**, either because he is deceased or because he remains in abroad. It can be exceedingly difficult for the children to deal with the **shame and or guilt** of what their parents did. The negative impact of an absentee parent figure is also an important factor to consider, regardless of their role while abroad (fighters or victims).

**Citizenship** is also an important administrative hurdle. One of the major challenges for authorities is **confirming the identity** of Syrian-born children of their citizens, especially when the mother has another child or children with father(s) of a different nationality. The **legal status** of these children remains unresolved in most of countries, presenting a significant barrier to their full reintegration into society.

Some sources have tended to generalise returnee children's experiences, but they are very different and depend on the child's **personal trajectory**: if they were born in Daesh or ISIL territories, the position of their fathers, their own ethnic background, etc.). Children in these territories were **considered adults from the age of 9** and/or when they show signs of puberty. This had severe consequences for their development and current challenges, adding a **gendered layer** to their trauma. For example, upon arrival in Daesh territory, boys from age 9 were usually separated from their family and sent to a *madafa* (a transitory house) for men. Similarly, when cities in Daesh territories were bombed, girls were usually evacuated with their mothers and younger male siblings, while **older boys were often left to their own responsibility** and had to survive on their own.

From a security perspective, child returnees are considered **primarily victims**; psychological support, securing a normal family environment and accessing education are paramount. At the same time, there is an awareness that reintegration is more challenging for children, chiefly for boys older than 9, who have been **indoctrinated or even militarily trained**<sup>9</sup>. A specific challenge is posed by **children of martyrs**, who have a specific status and could attract specific people (from the Islamist extremist sphere) who want to take care of the child and marry the mother.

It is also worth noting ways in which the reintegration of child returnees is **dependent or highly correlated with the reintegration of their mothers**. This is

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<sup>9</sup> RAN Practitioners, [Repatriated foreign terrorist fighters and their families: European experiences & lessons for P/CVE](#), 2021.

because most children have mostly returned accompanied by their mothers, with many of their fathers having being killed on the battlefield or being detained for their illegal activities.

Most of such women returnees arriving to Europe since the fall of the Caliphate in 2019, especially to Western European countries, belong to the third cluster of returnees, explained in the above section. These European travellers usually had **citizenship** - in some cases dual citizenship. Many, if not most, have a **migration background** and were born or grew up in Muslim families, but there are also a few prominent cases of converts. The women were usually teenage girls or young adults when they departed, between **15 and 30** years of age. Many women **returned with children** who had either been brought along on the initial journey or who were born abroad. The women had **diverse educational backgrounds** and they usually had **no employment** directly before departure.

Women returnees have both **immediate and short term needs** (health and psychological conditions) and **medium- and long-term needs** (finding new belief and identity structures and a sustainable livelihood). While some of these women were **perpetrators of violence** themselves, some have also faced **intensely traumatic experiences**: (sexual) violence, abuse, or the loss of loved ones. A major concern for this women is whether they will be **separated from their child** during and after detention. Thus, an important need is dealing with this separation, the legal procedures related to childcare, as well as the cooperation with actors such as child protection services. Moreover, support to the **reintegration of returnees' children** can in some cases also facilitate their own rehabilitation and reintegration.

In terms of reintegration and rehabilitation challenges, women face **additional stigma** upon return. Their communities may view them as transgressors, first for **supporting terrorism**, and second, for **breaching gender norms**. Practitioners need to consider how to work effectively with communities to mitigate stigma and scaremongering, while applying a gender sensitive approach to reintegration.

When considering gender, it is necessary to unpack both the specific experiences of women and men (including young boys) and accept that both genders can play the role of **victim or perpetrator**<sup>10</sup>. As a rule of thumb, **gender sensitive approaches** should be incorporated in all interactions with returnees, with a focus on meeting the **gendered needs** of returnees, be it men, women or children, and have an understanding that gender is a component of that person's **identity** and future development. There is also a need to adapt existing indicators and tools to

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<sup>10</sup> Katherine Brown, "[Gender-sensitive responses to returnees from foreign terrorist organisations: insights for practitioners](#)", RAN External Expert, 2021.

include gender-specific and gender-aware criteria and features. Gender sensitive processes and indicators should also be **culturally appropriate** to the returnee's community.

As of now, rehabilitation and reintegration approaches are mostly **tailored for the needs of male offenders**. For example, regular hours allow prisoners to go to work, but do not allow women to pick up children from school or kindergarten<sup>11</sup>. In principle, it is advisable to **facilitate the contact** of imprisoned mothers with their children, as separation can be very harmful and traumatic<sup>12</sup>. At the same time, the continued contact could help **reinforce women's identities** as mothers and **support their rehabilitation** process. Such needs are to be balanced with the needs of the children as well potential security threats.

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<sup>11</sup> Katherine Brown, "[Gender-sensitive responses to returnees from foreign terrorist organisations: insights for practitioners](#)", RAN External Expert, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Idem.

#### 4. EXISTING EU APPROACHES TO REHABILITATING AND REINTEGRATING CHILDREN FROM FTF FAMILIES

By now, European states have generally reached the conclusion that **the repatriation** of women and **especially children** is inevitable, not least to avoid larger security issues<sup>13</sup>. However, the process of repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of foreign terrorist' family members, including those currently located in detention centres and camps, raises complex challenges even beyond the reintegration of actual extremist foreign fighters. These concerns were reflected in the ***Strategic Orientations on a coordinated EU approach to prevention of radicalisation***<sup>14</sup>, addressing the priorities of the *Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU* adopted in December 2020.

In response to these developments, **policy makers, practitioners and researchers** have responded to the request to deepen and consolidate knowledge on **child returnees** and the **gender dimension** of returning FTF. While significant gaps exist in knowledge and practice, which we will explore in the last section, there have been some notable advances in the last years. In this section, we will explore the main existing frameworks for child returnee work, represented by pilot projects and flagship policy measures in Europe.

The following are three main areas of consensus, solidified by recent experiences in EU countries<sup>15</sup>, such as Finland (Helsinki), which have pioneered programmes for the reintegration of children. These areas of consensus revolve around the importance of five elements, which must be present and properly developed in any policy initiative targeting children returnees: multi-agency cooperation, trauma based psychological work, gendered approaches and strategic communications.

##### 4.1. Multi-agency work

Firstly, concerning the **institutional setup**, both for women and children, the macro-structures managing returnees should be **multi-agency in nature**, whereas the approach should be **individualised**, balancing security and social concerns, individual situations and needs. While child protection services and schools are the main actors in ensuring the safe reintegration of child returnees,

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<sup>13</sup> RAN Cross-cutting Thematic Event, Conclusion Paper- [Management of returning FTFs and their family members with a focus on returning women and children](#), 15 December, 14 and 15 December 2021.

<sup>14</sup> The full document for the SO 2021 is available [here](#).

<sup>15</sup> RAN FC&S multi-meeting, Conclusion Paper- [Dealing with returning children and their mothers from Daesh: taking stock and going forward](#) 11 June 2021; and RAN Practitioners, [Focus on Children – The challenge to reflect on values with imprisoned extremist parents](#), 2021.

for example, these need to function in the **context of a multi-agency approach**<sup>16</sup>. This means that **additional actors** are also involved, such as social care services, psychologists and healthcare actors, local authorities, schools, prison and probation services, employment services, sports and leisure organisations, religious and charity organisations, intelligence, police and so on.<sup>17</sup>

The role of education is likewise central to reintegration efforts. Many successful reintegration plans start with education, even while children are at the camps, and activities that support **immediate schooling** and learning once they arrive in their respective countries. Access to education can be hurdled by issues of citizenship and proper housing, so those often need to be addressed first. This is an example of how multi-agency work is **not only desirable but a necessary element** of reintegration programmes. Different national bodies need to establish agile and routinized framework of intervention in order for different elements of the reintegration efforts to flow smoothly.

#### 4.2. Trauma based approaches

A **trauma-based approach** to counselling and DRR programmes is absolutely necessary when dealing with returnees, especially for children. Trauma based work, especially at a counselling level, emphasizes **trust building, openness, transparency and empowerment** through the acknowledgement of one's situation in the past and present.

As we have seen, these children can suffer from severe trauma as a result from their experiences. **Child returnees** are considered primarily **victims**; psychological support is direly needed in processing traumatic experiences and securing normal life. At the same time, there is an awareness that **reintegration is more challenging** for those children, **chiefly boys older than 9**, who might have been **indoctrinated** or even **militarily trained**<sup>18</sup>.

There are, however, other areas where trauma based approaches are needed, for example, when children experience “survivor’s guilt” vis-à-vis **people from the camps**, which can influence their reintegration process and trauma processing. They **might want to go return to the camps** because they miss their friends, but it is also possible that they **feel guilty**, as they had the opportunity to escape the camps while their friends do not.

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<sup>16</sup> RAN Practitioners, [“The role of multi-agency cooperation in dealing with female returnees in prison and protecting the rights of children with imprisoned parents”](#), 5-6 April 2022

<sup>17</sup> RAN Practitioners, Conclusion Paper, [Small-scale expert meeting on Training for practitioners on dealing with returning children](#), 30 September 2021.

<sup>18</sup> RAN Practitioners, [Repatriated foreign terrorist fighters and their families: European experiences & lessons for P/CVE](#), 2021

Overall, trauma based work helps establish **relationships of trust** between practitioners and returnees. In turn, trust and effective partnerships between authorities, professionals and returnees are **essential to reintegration**. However, unclear or conflicting objectives, instrumentalising children returnees' and miscommunication **disrupts these efforts**, and thus **must be avoided**.

#### 4.3. Gendered approaches

As a rule of thumb, **gender sensitive approaches** should be incorporated in all interactions with returnees, focusing on meeting the **gendered needs** of returnees, be it men, women or children<sup>19</sup>. Indeed, practitioners have understood that gender is a component of that person's **identity** and future development, and thus should be incorporated in all levels of work: from counselling, education, professional development, etc.

Successful incorporations of gendered approaches take on an **intersectional approach**, and unpack the specific experiences of women and men (including young boys) and accept that both genders can play the role of victim or perpetrator, as well as suffer from trauma. It is necessary to adapt existing indicators and tools to include **gender-specific and gender-aware criteria and features**. Gender sensitive processes and indicators should also be culturally appropriate.

Appropriate gendered approaches to reintegration also combine **well-being models** (that address physical, mental, emotional and spiritual components), with **de-radicalisation and security models** (that focus on belonging, beliefs and behaviours of returnee women). Additionally, practitioners should work on (re)establishing women's identity as mothers, **strengthening their bonds with their children** and harnessing those women's existing motivations as drivers for reintegration.

Among some relevant proposals, chief is to **support family contact**, considered a significant resource for reintegration. Possible policies include the **design of child-friendly visiting rooms**, the potential for **parent-child encounters** outside prison, and easier access to **telephone contact** with the children. The goal is to create more everyday situations that **strengthen the bond between parents and children**.

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<sup>19</sup> Joana Cook and Gina Vale, "[From Daesh to 'Diaspora' II: The Challenges Posed by Women and Minors After the Fall of the Caliphate](#)," *CTC Sentinel* 12:6, pp. 30-46, 2019.

#### 4.4. Strategic communications

**Strategic communication** on returnees has also proven to be an important pillar in a country's P/CVE and R&R programmes<sup>20</sup>. The reason for it is that strategic communication helps frame community responses to returnees, be it through the distribution of positive narratives, through withholding information or by means of targeted communications to members of the multi-agency teams but not to the general public.

There is not general rule to strategic communications, as ultimately a country's choice of strategic communication will follow an **analysis of local priorities, context, needs and potential risks**. All countries, however, should have an **strategic communication plan** on hold, even if that plan refers mostly to the withheld of information from the general public. In the case of children, for example, **protection of identity** (especially in the case of children of high profile or "martyr" fighters) is paramount, in order to **avoid community backlash and attempts at radicalisation**. In the case of child returnees, these goals are mostly achieved through a **lack of information** flowing from governments to the general public.

At any rate, not only do successful reintegration plans depend on the correct management of information. Successful strategic communications also count on a multi-agency approach, which outlines pathways of cooperation and establishes communication channels between **national and local levels**, but also with the **media and the general public**, as well as effective communication between **the government, the FTFs and their families**.

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<sup>20</sup> RAN Practitioners, "[Effective Communications when Foreign Terrorist Fighters and their families return](#)" 1 December 2021.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS ON THE WAY FORWARD

The above outlined points of consensus in the field of child returnees herald a positive development of the field. Nevertheless, these same areas still **require further development** at an **implementation** level. Namely, more and better work is needed to ensure the successful application of multi-agency cooperation, training of practitioners and evaluation tools.

On top of this, there is an **overarching need for further research** in the dimension of child returnees specifically, as well as further insights being needed about the **intersectional nature of gender** for these children, and how it affects their individual reintegration processes.

### 5.1. Multi agency cooperation and funding

The presence of different working cultures can sometimes present a challenge for **effective and long term multi-agency cooperation**. From legal considerations, to police work, to social work, etc., different actors with different “work cultures” or ethos are present, and this can cause friction. In order to avoid this, **roles and responsibilities** in multi-agency settings should be **clearly defined**, and **communication channels**, formal or informal, should be **known to all actors** involved.

There is also a pressing need for a **long-term vision** regarding the management of all returning FTFs, but especially their **families**. Attention to this field should not rest on media or policy attention cycles. As seen from the numbers of children still detained in Syrian camps, as well as their mothers, the phenomenon of FTF families is only likely to increase in importance in the coming years. At the same time, we have established that **reintegration efforts are long term projects** which, while containing short and medium term needs, rest primarily on the adequate long term oversight of the returnees’ development.

For these reasons, **more resources** and importantly, **more stable funding** should be allocated to the practitioners working on this field, as their work is directly influenced by this **shifting attention and corresponding funding**. Especially NGOs, who are involved in many aspects of intervention and de-radicalisation work, suffer from **intermittent funding** and **short-term contracts**.

As an example, **trauma-based work with children** requires long-term commitment, so mental health practitioners will have to **continuously monitor** the returnee for signs of possible traumas that may show up even after a few years. There is thus an overall need for **further capacity building** in this area, as need for these services is **likely to increase** in the coming years.

## 5.2. Training for practitioners

In terms of trainings, there are two significant challenges. Firstly, there is a significant lack of **consolidated knowledge** and **field expertise** among the relevant practitioners involved, both for **gender-specific work** and for **child-oriented work**<sup>21</sup>.

Training for practitioners and multi-stakeholder cooperation should thus be **further fostered**. Practitioners, who are often faced with insufficient training and skill development, face a persistent challenge in dealing with **highly traumatised individuals**, often with multiple traumas or cases of **transgenerational transmission of trauma**. Moreover, many of the actors involved in the multi-agency approach have **no previous experience with former extremists**, and are in need of contextual trainings, explaining some basic information about the foreign fighters' situations, their families, their potential motivations and life trajectories. Practitioners would also benefit from acquiring **more direct trainings** on **gendered approaches** to counselling and how intersectional understandings of gender can aide with the different facets of the imprisonment, rehabilitation and reintegration processes.

Training should also be given to practitioners on **how to new and old use risk assessment tools**, which in turn should be used **complementarily** and not prevent from considering additional factors, on a case-by-case basis. For practitioners, risk management and assessment tools ought to also **be gender and age specific**, and be tailored to specific social and contextual environments, so as to become more operationally sound.

## 5.3. Evaluation tools

Finally, there is a great need for **risk assessment tools** that are geared specifically towards women and children. As mentioned elsewhere, in order to successfully tackle **gendered challenges** of reintegration, it is necessary to adapt existing indicators and tools to include **gender-specific and gender-aware criteria and features**. Gender sensitive processes and indicators should also be culturally appropriate, taking into account the community of the returnee, their customs and gender norms.

The general critique raised against current assessment tools, chiefly the **VERA-2R** but also tools frequently used on foreign fighters' families, is that they have

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<sup>21</sup> RAN Practitioners, [Gender-sensitive responses to returnees from foreign terrorist organisations: insights for practitioners](#), 2021.

been **developed and utilised almost exclusively with adult male offenders** and are thus **not gender or age sensitive** enough yet.<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, as stated elsewhere in this piece, an individual's rehabilitation or reintegration process may last several years, with limited results, making **evaluation tools** essential to **assess what programmes are working for whom**, and how to improve those processes which are not showing good results. However, there remains a general lack, in the field of P/CVE, of appropriate tools to **evaluate** the effectiveness of existing programming, in order to improve and adapt existing strategies. **More evidence and rigorous testing** is therefore needed on the reliability of **existing risk assessment tools** when applied to different age groups and gender.

#### 5.4. Further research

There is a general **lack of sufficient research on child returnees**, and to a lesser extent, on women returnees, who as explained have an impact on children's rehabilitation efforts. Some gaps in knowledge refer to specific aspects such as how to train practitioners or the need for further refinement in assessment tools. There is, however, a much more worrying lack of fundamental knowledge about child returnees, which impedes further work and refinement of existing programmes.

First of all, there is an alarming lack of **working databases**, namely including their **numbers, origin, disaggregation by sex and age**, as well as time of detainment in camps, possibility of **combat experience** and more. These figures are sorely needed to **project adequate funding** on the part of states, and to predict needed resources, as well as to draft appropriate multi-agency response teams and distribute roles.

Secondly, there is a lack of research on how **working with extremist parents affects the development of children reintegration efforts**. Whilst initial evidence seems to point to mutually beneficial effect<sup>23</sup>, and it seems logical considering their function as role models, further research is needed to understand the impact of parent's extremist attitudes on their children. There is some tentative evidence pointing to how **families can also be a harmful**

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<sup>22</sup> RAN Practitioners, [Gender-sensitive responses to returnees from foreign terrorist organisations: insights for practitioners](#), 2021.

<sup>23</sup>Michelle Grossman, "The Role of Families and Civil Society in Detecting Radicalisation and Promoting Disengagement from Violent Extremism", in Rohan Gunaratna & Patrick Rueppel (eds). *Combatting Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Asia and Europe – From Cooperation to Collaboration*, 2018.

**influence** and exacerbate anti-democratic, violent thinking or behaviour<sup>24</sup>. Probably, both positions hold some true and the direction of the influence will depend on the specific family, the profile of the returnees' and their conditions upon return. This is true also of the **development of such attitudes over time**, for example, in the case of returnee children going through puberty years after having returned.

Thirdly and finally, there is a **gap** in current programmes which often still rely on binaries of victim/perpetrator to assess child returnees. This approach fails to acknowledge the trajectories of **young returnee boys**, who either have **military experience** as soldiers, and/or have undergone **ideological indoctrination**, either within Jihadist organisations or as a result of their time imprisoned with hardened convicts. **Further insight** is needed into this type of returnee, their profile and needs.

To conclude, countries and researchers alike should pay more attention to child and women returnees, who remain a **relatively novel demographic in counter-terrorism efforts**, and an **absolute incognita in dis-engagement, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes**.

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<sup>24</sup> RAN Practitioners, [Focus on Children – The challenge to reflect on values with imprisoned extremist parents](#), 2021

ANNEX I: LIST OF PUBLICLY AVAILABLE EU CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE TOPIC, VIA THE  
RADICALIZATION AWARENESS NETWORK (RAN)

References:

**Strategic Communications for returning FTF and their Families:**

RAN Practitioners, Conclusion Paper, "[Effective Communications when Foreign Terrorist Fighters and their Families Return](#)", 2021

RAN Practitioners, LOCAL WG, Conclusion Paper, "[Local communications when FTFs and/or their family members are returning](#)", 2020.

**FTF Families: Women and Children Returnees**

RAN Practitioners, [Repatriated foreign terrorist fighters and their families: European experiences & lessons for P/CVE](#), 2021

RAN Practitioners, FC&S WG, Conclusion Paper, "[Challenges and solutions when working with families of foreign terrorist fighters](#)", 2021

RAN Cross-cutting Thematic Event, Conclusion Paper- [Management of returning FTFs and their family members with a focus on returning women and children](#), 15 December, 14 and 15 December 2021, online.

RAN Policy Support, Consensus Meeting-Youtube Video - [Managing Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters and their families](#), April 2021.

RAN Practitioners, Conclusion Paper - "[Study Visit to Helsinki: the management of child returnees](#)", 2021, online.

RAN Policy Support, Consensus Meeting-Youtube Video - [The challenges of managing child returnees](#), April 2021.

RAN Practitioners, [Gender-sensitive responses to returnees from foreign terrorist organisations: insights for practitioners](#), 2021.

RAN FC&S multi-meeting, Conclusion Paper- [Dealing with returning children and their mothers from Daesh: taking stock and going forward](#) 11 June 2021.

RAN Practitioners, [Focus on Children – The challenge to reflect on values with imprisoned extremist parents](#), 2021.

**Practitioners' Needs & Trainings**

- RAN Practitioners, Conclusion Paper, [Small-scale expert meeting on Training for practitioners on dealing with returning children](#), 30 September 2021, online.
- RAN Practitioners, Conclusion Paper, [Practitioners' questions and needs for the future, based on experiences in dealing with Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Violent Extremist or Terrorist Offenders](#), 2021.
- RAN Practitioners, Rehabilitation WG, Conclusion Paper, [Returning FTFs and their families: Practitioners' insights on improving the return process](#), 2021.