



Improving PVE Practice

10 Steps to Strengthening Rehabilitation and Reintegration Efforts for Terrorism Offenders, Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters, and Victims of Violent Extremism

Managing the return of the many individuals who have traveled to conflict zones and the growing number defecting from terrorist groups is a priority for many countries. Effective and sustainable rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) programs are essential to addressing this challenge and preventing violent extremism over the long term. Governments cannot do this work alone and should work with civil society and other local actors. Effective R&R requires attention and action at the state, community, public discourse, family, and individual levels. Because R&R is an individual, psychosocial process that requires the sustained engagement and involvement of local communities, families, and other supportive social networks, civil society has a unique contribution to make. Civil society organizations (CSOs) often have the trust of and access to the affected individuals and communities in ways that government officials do not.

Here are 10 steps that governments should take for effective R&R efforts:

- 1. Widen the focus of R&R efforts beyond the individual terrorism offender** to include all those affected by violent extremism, including children who were kidnapped by violent extremists or conceived in captivity, female abductees, internally displaced persons, and vigilante groups that fight violent extremists. Addressing the realities of the communities affected—and the needs of all victims—is vital for broader community cohesion and support for R&R.
- 2. Recognize the critical gender dimensions and differences of R&R work**, given the cohorts of returning women and children. Assessments based on gender, age, and other characteristics of individual returnees are crucial and will have implications for actions by different sectors, including law enforcement, the judiciary, and social welfare, as well as community actors.
- 3. Promote multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary approaches.**
 - a.** Design and implement national R&R policies, plans, and guidelines in coordination with a wide range of governmental and nongovernmental stakeholders (e.g., law enforcement, criminal justice, education, social welfare, and local CSOs) to ensure the development of multi-stakeholder and multidisciplinary approaches to address the complexity of needs and articulate clear roles and responsibilities for the different stakeholders.
 - b.** Involve women and youth-led CSO representatives from the outset and throughout to ensure that a comprehensive analysis of the local context informs program design and that all are engaged based on their comparative strengths.
 - c.** Enable safe interactions between CSOs and security actors throughout the R&R process.
 - d.** Build trust including through regular round tables among national/local governments, CSOs, religious institutions, traditional leaders, and communities to ensure strong collaboration, information sharing, and capacity development on potentially sensitive issues.
- 4. Ensure that coherent, transparent legal and policy frameworks and guidelines are in place.**
 - a.** Assess how courts, prisons, and other state institutions are currently addressing issues of the returnees, particularly with regard to the treatment of women and children.
 - b.** Articulate a clear policy, including zero tolerance for sexual abuse and other misconduct, regarding the treatment of returnees and those associated with them (e.g., family members) with a gendered/child-appropriate approach.
 - c.** Ensure legal clarity on the status of returnees and those associated with them, and implement human rights-compliant monitoring frameworks and support services.



- d. Provide CSOs with the legal protections and policy guidance to engage in R&R interventions.
 - e. Ensure that initiatives are drawing on the best practices and lessons learned from the failures of previous relevant initiatives, including disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs, and rehabilitation programs developed for general prisoners and gang members.
- 5. Develop, implement, and monitor stringent guidelines for the front line security actors (including border guards and correctional officers) in their treatment of returnees and their families.**
 - a. Promote adherence to human rights protections and accountability for violations as essential for effective PVE efforts as abuse by security actors can be a catalyst for radicalization.
 - b. Ensure that psychosocial support is provided to address past experiences of violence and abuse.
 - 6. Build the capacity of CSOs to engage effectively in this field through investing in R&R expertise among CSOs, for example, through program design and relevant multidisciplinary skills training.**
 - 7. Ensure direct engagement with and support for the families of those who are detained, incarcerated, or participating in an R&R program, to provide their family members with support and facilitate their eventual successful reintegration.**
 - 8. Engage local communities including the CSOs already active in PVE.**
 - a. Work with these CSOs to determine the most relevant means of socializing local communities to the need to reintegrate successfully and reduce the stigma of those associated with and affected by violent extremism.
 - b. Consult with all community sectors to determine the specific challenges they face, solutions they offer for addressing reintegration, as well as to identify their needs and ensure that no inadvertent harm is done by state and international actors.
 - 9. Initiate public dialogue through the media and education sectors, including on religious and other relevant ideologies.** Because the issues are sensitive, there is a need for responsible public engagement on the rationale for policies and approaches being developed.
 - a. Engage the media directly to encourage balanced reporting so that public fear, anger, and potential violence are not fueled through inaccurate reporting.
 - b. Encourage CSO-led media campaigns to engage religious scholars to convey accurate non-violent narratives and to debunk violent ones.
 - c. Develop teacher training and support mechanisms and curricula to address R&R and broader PVE issues in schools.
 - 10. Initiate sustainable economic and employment development, including by working with the private sector, to determine critical needs and potentials for new sectoral development and vocational training for men and women.** This should include, where appropriate, offering remedial education programs and schools to enable those returnees who require it to enter the education system.

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