



# Action Agenda on Violent Extremist Offenders in Prison in Mali

Gaps, Challenges and Action Plans for the  
Rehabilitation & Reintegration of Violent  
Extremist Offenders in Prison in Mali

# About the Authors

## The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT)

The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT) is an independent think and do tank providing multidisciplinary policy advice and practical, solution-oriented implementation support on prevention and the rule of law, two vital pillars of effective counter-terrorism. ICCT's work focuses on themes at the intersection of countering violent extremism and criminal justice sector responses, as well as human rights related aspects of counter-terrorism. The major project areas concern countering violent extremism, rule of law, foreign terrorist fighters, country and regional analysis, rehabilitation and reintegration, civil society engagement and victims' voices. Functioning as a nucleus within the international counter-terrorism network, ICCT connects experts, policymakers, civil society actors and practitioners from different fields by providing a platform for productive collaboration, practical analysis, and exchange of experiences and expertise, with the ultimate aim of identifying innovative and comprehensive approaches to preventing and countering terrorism.

## The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI)

The United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) is the United Nations entity established in 1965 to support countries worldwide in preventing crime and facilitating criminal justice. Its mission is to advance security, serve justice and build peace in support of the rule of law and sustainable development.

UNICRI is mandated to assist intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental organizations in formulating and implementing improved policies in the field of crime prevention and criminal justice. The Institute works in specialized niches and selected fields of crime prevention, justice, security governance, counter-terrorism and social cohesion.

UNICRI's goals are advancing the understanding of crime-related problems to foster just and efficient criminal justice systems, to support the respect of international instruments and other standards, and to facilitate international law enforcement cooperation and judicial assistance. UNICRI's programmes aim to promote holistic approaches, national self-reliance and the development of institutional capabilities. To this end, UNICRI provides a one-stop facility offering high-level expertise in crime prevention and criminal justice problems. Technical co-operation is enhanced by the use of action-oriented research to assist in the development of concrete and tailored intervention programmes. Institutional and on-the-job training of specialized personnel form an integral part of UNICRI activities. The Institute serves as a platform for consultation and cooperation acting as an honest broker in bringing together different partners to address common challenges.

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# Introduction

The violent conflict in Mali, initiated in 2012, is complex and continuously evolving: the groups involved include terrorist organisations such as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Mouvement pour l'Unité and le Jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO), Ansar Dine<sup>i</sup>, its affiliate Macina Liberation Front (MLF), and Al Mourabitoune. As the number of extremist detainees has increased due to the country's situation, it is important to consider issues that come along with this: how to deal with violent extremists when they are in prison? What different actors can play a role during this detention time? As most of the detainees will eventually be released, it is also important to take into consideration challenges linked to re-integration. This Action Agenda aims to address a number of these issues by outlining four Action Areas that currently deserve the attention of both national and international actors in order to efficiently deal with problems associated with detaining Violent Extremist Offenders (VEOs).

In August 2016, UNICRI conducted an assessment mission in Mali to present its programme on Rehabilitation & Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders, developed within the framework of the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF). The presentation was addressed to key national and international stakeholders and aimed to ensure their engagement<sup>ii</sup>. From September 2016 onwards, ICCT and UNICRI joined their efforts in Mali on Reintegration and Rehabilitation (R&R) of violent extremists. Three trainings have been jointly organised so far: first, a training on the psychological aspects of violent extremism for prison staff in the Central Prison of Bamako (December 2016); second, a training for religious leaders on radicalisation (April 2017); and third, a training on risk assessment with a special focus on violent extremism for personnel of the National Prison Administration, DNAPES (August 2017). These training workshops have been designed in close consultation with national authorities and international partners, such as the Justice and Correction Section of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA/JCS).

Throughout the needs assessment mission and training workshops, and in consultation with different actors on the ground, ICCT and UNICRI have identified four target areas that deserve the attention of both national and international actors, namely (1) increasing awareness of the causes and consequences of violent extremism in the Malian context, (2) intake and risk assessment of violent extremist offenders, (3) empowerment of youth leaders, and (4) disengagement of VEOs through vocational training and engagement of communities through dialogue sessions in prison. These areas will be further discussed below, outlining specific actions recommended to increase capacity building, intensify inter-agency cooperation and coordination, and design and implement an R&R programme, all using research to ensure that actions are tailored to local needs and guided by an evidence-based approach.

This Action Agenda is composed of three sections: the first briefly discusses the background of the conflict in Mali as well as some of the issues faced in Mali with regards to VEOs in prison. The second section describes the four Action Areas and outlines proposed activities to address concerns and needs identified by ICCT and UNICRI throughout the initiatives implemented by both organisations so far. Finally, next steps and recommendations will be discussed.

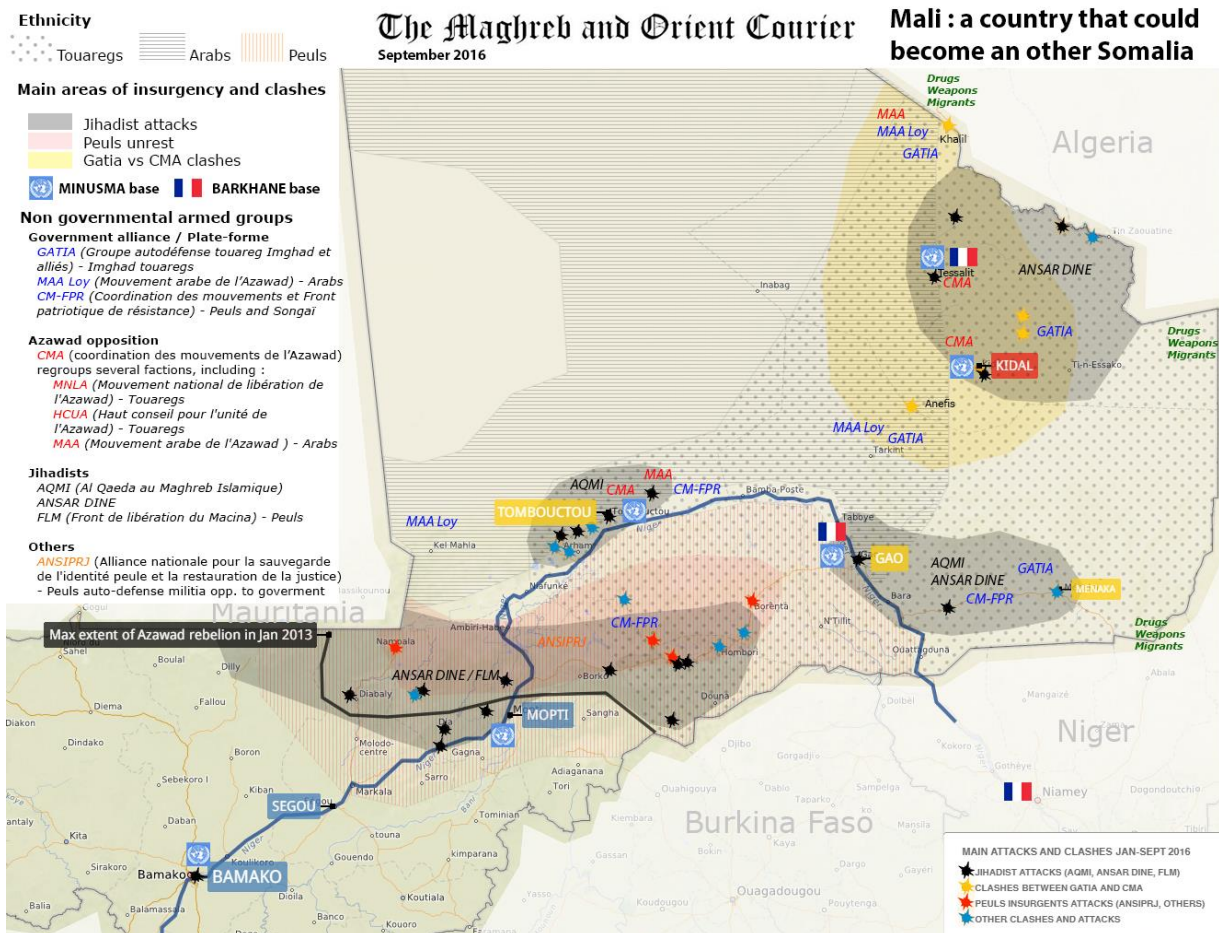
# Methodology

The current Action Agenda is the result of the analysis of existing literature on the region and on the radicalisation process combined with data gathered during field research missions. The collection of primary data was conducted in the framework of a UNICRI project on "Strengthening National Capacities for Rehabilitation of Violent Extremist Offenders" and an ICCT project on "Development and Piloting of a Single-Country Training Course on Implementing the GCTF's Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration", both funded by the United States Department of State. Primary data were collected through unstructured interviews with local, national and international actors, in-depth interviews conducted with inmates accused of terrorism-related offences and field-notes taken by the researchers during the stay in the country.

This Action Agenda is based on a unique set of data gathered by the ICCT-UNICRI research team over a one-year period. The data consists of primary sources, such as interviews with offenders charged with terrorist offenses, religious leaders, including imams from remote regions of the country, prison staff and government officials working within the field of terrorism and radicalisation and a range of international actors working in Mali, including the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), NGOs and embassies. On top of data gathered through interviews, various government documentations and policy plans from diverse actors have been analysed and combined to create a comprehensive and up to date overview of what is happening and what is needed in the country over the coming years.

## Background

Since 2012, Mali has been experiencing a violent conflict. The main terrorist groups active in the country are Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Mouvement pour l'Unité and the Jihad enAfrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO), Ansar Dine<sup>iii</sup>, its affiliate Macina Liberation Front (MLF), and Al Mourabitoune. In March 2017, Ansar Dine, Al Mourabitoune, Katiba Ansar Dine Macina, and AQIM announced their alliance, under the guidance of Ag Ghali.



*Figure 1 - Overview of the different actors involved in the conflict  
(Source: Le Courier du Maghreb et de l'Orient - 2016)*

The country also counts several self-defence and/or pro-governmental militias, of which some have joined the “Platform”, a coalition of movements engaged in the peace process. Among the main actors of the platform are GATIA (Groupe Autodéfense Touareg Imghad et Alliés), CM-FPR (La Coordination des Mouvements et Front Patriotique de Résistance, including Ganda Koy, Ganda Izo and FLN-Forces de Libération des régions Nord du Mali), MAA (Mouvement Arabe de l'Azawad), MPSA (Mouvement Populaire pour le Salut de l'Azawad), FPA (Front Populaire de l'Azawad), and MDP (Mouvement pour la Défense de la Patrie). In the Coordination of the Movements for the Azawad (CMA), the main groups are MNLA (Mouvement National pour la Libération de l'Azawad), HCUA (Haut Conseil pour l'Unité de l'Azawad), a wing of the MAA, the CPA (Coalition du Peuple pour l'Azawad), and a section of the CM-FPR2 (Coordination des Mouvements et Front Patriotique de Résistance).

### Recent developments

Stakeholders engaged during the assessment mission and ICCT/UNICRI’s projects activities have identified the issue of returning foreign terrorist fighters as a major and pressing concern for the region. This becomes clearer by looking at the origin of the instability in the region. The conflict started in 2012 due to returning militias from the war in Libya after Gaddafi was defeated. Supported by Libyan and Malian arsenals, the separatist Tuareg rebels were able to oppose the Malian army in the north of

the country. Meanwhile, also jihadist groups returning from the Algerian civil war established their bases in the region<sup>iv</sup>. With the knowledge that organisations such as Al Qaeda thrive in unstable, ungoverned areas, it is not hard to state that the return of foreign terrorist fighters will continue as long as the situation in northern Mali will remain the same<sup>v</sup>. More work is needed to ensure the appropriate laws are in place, capacities of the stakeholders involved are enhanced, and institutional approaches are developed to guide the full range of correctional and reintegration/rehabilitation interventions in Mali and the broader Sahel region. This should include consideration of how to address issues related to non-combatants, women and families returning with Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs).

Furthermore, Mali has also been experiencing forms of collaborations between terrorism and organised crime: local and regional terrorist groups have embarked in various forms of trafficking, especially in smuggling of migrants and drug trafficking<sup>vi</sup>, while criminal groups have placed huge amounts of money in the northern part of the country through trafficking of drugs and weapons, smuggling of migrants and trafficking in persons to the Mediterranean<sup>vii</sup>. This issue is hard to tackle, also because it is linked to the informal economy that is part of the regional culture and customs: whole villages depend on the smuggling networks that have been there for centuries<sup>viii</sup> ix. The level of complexity of the situation is well represented by Figure 2.

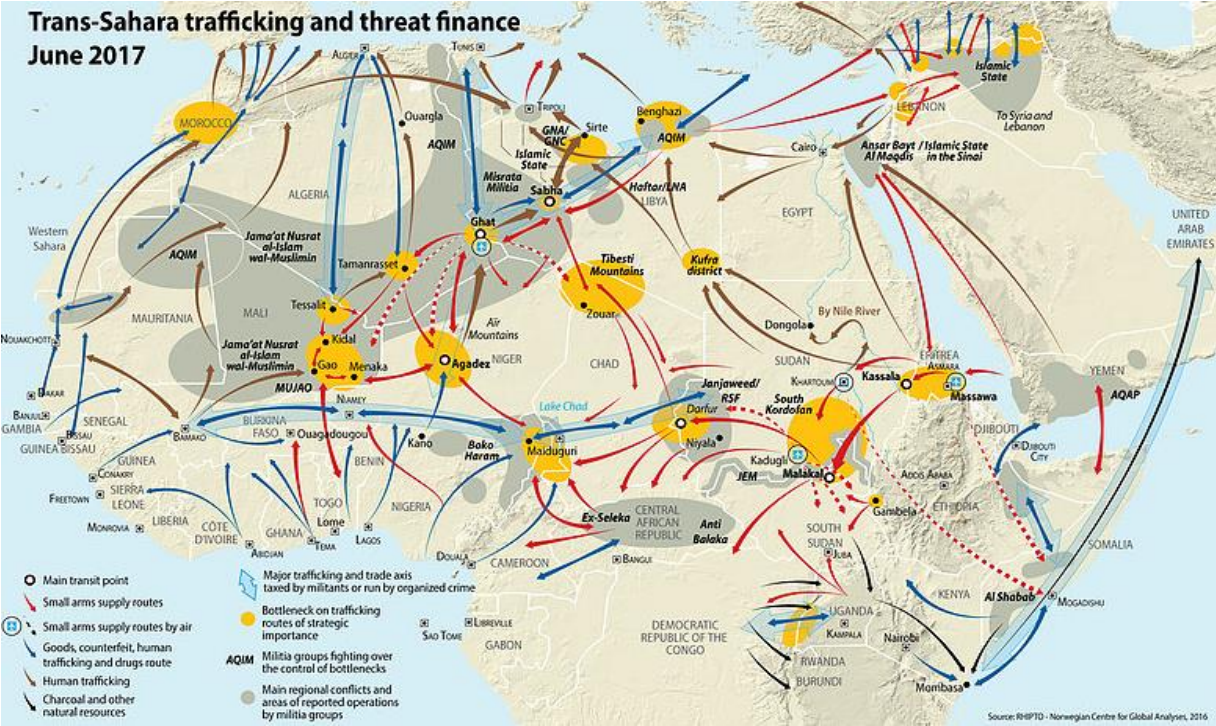


Figure 2 - Trans-Sahara trafficking routes  
 (Source: RHIPTO - Norwegian Center for Global Analyses - 2017)

The complexity of the conflict in Mali is thus intrinsically linked to the history of the region, the socio-economic vulnerabilities as well as to identity strains. In 2013, France intervened in the conflict with the so-called Operation Serval and, later that year, the international peacekeeping mission MINUSMA started and is still running in Mali. In 2014, Operation Barkhane was launched, with deployment

targeting Chad, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Niger. More recently, during the G5 Sahel meeting of July 2017, the creation of a regional counter-terrorism force was discussed.

As part of counter-terrorism efforts brought forward by both national authorities and international partners, many individuals have been arrested and accused of terrorism-related charges since the beginning of the conflict. According to the US State Department, approximately 500 individuals were arrested in 2015 alone in connection to the conflict<sup>x</sup>. In May 2016, it was reported that, from the beginning of the year, 103 people had already been arrested on terrorism-related charges<sup>xi</sup>. Within the Malian legal framework, terrorism-related offences and sanctions are defined by law n. 08-025 of 23 July 2008, while law n. 062 of 30 December 2010 defines the fight against terrorism financing and law n. 016 of 21 May 2013 modifies the duration of police custody and other procedures for suspected terrorism acts. Terrorism and/or transnational crimes in Mali are dealt by an *ad hoc* institution, the *Pôle Judiciaire Spécialisé dans la Lutte Contre le Terrorisme et la Criminalité Transnationale* (specialised judiciary division for the fight against terrorism and transnational crime), established in 2013. Despite the creation of this specialised division, the judiciary still struggles in adequately processing court cases and hundreds of detainees are awaiting trial whilst being held in pre-trial detention, thus causing prison overcrowding<sup>xii</sup>. Main challenges for the judiciary are a lack of training in investigative techniques, a lack of experience in terrorism trials<sup>xiii</sup> as well as limited financial and human resources and difficulties in gathering evidence in conflict areas.

As the US State Department reported in 2015, a comprehensive Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) strategy is missing in Mali, although efforts are made at delegitimising violent ideologies as well as increasing social cohesion. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Faith, for instance, has been working with different religious associations on promoting dialogue and addressing radicalisation, despite the difficulties brought by the lack of control the national government has over the North of Mali<sup>xiv</sup>, and has been leading an intra-ministerial coordination effort to develop a national counter-terrorism strategy.

## Action Areas

This Action Agenda identifies four main target areas for future action, namely (1) increasing awareness of the causes and consequences of violent extremism in the Malian context, (2) intake and risk assessment of violent extremist offenders, (3) empowerment of youth leaders, and (4) disengagement of VEOs through vocational training and engagement of communities through dialogue sessions in prison. For each of these areas, a short description of the current situation will be provided, followed by number of concrete local entry points and recommendations for the involvement of actors and resources. These recommendations are also tied to the broader policy framework for the Sahel region, as laid out in – among others – the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the UN Plan of Action on Countering Violent Extremism, the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) strategic goals as defined in the Rabat Memorandum of Good Practices for Effective Counterterrorism Practice in the Criminal Justice Sector, the five priority areas of the GCTF Sahel Working Group, the Department of State and USAID Joint Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism, the US Department of State Regional Strategic Initiative (RSI), specifically countering terrorist safe havens, the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism



Partnership (TSCTP), a multifaceted, multi-year strategy implemented jointly by US State, USAID and the US Department of Defense (DoD), the European Union External Action Service’s Strategy for Security and Development in the Sahel and the the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Counterterrorism Strategy and Implementation Plan.

This Action Agenda recognises that mutual legal assistance in the area of intelligence, investigation, prosecution and counter-terrorism operations is an absolute necessity to meet the shortfall and disparities in capabilities of the agencies involved in Mali, both on the national as well as on the international community level.

The activities proposed below to address the four main target areas are organised across four strategic objectives. The first strategic objective is capacity building of the Malian criminal justice sector through training in the Malian prison context. The second strategic objective is to establish networks and foster interagency cooperation. As a third goal, the proposed actions aim to work toward the design and institutionalisation of an overall R&R framework in Mali. Finally, ICCT and UNICRI advocate for a research-based, policy-oriented approach through incorporating a research component throughout all proposed activities, to strengthen the evidence-based approach and enable effective monitoring and evaluation of the individual action components.

<b>Key areas</b>	Increasing Awareness of the Causes and Consequences of Violent Extremism in the	Intake and Risk Assessment of VEOs	Empowerment of Youth Leaders	Disengagement of VEOs through Vocational Training and Engagement of Communities in Dialogue
<b>Strategic priorities</b>				
Capacity building	X	X	X	X
Interagency cooperation	X		X	X
R&R framework	X	X	X	X
Research base	X	X		X

*Table 1 - Key areas and strategic priorities*

## 1. Increasing Awareness of the Causes and Consequences of Violent Extremism in the Malian Context

### Current situation

Since 2012, Mali has experienced an unprecedented security situation, resulting in occupation of Northern regions by various violent extremist groups. With the assistance of operation Serval and operation Barkhane, many individuals have been arrested in the North and have been transported to Bamako for judgment. Pre-trial detention for terrorism-related offences is usually observed either in Bamako or in Koulikoro. The Malian Prison Administration Directorate recognises the need to train prison staff to deal with violent extremist offenders in prison, also to prevent (further) radicalisation in prisons.

### Gaps

There is a lack of general understanding of what violent extremism is and how the process of radicalisation occurs in the Malian context among those responsible for designing and implementing rehabilitation programmes of violent extremists. More specifically, there is the need to identify and address the factors that contribute to radicalisation, especially from a psychological perspective: why

do individuals become vulnerable to extremist narratives? What are country-specific circumstances that have an influence on the radicalisation process? What role does the prison context play? A lack of scientific data has been identified, especially with reference to the conducive factors as well as on the effectiveness of rehabilitation initiatives. Not only those responsible for implementing and designing rehabilitation programmes, but also prison staff in direct contact with the VEOs present some lacunae with reference to a general understanding of violent extremism.

ICCT and UNICRI have already started training prison personnel in order to raise awareness among prison staff in what their role can be in the rehabilitation process. Next to that, proper consideration should be given to the fact that guards are constantly exposed to the underlying psychological and sociological factors that drive VEOs to their extremist views and might become more vulnerable themselves.

### **Ongoing activities**

ICCT and UNICRI, with the support of MINUSMA/JCS, have organised the following training sessions:

- Psychological training for prison personnel dealing with VEOs in the Central Prison of Bamako (held in Bamako, Mali in December 2016)
- Training on radicalisation for religious leaders (held in Bamako, Mali in April 2017)
- Training on risk-assessment with a special focus on radicalisation risks (held in Bamako, Mali in August 2017)

In addition, a local psychiatrist has been recruited to provide psychological counseling to VEOs and support to prison personnel in Bamako Central Prison from December 2016 to March 2017.

### **Recommended activities**

Not only awareness and capacity among prison personnel needs to be enhanced. An important starting point for effective rehabilitation and reintegration efforts is provided by good standards and practices in the prison. Human rights need to be protected, a clear legal basis and a procedural framework have to be the structure within a prison. The internal environment of the prison needs to be a safe and structured place in which the responsibilities and roles of institutions, agencies, prison staff and prisoners are clearly defined<sup>xv</sup>. Through this solid basis, the development of a strong judicial rehabilitation and reintegration policy can be created.

First, UNICRI and ICCT recommend organising specific training for prison staff focusing on good practices and ethical standards in prison, based on the Rome Memorandum and the Mandela Rules.

Second, mid-level and senior policymakers within the Ministry of Justice should receive training focused on increasing their awareness of the factors contributing to the engagement in violent extremism in general, and the effect of prison settings in particular.

Third, to enhance cooperation between the judiciary and those who have to implement their decisions, a joint training session should be organised bringing together representatives of the public prosecutor's office, judges, and prison staff to identify challenges and explore potential avenues for improved cooperation.

Finally, police and military forces performing arrests of suspected terrorists would benefit from training on the collection of evidence that is necessary for the creating of terrorist-related judicial cases, thus helping the work of the *Pôle Judiciaire Spécialisé dans la Lutte Contre le Terrorisme et la Criminalité Transnationale* in its investigative tasks.

### **Local entry points**

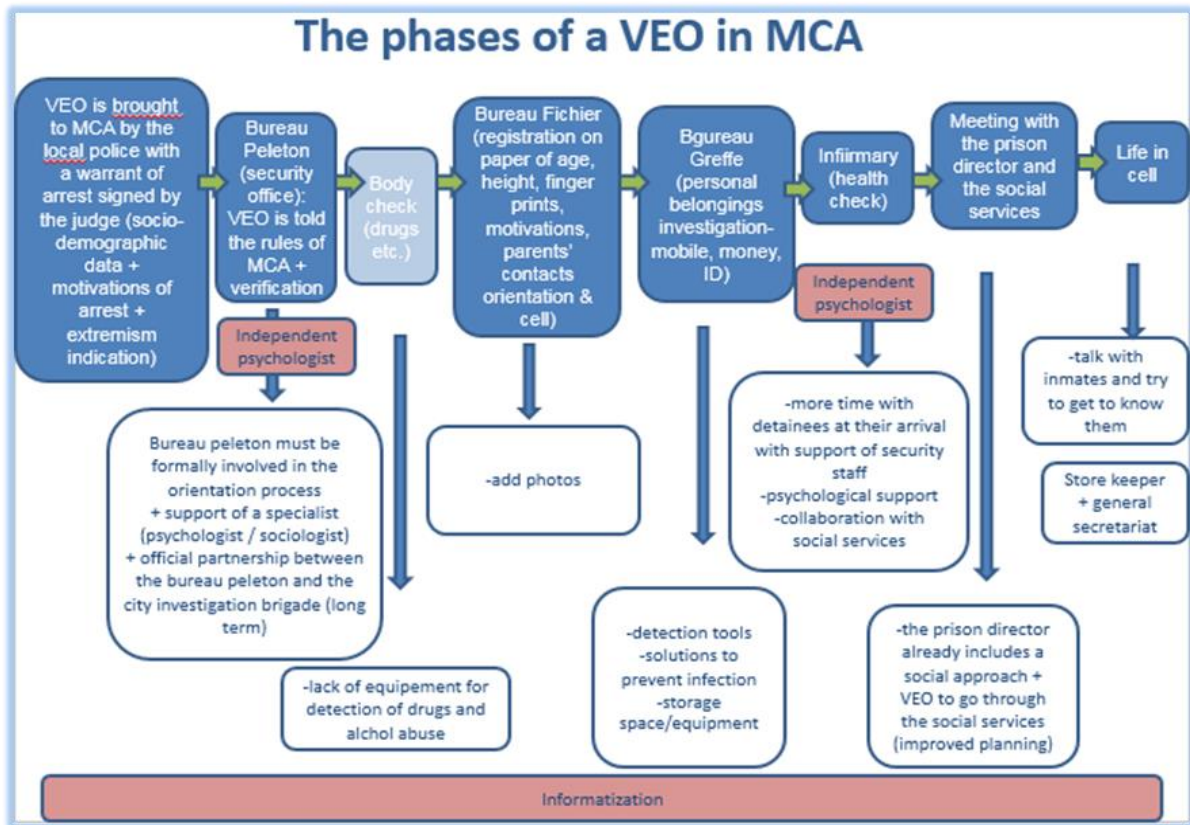
Participants of the December 2016 and August 2017 training sessions strongly emphasised that capacity building in the field of legal and judicial cooperation were urgently required in numerous areas related to combating terrorism and that this should be considered as one of the highest priorities for the countries of the region. They also stressed that financial and technical support for such activities was essential. Furthermore, any work related to increasing the awareness of violent extremism, its causes and consequences in the local context should build on and incorporate the knowledge that has already been gathered by actors such as ICCT and UNICRI as well as MINUSMA/Human Rights, and ongoing training activities performed by MINUSMA/Justice and Corrections Sector (JCS), DNAPES and other national and international actors.

## **2. Intake and Risk Assessment**

### **Current situation**

Although the Malian prison system currently lacks standardised risk assessment procedures to determine the level of radicalisation of VEOs, an evaluation of the incoming inmate is performed on the basis of the charge, the case file and based on the assessment of key actors in the prison system (including the warden, the head of security, social workers and - if deemed necessary - a medical doctor).

The process that VEOs experience from the start of their incarceration to their release requires fundamental improvements at different stages, according to stakeholders both at the policy level as well as according to those who have to implement these procedures. The figure below provides an overview of the intake and risk assessment procedure at Bamako's main prison, *Maison Central d'Arrêt* (MCA), and exemplifies the current standard procedures. Challenges that prison personnel face are depicted in the picture below per each phase of the process.



*Figure 3 – the Intake and Risk Assessment Process in MCA*  
 (Source: Data collected and analysed during training sessions by UNICRI and ICCT)

### Gaps

It is of vital importance to start the incarceration process of any detainee, especially VEOs, with proper intake and risk assessment procedures for two reasons. First of all, prison authorities need to assess the degree of radicalisation of an individual in order to determine the potential risk they pose to other prisoners, to prison personnel and to society at large, and second, the outcome of the risk assessment should provide a starting point for a targeted intervention strategy and identify ‘hooks’ for interventions. In the context of violent extremism, risk is defined as the likelihood that a given individual will commit to a violent ideology and will be prepared to act on its behalf (commit acts of violence on her or his own, help in the planning of such acts or recruit others to the ranks of an extremist organisation).

Assessing such risk is of considerable importance and can serve several important purposes. For instance, individuals who are arrested under suspicion of terrorism may need to be appropriately classified at intake both regarding the security risk they pose, and how they should be treated while in prison (e.g. with whom they should be placed in the prison setting). Release decisions, too, should be critically based on a determination of the risk a given individual would pose on re-entering society. To that end, there is a need for a review of current risk assessment tools that are being used in detention settings. Furthermore, an appropriate methodology should be selected and tailored to the local context. This should include the development of relevant risk indicators by prison staff and

psychologists – as well as a procedure determining how interventions will be connected to the outcomes of the risk assessment.

### **Ongoing activities**

ICCT and UNICRI have organised an intake and risk assessment training for prison personnel dealing with VEOs in the Central Prison of Bamako (MCA), held in Bamako in August 2017, bringing together prison staff from MCA and Koulikouro prison as well as participants from the special judiciary assigned to dealing with VEOs. In doing so, ICCT and UNICRI have built on earlier training sessions provided by the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL) of the US State Department, which organised two training sessions on security classification, including the classification of the inmates as well as of the prison facilities. These trainings focused on producing simple forms to do at least a basic assessment on the basis of information that can be gathered on inmates.

### **Recommended activities**

Risk assessment is a dynamic process strictly linked to the specific context and environment in which the tool is administered. As a matter of fact, a risk assessment tool shall take into consideration contextual aspects, socio-political factors as well as historical and behavioural elements. Inputs collected so far by ICCT, UNICRI, INL and other actors in the Malian penitentiary sector should be consolidated, in close collaboration with the National Prison Administration (DNAPES), to design and implement a risk assessment tool tailored to the Malian penitentiary context.

In addition, prison personnel should be equipped with necessary skills and knowledge on how to administer the tool and benefit the most from its implementation. This capacity building process would reduce the potential stress and frustrations linked to the complex task of evaluating risks of radicalisation and may be supported by a verification procedure to further strengthen the risk assessment cycle.

### **Local entry points**

The capacities of prison personnel can be strengthened in two ways: first of all in terms of increasing the number of staff, and second with reference to acquiring specialised knowledge of risk assessment for violent extremism. DNAPES has already expressed interest in enhancing the capacities of its staff in risk assessment and ICCT and UNICRI have organised a first intake and risk assessment workshop to DNAPES personnel in August 2017. During the previous training sessions, prison personnel, senior policy makers and religious leaders have all been asked to identify indicators of violent extremism in the Malian prison context: these inputs have been used as a basis for the discussion during the risk assessment workshop, with the aim of tailoring existing risk assessment methodologies to the Malian context. As the topic of risk assessment with a specific focus on violent extremism and identification of risks of radicalisation is complex and multifaceted, further training and capacity building is required and should draw from different disciplines and sectors.

### 3. Empowerment of Youth Leaders

#### **Current situation**

Young people represent a crucial actor to be taken into consideration when talking about violent extremism, both in their role as victims as well as perpetrators. Youth is increasingly engaged by terrorist groups at various levels and in different regions: as the rate of youth is high in Africa, along with other challenges, young African people are exposed to a serious situation of vulnerability<sup>xvi</sup>.

Youth leaders play an important role in Malian society and their engagement in spreading a tolerant and peaceful message is essential in order to prevent and halt radicalisation in the country, especially to build a more resilient generation. The Ministry of Religious Affairs and Faith has been tasked to work with the High Islamic Council as well as with all the religious organisations in the country to promote dialogue and a peaceful religious message amongst youths in the country. The key role of the Ministry of Religious Affairs is shown by the recent decision to appoint this Ministry as the leader of the inter-ministerial working group in charge of developing a national strategy to counter and prevent extremism.

#### **Gaps**

Although the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Faith is devoting considerable efforts to enhancing coordination among local youth leaders, some challenges have been raised. Due to the conflict in the north, in certain areas of the country it is hard to prevent local radicalised imams from spreading messages that fuel the violent extremism narrative. A national coordination mechanism would be helpful in this regard. Furthermore, moderate religious leaders often lack knowledge of violent extremism and how it can be identified as well as how to exploit innovative technology to spread their positive/constructive message (i.e. social media) among the younger generations.

Specifically in the prison context, where a considerable number of the VEOs are below thirty years old, stakeholders indicated that a lack of knowledge of the local languages provides a barrier for prison staff to adequately monitor religious discourse and assess the content of the religious services delivered in prison. Many detainees charged with terrorist-related crimes come from the rural northern regions of Mali and often speak different ethnic dialects and languages of the region of origin. As a result, prison staff indicated the need for language courses for prison staff as well as for proper vetting procedures to be elaborated in close collaboration with the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Faith: these measures would enable effective communications monitoring.

#### **Ongoing activities**

ICCT and UNICRI have been in contact with the Mercy Corps and Think Peace Mali, two NGOs that have done considerable research in the field of youth and juvenile engagement in non-state actors, armed, rebel and terrorist groups. Additionally, ICCT and UNICRI connected to the United Nations University (UNU), which is currently undertaking research on children and extreme violence, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative research, in a range of countries, including Mali. Together, the data shared through these connections provide important insights as to how youths become recruited or decide to engage in violent (extremist) groups. Finally, ICCT and UNICRI have been in contact with the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Bamako, Mali, which has launched a youth empowerment

initiative, with the aim of enhancing youth engagement in the political dynamics and decisional process at municipal level.

### **Recommended activities**

Youth radicalisation represents a serious challenge in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PVE/CVE). Young people are subject to the influence of a broad range of factors, ranging from quest for significance to economical needs and political dynamics. At the same time, young leaders can play a crucial role in preventing and countering radicalisation if provided with necessary tools and support.

Young leaders, with the support of dedicated experts and the endorsement of local and national authorities, can develop and spread tailored information and awareness raising material that are targeted to a young audience. Also, youth engagement in politics and in spreading a peaceful religious message may provide concrete examples of possible alternative paths for people at risk of radicalisation.

### **Local entry points**

Youth empowerment efforts should reflect the needs and the contextual situation assessed by previous research and studies conducted by Mercy Corps and Think Peace Mali. In addition, current initiatives and projects in this sector, such as the initiative promoted by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Bamako, shall be taken into account and serve as a basis for the development of further actions in order to maximise efforts and minimise duplication. Another example of an existing entry point is represented by the comprehensive and multi-sectorial plan of action to prevent radicalisation in Mali, developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Faith, in which youths play a prominent role and which envisages five strategic axes, namely awareness raising; promotion of an intra-religious dialogue; training and capacity building of key actors; enhancement of social national cohesion; and research, monitoring and evaluation efforts to ensure efficaciousness.

The plan of action fully addresses the needs identified in the country and requires supports in terms of specialised expertise, devoted personnel and adequate financial resources. Therefore, the analysis and action plan elaborated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Faith provide the best starting point for devising strategies to address violent extremism and the role of youth leaders in that regard.

## **4. Disengagement of VEOs through Vocational Training and Engagement of Communities through Dialogue Sessions in Prison**

### **Current situation**

Generally speaking, accused terrorists in Mali are either housed in *Maison Centrale d'Arrêt* (MCA) or in the prison of Koulikoro. MCA houses approximately 1500 inmates, of which approximately 3,5% violent extremist offenders, namely inmates who have been incarcerated based on terrorism-related charges and that are either convicted (the minority) or in pre-trial detention<sup>1</sup>. ICCT and UNICRI staff have been conducting in-depth interviews with these inmates in MCA since December 2016 to identify

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<sup>1</sup>The number is constantly changing and this percentage represents the average of the VEOs in MCA during the period of implementation of UNICRI/ICCT project (August 2016-August 2017)

and assess patterns of radicalisation before incarceration and risks of radicalisation within the prison settings. One of the main findings is the fact that many of the VEOs are incarcerated thousands of miles away from their families and communities and, as a result, the majority of them do not receive visitors. This aspect is crucial as families, peers and communities play a fundamental role in the rehabilitation process and their support is essential for the re-entry phase to avoid stigmatisation and prevent recidivism.

### **Gaps**

The interviews with inmates demonstrate a lack of targeted activities for VEOs and/or inmates charged with terrorism in pre-trial detention. Regarding daily life in prison, a common aspect underlined by all of the inmates is the lack of any kind of activity, training or occupation, resulting in feelings of boredom, neglect, uselessness and depression. All participants provide a variation of the following activities when asked about their daily routine: sleeping, waking up, eating, praying, washing, listening to the radio, walking around and – dependent on the availability of books – a bit of reading. The participants do not have access to the mosque but pray in their cell and some inmates receive French books from religious entities upon request. Some interviewees strongly emphasized that there is lack of space for any kind of physical activity (i.e. walk, run, etc.).

Since all (suspected) VEOs are incarcerated together and share cells with 3-5 people, there is a large variety of ethnic backgrounds within the prison facility. The majority of the inmates are from the North, thus their families and community members are often unable to visit. Organising dialogue sessions with community leaders or representatives would facilitate a focus on reconciliation, common goal building and focusing inmates on their future lives after prison. These sessions would be beneficial to maintain and/or improve relations with families and communities, bridge the divide between ethnic and religious groups and reduce the risk of recidivism, as stated by one of the interviewees. Prison staff and policymakers underlined these findings during the assessment mission.

### **Ongoing activities**

ICCT and UNICRI would like to conduct a first dialogue session for VEOs in Bamako – specifically aimed at enabling dialogue with participation of community leaders within a secure environment where inmates charged with terrorism-related crimes can participate. The session is projected to take place late 2017 and, if successful, recommendations will be elaborated for the attention of the prison authorities to integrate such activities into the daily routine of the management of violent extremist offenders.

### **Recommended activities**

Disengagement of suspected terrorists in prison requires a multi-level approach aimed at countering radicalisation in the penitentiary context and at preventing recidivism after release. Several studies and strategic documents underline the notion of focusing on fostering the skills of inmates to better equip them for re-entry into society. As the Rome Memorandum notes: “To successfully reintegrate into society, it is critically important that the inmate be employable and able to support his or her family. Employment can reduce the need and the appeal to re-join a terrorist group and can facilitate the former inmates’ reintegration into society.” In addition to vocational training for inmates, community engagement also represents a strong tool and strategy to foster social cohesion and prevent radicalisation.



The implementation of vocational skills training thus represents an important component of a rehabilitation-oriented prison regime. Vocational skills training should be offered to VEOs based upon the availability and resources of the prison and in line with security regulations, especially with regard to high-risk prison populations. Examples of vocational skills training are tailoring, carpentry workshops, mechanical skills trainings or agricultural workshops, if plots of land are available. Vocational skills training also provides an avenue for a potentially fruitful engagement of NGOs and civil society representatives in the rehabilitation and reintegration process.

Besides strengthening job skills to enhance employment opportunities after release, engagement of community representatives in debates and discussions in prison, with the involvement and under the supervision of dedicated experts, can be beneficial both to detainees and to local communities to prepare for the reintegration phase.

### **Local entry points**

The National Prison Administration has often expressed its interest in the development of targeted vocational trainings, starting from an assessment of the inmates' needs and talents, through skills acquisition in prison (in an appropriate and secure environment) to a follow-up mechanism that ensures sustainability after release.

In addition, various NGOs and national authorities have been promoting debates and discussions to spread a peaceful message; their experience and expertise can be replicated in the prison context with the support of dedicated experts. Given the high presence of actors working on PVE/CVE in the country and in the region, more coordination and cooperation could improve projects' effectiveness.

# Recommendations

Based on the identification of the four target areas for interventions and the analysis of the current situation, gaps, on-going activities and local entry points, a clear picture can be drawn detailing which activities work towards achieving the strategic priorities laid out in the introduction, including capacity building, interagency cooperation, developing a rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) framework and providing a sound research base to enable evidence-based decision-making in preventing and countering violent extremism in prison.

The table below provides a schematic overview of both on-going and proposed activities and clearly lays out what target area they contribute to as well as what strategic priorities are accomplished through these activities. As such, the framework should be used as a quick overview of recommendations and perhaps inspiration for those actors seeking to play a role in countering violent extremism in Malian prisons.

Key areas	Increasing Awareness of the Causes and Consequences of Violent Extremism in the Malian Context	Developing Robust Intake and Risk Assessment Procedures for VEOs	Empowerment of Youth Leaders	Disengagement of VEOs through Vocational Training and Engagement of Communities in Dialogue Sessions in Prison
Strategic priorities				
Capacity building	-Training for Prison Staff -Develop training modules based on empirical evidence and research	-Establish criteria for assessments through research -Specializing Prison Staff in making individual risk assessments	-Involving and training more youth leaders in the process	-Generating more skilled staff to train -Generating financial means -Training of trainers of inmates (ToT)
Interagency cooperation	-Technical Workshop	-Combining interagency intelligence to create a strong risk assessment procedure	-Align interagency efforts to strengthen coordination among young leaders (including religious leaders)	-Sharing of expertise among agencies to design and develop trainings-Generating financial means -Generating cooperation and financial means to ensure sustainability after release
R&R framework	-Develop strategy	-Use risk-factors to determine where to focus on at the individual level	-Engaging with youth leaders to enhance willingness among locals to help	-Link skills to local community -Engage locals in the training of VEOs
Research base	-Interviews and focus groups with relevant actors	-Interviews with VEOs -Interviews with contacts of VEOs	-Interviewing local youth leaders	-Interviewing local charismatic businessmen -Assess inmates professional interest and skills

*Table 2 - Recommendations reflecting key areas and strategic priorities*

## **Action Agenda on Violent Extremist Offenders in Prison in Mali**

### *Gaps, Challenges and Action Plans for the Rehabilitation and Integration of Violent Extremist Offenders in Prison in Mali*

#### **Liesbeth van der Heide**

Liesbeth van der Heide is a researcher and lecturer at the Institute of Security and Global Affairs (ISGA), Leiden University since 2011. She also works as a Research Fellow at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) where she coordinates ICCT's activities in the field of (counter-) terrorism in prison, a project that focuses on prisons in North-Africa and South East Asia and includes implementing threat and risk assessment measures to identify and assess violent extremism.

Her fields of interest are: terrorism and stability in the Sahel (Mali); the overlap and fusion of (non-)violent jihadist, separatist and rebel movements; (de)radicalisation and reintegration; and effective counter-terrorism. She currently coordinates a two-year research project for the National Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism and Security (NCTV) regarding the effectiveness of the reintegration of terrorists in the Netherlands.

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#### **Elena Dal Santo**

Fellow at UNICRI, the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute, since 2012, she has been involved in several projects related to urban security, the connection between illegal trafficking and terrorism, and rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist inmates. Since 2014 she is also a PhD student in Political Science at the University of Genoa with a thesis focusing on the analysis of the radicalisation process in Italy.

### Contact ICCT

Zeestraat 100  
2518 AD The Hague  
The Netherlands  
T +31 (0)70 763 0050  
W [www.icct.nl](http://www.icct.nl)  
E [info@icct.nl](mailto:info@icct.nl)

### Contact UNICRI

Viale Maestri del Lavoro10  
10127 Torino - Italy  
T +39 011-6537 111 / F +39  
011-6313 368  
W <http://unicri.it/>  
E [publicinfo@unicri.it](mailto:publicinfo@unicri.it)

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# Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup>Sergei Boeke and Antonin Tisseron, 'Mali's Long Road Ahead', *The RUSI Journal*, 159:5 (2014), p. 33.

<sup>ii</sup>UNICRI met with the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights, the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Faith, the National Directorate of Prison Administration and Supervised Education (DNAPES), the Director the Central Prison of Bamako, and Director of the Female Detention Center of Bollé, MINUSMA, UNODC, UNPOL, UNDP.

<sup>iii</sup>Sergei Boeke and Antonin Tisseron, 'Mali's Long Road Ahead', *The RUSI Journal*, 159:5 (2014), p. 33.

<sup>iv</sup>Bruce Whitehouse and Francesco Strazzari, 'Introduction: Rethinking Challenges to State Sovereignty in Mali and Northwest Africa', *African Security*, 8:4 (2015),p. 216.

<sup>v</sup>Jessica M. Huckabey, 'Al Qaeda in Mali: The Defection Connections', *Orbis* 57:3 (2013), p. 470 .

<sup>vi</sup>Jessica M. Huckabey, 'Al Qaeda in Mali: The Defection Connections', *Orbis* 57:3 (2013), p. 470.

<sup>vii</sup>Bruce Whitehouse and Francesco Strazzari, 'Introduction: Rethinking Challenges to State Sovereignty in Mali and Northwest Africa', *African Security*, 8:4 (2015),p. 216.

<sup>viii</sup>Jessica M. Huckabey, 'Al Qaeda in Mali: The Defection Connections', *Orbis* 57:3 (2013), p. 470.

<sup>ix</sup>Bruce Whitehouse and Francesco Strazzari, 'Introduction: Rethinking Challenges to State Sovereignty in Mali and Northwest Africa', *African Security*, 8:4 (2015), p. 216.

<sup>x</sup><https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/252915.pdf><https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/252915.pdf>.

<sup>xi</sup><https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/mali/report-mali/><https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/mali/report-mali/>.

<sup>xii</sup>[https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/mali - c4aad](https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/mali-c4aad) .

<sup>xiii</sup><https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257514.htm><https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257514.htm>.

<sup>xiv</sup><https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257514.htm><https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2015/257514.htm>.

<sup>xv</sup>Global Counter Terrorism Forum (2012), 'Rome Memorandum on Good practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Offenders', Conducted on 20<sup>th</sup> April 2017, through <https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/A/GCTF-Rome-Memorandum-ENG.pdf>.

<sup>xvi</sup>Raeesah Cassim Cachalia, Uyo Salifu and Irene Ndung'u, 'The dynamics of youth radicalisation in Africa reviewing the current evidence', ISS paper 296, August 2016.