



United Nations Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED)

FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS

Even though the ISIL (Da'esh) terrorist group has lost control of the territories it controlled in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic, tens of thousands of the more than 40,000 foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) from 110 States who travelled to join the conflict in those two States may still be present in the region. Consequently, previous expectations that the group's military losses would result in a flood of returnees have not been realized, as many States have instead received a steady trickle of returning FTFs.



DID YOU KNOW?

According to the United Nations Secretary-General, an estimated 20,000 fighters may still be present in Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic.

Whereas Security Council resolution [2178 \(2014\)](#) focused on stemming the flow of foreign terrorist fighters attempting to travel to conflict zones, Security Council resolution [2396 \(2017\)](#) concentrates instead on returning and relocating FTFs, calling on States to strengthen measures to prevent the transit of terrorists, including by ensuring that identity documents are not forged and employing evidence-based risk assessments, screening procedures, and the collection and analysis of travel data to identify individuals posing a terrorist threat, in accordance with domestic and international law, and without resorting to profiling based on discrimination. The latter resolution also calls on States to take appropriate action with regard to suspected terrorists and their accompanying family members who enter their territories. While

emphasizing that Member States are obliged to bring to justice anyone who has participated in a terrorist act, the resolution also stresses the importance of assisting women and children associated with FTFs who might be victims of terrorism. It also underlines the need for comprehensive and tailored prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration (PRR) strategies for family members that might have abetted terrorist acts in various roles, taking into account gender and age sensitivities in the design of such strategies.

In its resolution 2178 (2014), the Council defines FTFs as “individuals who travel to a State other than their State of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict”, adding that FTFs

increase the intensity, duration, and complexity of conflicts and may constitute a serious danger to their States of origin, transit, destination, as well as neighbouring zones of armed conflict in which they are active.

CTED has identified three major trends since the adoption of Security Council resolution 2396 (2017): (i) difficulties in conducting comprehensive risk assessments of returnees and their accompanying family members, as well as various evidentiary and jurisdictional challenges linked to the prosecution of returning and relocating FTFs; (ii) as a significant number of FTFs have already entered States' criminal justice systems, new demands have been placed on prisons and increasing concerns raised about the potential for in-prison radicalization; (iii) the potential risks posed by the forthcoming release of imprisoned FTFs, including the potential for some of them to re-engage in terrorist activities and radicalization to violence.

Because of these and other risks, there is a need to strengthen the collection of data and information-sharing in this area, including with respect to lessons learned, in order to ensure that rehabilitation and reintegration programmes are based on sound methodologies and are implemented in full compliance with domestic law and international human rights law.

Terrorist organizations also benefit financially from the FTF phenomenon, whether in the form of donations made by the fighters themselves or in the form of ransoms paid by others to free FTFs or individuals kidnapped for ransom from conflict zones. In order to tackle terrorism financing effectively, States should integrate countering the financing of terrorism into their national counter-terrorism strategies in accordance with resolution 2178 (2014).

Women FTFs are often viewed from the perspective of deep-rooted gender stereotypes. The conventional view is that women are less likely than men to engage in terrorism. However, the experiences of many Member States suggest a different picture. According to some Member States, an estimated 25-40 per cent of all individuals who left to become FTFs were women. Women have long played significant roles in terrorist movements. The current scale of their involvement in perpetrating acts of terrorism and violent extremism, however, demands a considerably more serious and urgent examination. In accordance with Council resolutions [2242 \(2015\)](#) and [2395 \(2017\)](#), CTED – acting in collaboration with UN-Women – encourages gender-sensitive research and data collection on the drivers of radicalization for women and the impacts of counter-terrorism strategies on women's human rights and women's organizations, in order to develop targeted and evidence-based policy and programming responses.

In Guiding Principle 30 of the [Madrid Guiding Principles](#) (S/2015/939), the Counter-Terrorism Committee notes that Member States should ensure that their competent authorities are able to apply a case-by-case approach for returnees, on the basis of risk assessment, the availability of evidence, and related factors. Furthermore, in the 2018 [Addendum to the Madrid Guiding Principles](#) (S/2018/1177), Guiding Principle 46 encourages States to consider ways to ensure that prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies are timely, appropriate, comprehensive and tailored, taking into account gender and age sensitivities and related factors, the severity of the crime(s) committed, available evidence, intent and individual culpability, the support network, the public interest and other relevant considerations or factors, as appropriate, and that they are in compliance with domestic and international law, including international human rights and humanitarian law.

Accordingly, CTED, through its assessments on behalf of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, facilitates the delivery of technical assistance to States to assist them to implement all their obligations to ensure that terrorists are brought to justice, as required by resolutions [1373 \(2001\)](#), [2178 \(2014\)](#) and [2396 \(2017\)](#), and to ensure that their criminal justice systems are capable of dealing with all the serious crimes that may have been committed by FTFs.

