



Custodial Institutions Agency  
Ministry of Justice and Security

# Recognizing signs of radicalization leading to extremism





# Introduction

This brochure is developed by the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency specifically for prison guards. Custodial agencies are faced with the challenge how to deal with radicalization and violent extremism. The aim of this tool is to stimulate your awareness of signs that indicate that a detainee is in a process of radicalization that leads to extremism. This requires cooperation between all levels in the prison. Prison guards are an essential element in this approach. Together with your colleagues, you have most direct contacts with the detainees. This makes you the first frontline worker to identify signs of radicalized or extremist behaviour among detainees.

Before we go any further, we want to explain what we mean with the terms radicalization and extremism. Both refer to a status in which someone is not satisfied with his/her place in society, or with political or religious developments in the world. People can for example feel rejected or discriminated and as a consequence feel “detached” from society. Radicals and extremists want to stand up against such experienced injustice. Some people believe that they can and should use violence in order to change the world or society they live in based on strict political or religious beliefs. If this is the case, we refer to such convictions as an *extremist belief system*. Prior to such extreme convictions, detainees undergo a process that we call a *process of radicalization*. People are not born as radicals, they develop specific beliefs and principles throughout their lives. Others, such as parents, friends or fellow detainees, can influence and exploit such beliefs. Although radical thoughts are not punishable by law in most European countries, prison authorities should do anything possible to prevent radicalization leading to extremism and the recruitment of fellow detainees. This requires knowledge on relevant signs and early interventions so you can interfere in such a process to reduce the opportunity that radicals become extremists.

The elements in this tool are based on scientific knowledge and feedback from experts in the field of counter-terrorism. This makes this tool relevant and up-to-date. Bear in mind however, that risks of radicalization change over time and differ per individual.

## Framework for action

The key objective of this brochure is to support you and your colleagues in your awareness of signs of radicalization in detention. It is important to share concerns with colleagues because various professionals experience different signs, whether due to a difference in access to the detainee or to different security clearances. When you share your concerns, this will lead to a more complete and mutually supported impression. Potential successive operational steps differ per country. Make sure that you know how to act and when, and with whom to share your concerns. The elements in this brochure serve as guideline and assist you in your communication.

## Why this brochure

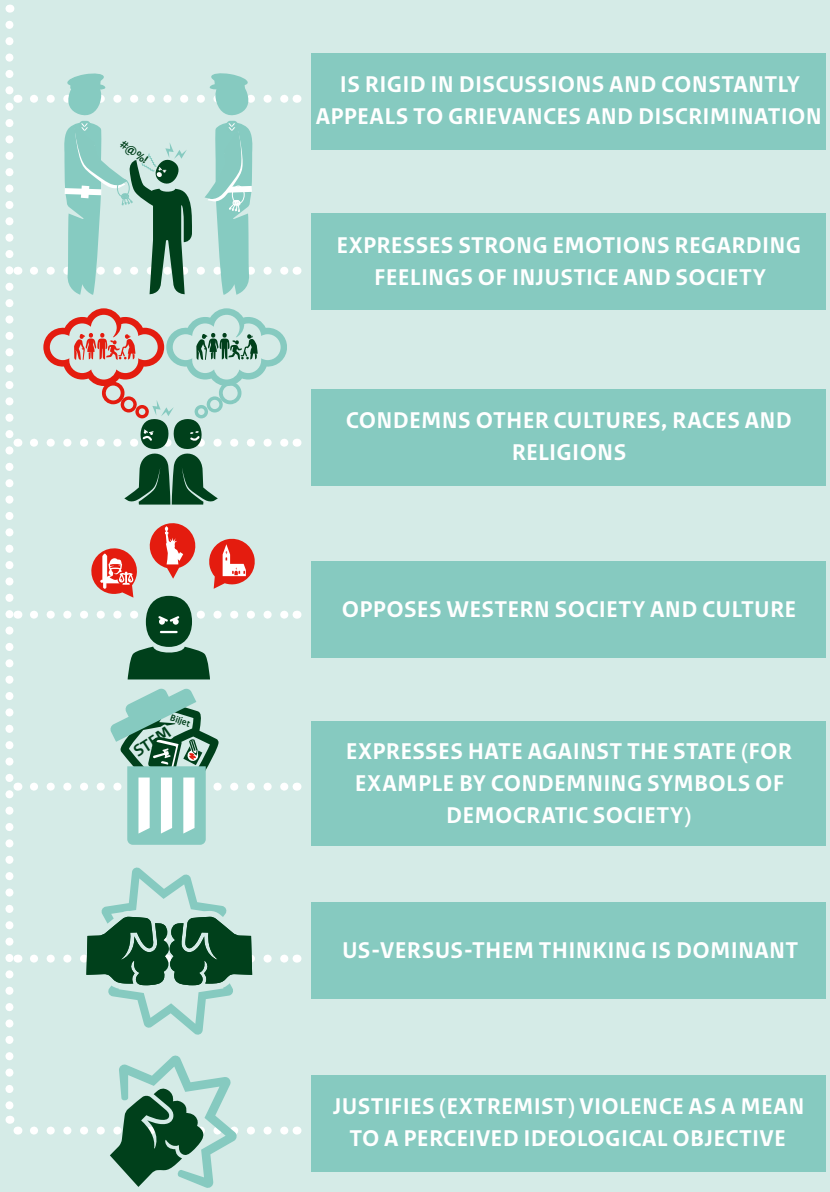
Recognizing behavior that indicates extremism is challenging. There are many forms of extremism (right-wing, left-wing, eco, religious) and the context in which processes lead to extremism differ for every detainee. People vary in their personal history, characteristics, motivations and personality traits and as a result, there is no universal path that leads to extremism. Moreover, it is important to realize that radical thoughts or increasing religiosity do not always imply risks. Many detainees turn to religion in order to find support and strength for the difficult situation they find themselves in.

While radicalization often arises from grievances, many detainees have grievances. Detainees for example will claim they are innocent, that they are angry and frustrated towards authorities and believe that they are treated unjustly or are subjected to discrimination. Also, for example juvenile, detainees can express themselves in such a way that they appear cool, or fierce. Although such behavior overlaps with some of the signs in this brochure, it does not have to imply that you are witnessing a process of radicalization. It may however stimulate you to conduct further examination. Identifying potential signs of concern and assessing them properly always requires a tailor-made approach, based on knowledge on relevant signs. This brochure supports you in your judgement and assists you to differentiate between 'ordinary prison behavior' and potential radicalization.

## How to read this brochure

The focus and starting point of this brochure is religious radicalization leading to extremism. Nonetheless, the signs and elements described here are applicable to all types of extremism. All signs are divided in three subcategories, *Ideology*; *Attitude & Behavior*; and *Contacts*. We describe the signs using three different methods. There is a small section with (theoretical) background information, each signal is displayed by its own pictogram and every subcategory is concluded with an example.

# Ideology



# Ideology

The concept *ideology* refers to a set of ideas and ideals that together form someone's worldview. It can reflect a religious, political or social scope and refers to an ideal type of society. In some ideologies the use of violence is justified in order to reach such an ideal type, such as the ISIS-ideology and their 'Caliphate' and the Third Reich concept of Hitler's Germany. These ideologies are pushed forward by people that have the ambition to actively (and violently) act upon their grievances, such as feelings of discrimination and injustice.

As you have read in the introduction, detainees often have grievances and experience feelings of injustice. This can refer to their own situation but also to the situation of the group they feel loyal to. Individual vulnerabilities and grievances however, do not have to imply that radicalization is of concern, but you need to be alert. Terrorist organizations or fellow detainees with extremist ideas may target exactly the detainees with grievances in order to recruit them. Recruiters try to exploit the existing grievance, by claiming that they are the only 'friend' the detainee has and promise that the grievances will disappear if the detainee joins them and act upon these grievances. It is important to prevent that such beliefs are spread among other detainees because this will increase polarization and decrease possibilities for successful rehabilitation.

Fortunately, not all detainees are susceptible for such recruitment narratives. However, the ones who are may initiate their process of radicalization leading to extremism. Usually, before someone considers the use of violence a justified mean to reach a desired ideological objective, several concerning signs may already have been revealed. Examples of these signs are outlined in this subcategory.

Someone's ideology is personal and can be quite difficult to identify and explore. You are not to be expected to have knowledge on all characteristics of existing ideologies. As a general rule of thumb you have to pay special attention in situations where a detainee gets more rigid in his beliefs and more intolerant against people with other beliefs and opinions. This is that we refer to as an us-versus-them perspective.

### **Example religious extremism**

K. has been in and out of detention during the last ten years. He is convicted for several financial and assault crimes. Never before were there any complaints regarding his imprisonment. During his latest detention however, K behaves differently. He constantly claims that the authorities are pursuing him merely due to his Moroccan background. To underline this feeling of discrimination, he suggests that the relatively high percentage of Islamic detainees in his country is another example of “Muslim-discrimination.” Prison staff finds it more and more difficult to talk with K. and believe he lacks any kind of nuance, something he always demonstrated. Recently, most communications end up in discussions about grievances, discrimination and politics.

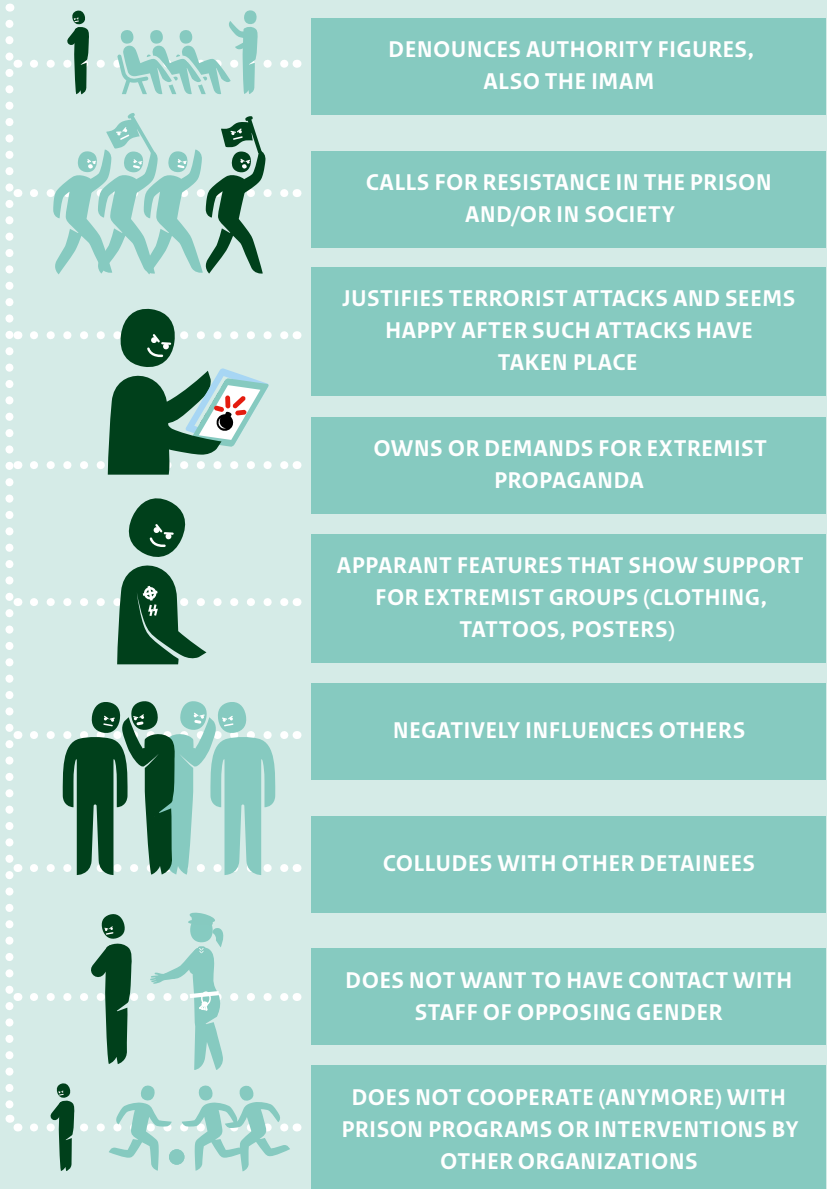
### **Example right-extremism**

M. considers western authorities weak. He consistently argues that countries such as England, Germany, Belgium, France and the Netherlands are failing to protect their liberal values by accepting mostly Islamic refugees from intolerant cultures. M. believes that “Europe will be dominated by Islam within 25 years, if we don’t stand up and act against the political developments.” When confronted with these remarks by prison staff, M. says he recently got a daughter and fears for her safety. M. foresees that women are suppressed by certain cultures. M. repeatedly compares the situation in his country with events that took place in Cologne, Germany during new year’s eve 2016, where dozens of women have been assaulted by, mostly, asylum seekers and immigrants. Moreover, he fears for an overall increase in national crime-rates.

## *‘Recognizing signs of radicalization leading to extremism among detainees’*



## Attitude & Behavior



# Attitude & Behavior

Off course, as prison guard, you know that you can learn a lot from the way a detainee behaves in the prison environment. Does he acknowledge the norms, values and rules within the prison, or does he, actively, reject them? You have a key position in studying and evaluating the behavior and attitudes of a detainee. As said before, radicalization is a process that someone undergoes. Changes in behavior can therefore always be relevant, whether compared to a previous detention or to prior behavior during someone's current imprisonment. Events in someone's personal situation can inflict triggers for behavioral change that may influence vulnerability for radicalization and extremism. This can be caused by external factors (a new cellmate or fellow detainee) or by internal motivators (personal events).

How someone cooperates with prison rules is an important indicator of his attitude. When a detainee spends less time complying to the rules and emphasizes the perceived illegitimacy of these rules, increasing conflicts can be expected. Especially when a rigid us-versus-them attitude develops, concerns should be raised and additional investigation is required. In situations where such an 'us-versus-them-doctrine' is noticed and detachment from prison rules and society takes place, a detainee will be more susceptible for extremist recruiters (or has already been recruited) and you will possibly notice some behavioral changes.

If someone becomes intolerant of other people's norms, values and rules and this leads to (verbal) aggression, conflicts and detachment from prison regulations, further investigations are essential. It may also be concerning when someone (suddenly) terminates or changes prior behavior, for example when a detainee stops with certain (group) activities. If it is possible, you can approach the detainee and try to talk with him about the changes you see. Bear the elements from this brochure in mind. Perhaps the reaction of the detainee provides interesting information. If you do address the detainee personally, make sure to talk with him as open and judgement-free as possible. All efforts that result in naming and shaming will intensify the risk that the detainee will feel rejected, which may

eventually lead to an ‘us-versus-them’ feeling. If this is the case, it will damage working alliances and probably accelerate someone’s radicalization process towards extremism.

### **Example religious extremism**

K. tries to influence his fellow detainees not to join the Friday prayers anymore. Some inmates claim that K. argues that the prison imam “has betrayed his religion by working for western authorities.” K. organizes religious meetings on his own, inviting fellow detainees to pray with him. When confronted by prison guards, K. disputes that the freedom of religion provides him with this right. He also states that he does not acknowledge the prison regulations.

### **Example right-extremism**

Despite his resentment towards authorities, M. cooperates with prison regulations. However, he increasingly has conflicts with other detainees, especially those with an immigrant background. After being confronted with this by prison staff, M. doesn’t respond to the conflict at hand, but he generalizes claiming that “all foreigners are aggressive in claiming their rights in society without doing anything in return.” Fellow detainees mention that M. gets excited when he speaks about events that took place in the Netherland and Germany, where mosques were attacked with Molotov cocktails. He misses such action against the “islamization” in his country.

*‘He increasingly expresses feelings of discrimination and injustice’*

## Contacts



RECEIVES KNOWN RADICALIZED OR EXTREMIST VISITORS.



COMMUNICATES (RECEIVING EITHER SENDING) WITH CERTAIN PRESSURE GROUPS



COMMUNICATES WITH OTHER EXTREMIST DETAINEES



EXCLUSIVELY ASSOCIATES WITH DETAINEES (OR VISITORS) SHARING THE SAME IDEOLOGY. EXCLUDES PEOPLE THAT BELIEVE DIFFERENTLY THAN HE DOES.



SEVERAL DETAINEES RECEIVE THE SAME VISITOR. THESE DETAINEES SHARE IDEOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIORAL FEATURES.

# Contacts

People that are in the process of radicalization will often withdraw from former networks and start to associate with new groups, or will start to isolate themselves. Isolation from prior networks can also be manifested by a change in the visitors a detainee receives. If the ideology of the detainee becomes so dominant that he renounces everyone who doesn't share his beliefs, this can even imply that family visits disappear.

A change in someone's network doesn't only apply to face-to-face contacts, digital or written mail can also change and influence the behavior and ideology of the detainee. There are pressure groups throughout Europe that officially claim to stand up for the rights of detainees, but often have a hidden agenda and secretly promote extremism. It is important for you to know that these pressure groups exist, even if you're not in the position to monitor all communication of the detainees.

In general, detainees that are in contact with a variety of others will be less likely to develop a rigid 'us-versus-them' mindset. The moment the ideology of the detainee starts to become the main directive in his life, the more realistic it becomes that he will surround himself exclusively with equal minded detainees. Once within networks of equal minded peers where the ideology is the dominant overlapping factor, risks of increasing detachment and resentment will rise.

Knowing how network dynamics develop in your prison is therefore essential. If concerns are rising, you may want to check someone's visits and other communication, or at least address your concerns to a colleague that has access to visitors logs. You may also want to stimulate diversity and interaction among different detainees, for example when assigning cells and cellmates or by organizing certain group activities.

### **Example religious extremism**

Prison staff notice that K. apparently terminated all ties with his prior contacts. K. is increasingly seen with a detainee that is known as an extremist. Based on a variety of concerns, prison authorities decide that all communications of K. should be monitored. It becomes apparent that K. lately receives letters from contacts that are in the database of the police as radicalized individuals.

### **Example right-extremism**

Throughout his prison life, M. has always been in contact with equal minded peers. They share specific external features, such as clothing and tattoos. In addition to people from this network, M. associates with a variety of detainees, except for detainees with an immigrant or colored background. Inspired by other risks, additional investigation is commenced that show that M. and his friends repeatedly receive the same visitor. This visitor is known by police as a right-wing extremist. Concerns are that this visitor organizes the detainees to (violently) revolt using outside pressure.

*‘He gets more detached from prison rules and society as a whole’*

# Concluding

It is our ambition that this brochure assists you in your everyday work. This tool helps you to verify possible concerns you already have. Changes in networks, ideologies or behavior do not always imply that detainees are turning to extremism. And detainees can also radicalize to extremism without any signs from this brochure have been manifested. Regarding topics as sensitive as radicalization and extremism, correct assessments can make the difference between proper early identification and increasing polarization. We therefore invite you to study the signs and explanations as outlined in this brochure and to stimulate you to discuss potential concerns with your colleagues.



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## Disclaimer:

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# Colophon

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