



# The Crime-Terror Nexus in Finland and the Baltics

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- The objective of this working paper is to present an overview of links between crime and terrorism (the crime-terror nexus) in Finland and the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), highlight potential risks, and make a series of recommendations for how such risks can be mitigated.
  - It is part of a Europe-wide survey that will produce similar papers for all 28 member states of the European Union. In doing so, the aim is to generate a more holistic understanding of threats from crime and terrorism, and promote new and innovative ways of tackling them.
  - Although organised crime groups are present and active in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, there is barely any terrorist activity, which means that direct links between crime and terrorism currently do not exist in the Baltics.
  - In Finland, the situation is more complicated, given the existence of a small but relatively active jihadist scene, which has produced potential and actual problems that are similar to other European countries. This is especially true for the situation in prisons, which we believe should be monitored.
  - Our recommendations include action on terrorist financing, information sharing, illicit trafficking, and collaboration between security agencies as well as between government and non-government actors.
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# 1 Introduction

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**B**ecause of their geographical location, Finland and the Baltics are often perceived to be at the margins of Europe. However, Finland and, especially, the three Baltic countries – Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania – have experienced significant societal change over the past three decades, and should be looked at with all the attention and effort they deserve. Indeed, while most of this change has been positive, it may also have created opportunities for “bad actors” – criminals and terrorists – to emerge and establish themselves. It is the activities of these bad actors that are subject of this working paper.

The objective of this paper is to present an overview of crime and terrorism in Finland and the Baltic states, as well as potential links between the two. Our aim is to highlight potential risks and make recommendations for how such risks can be mitigated. It is part of a Europe-wide survey that will produce similar papers for all 28 member states of the European Union. In doing so, the aim is to generate a more holistic understanding of threats from crime and terrorism, and promote new and innovative ways of tackling them.

The paper’s empirical basis is a survey of open sources, including relevant government and inter-governmental reports, academic research, court documents and newspaper articles. The research took place between June and July 2018, and was carried out by a team of Latvian, Lithuanian, Finnish, and British researchers.<sup>1</sup>

Although organised crime groups are active in Finland and the Baltics, there is barely any terrorist activity, which means that direct links between crime and terrorism do not exist. However, we believe that the government and other actors should be alert and keep monitoring the situation in order to ensure that such links do not emerge in the future.

Our recommendations include actions on monitoring, terrorist financing, illicit trafficking, information sharing, and collaboration between security agencies as well as between government and non-government actors.

The paper starts with overviews of organised crime and terrorism in Finland and the Baltics, before exploring potential links between terrorism and crime. It concludes with a series of recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

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## Box 1: What is the Crime-Terror Nexus?

The concept of the crime-terror nexus emerged in the early 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of globalisation. Amidst shifting geopolitics and the birth of the information age, analysts noticed that terrorist and insurgent groups were increasingly adapting criminal *modus operandi* to further their aims.

Since then, scholars have identified *three types of crime-terror nexus: institutional, organisational, and social.*

### Institutional

One of the pioneers was Tamara Makarenko.<sup>2</sup> On her “crime-terror continuum”, she identified three types of institutional linkages between criminal and terrorist groups:

- At one end, criminal and terrorist groups engaged in *co-operation*, either in limited, transaction-based alliances, or in more sophisticated coalitions.
- Nearing the middle, *convergence* indicated when groups adapted skills belonging to the other, resulting in “hybrid criminal-terrorist groups”.
- At the other end was *transformation*, in which a group had completely transformed into the other by way of a shift in motivation.

Among the most prominent examples have been the Taliban, which have at times depended on Afghanistan’s heroin production; the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces’ (FARC) involvement in their country’s narcotics industry; and the smuggling of petrol and counterfeit goods by the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

### Organisational

Writing at the same time as Makarenko, Letizia Paoli focused on the structural and organisational similarities between youth gangs and terrorist groups, which she categorised as “clannish” organisations:<sup>3</sup>

- They were involved in illegal activity, including violence;
- They required members’ “absolute commitment”;
- They offered *emotional benefits*, such as status, “brotherhood”, identity, and belonging.

*continues...*

<sup>2</sup> Tamara Makarenko, “The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism”, *Global Crime*, Vol 6, No 1, 2004, pp.129-145.

<sup>3</sup> Letizia Paoli, “The Paradoxes of Organized Crime”, *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, Vol 37, No 1, 2002, pp.51-97.

In Paoli's view, drawing sharp distinctions between actors based on their stated aims – criminal versus political – could be misleading, because the distinctions might be blurred and “goals [could] change”.

As an example, she cited white supremacist gangs in the United States, which recruited their membership according to ideological principles and professed to have a political programme but were heavily involved in “ordinary” crime.

## Social

In a recent study of jihadist recruitment in Europe, Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann highlighted not the convergence of criminals and terrorists as groups or organisations but of their social networks, environments, or milieus.<sup>4</sup> Rather than formalised collaboration or even transformation, they found that criminal and terrorist groups recruited from sociologically similar pools of people, creating (often unintended) synergies and overlaps.

This “new” crime-terror nexus had four facets:

- It affected processes of *radicalisation*, because involvement in terrorism could offer redemption and legitimise crime.
- It highlighted the *role of prisons* as environments for radicalisation and networking among criminals and extremists.
- It emphasised the *development of skills and experiences* that could be useful for terrorists, particularly access to weapons, forged documents, and the familiarity with violence.
- It facilitated the *financing* of terrorism, especially through petty crime.

Despite differences in approach and perspective, the *three types of nexus – institutional, organisational, and social* – are not mutually exclusive. Taken together, they provide the analytical framework of the Crime Terror Nexus Project.

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<sup>4</sup> Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, “Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 10, No 6, 2016, pp.25-40.

## 2 Organised crime

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Finland is globally admired for its high standards of human development. The Baltic states too have transformed into successful societies, which have overcome authoritarian pasts. However, the changes that have happened over the course of the last decades may also have provided “bad actors” such as organised criminals with opportunities to establish themselves.<sup>5</sup>

This section provides an overview of the organised crime scene in Finland and the Baltics, covering the groups involved, their activities, and the locations in which they operate.

### Groups

Organised crime is not a new phenomenon in Finland. Its roots can be traced to the rise of outlaw motorcycle clubs (commonly known as “biker gangs”) in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which remain the most visible aspect of organised crime in the country.<sup>6</sup> Since then, crime groups have established themselves – especially within the drug trade – in almost every major city in the country.<sup>7</sup>

The chaos of the immediate post-independence years in the early 1990s also saw organised crime take off in the Baltics. Crime groups sought to exploit the weak central and local government institutions – as well as the rapid privatisation of state assets – by providing “services” that the state had previously fulfilled.<sup>8</sup> Gangs began dividing territories of influence, extorting businesses for protection money, and engaging in cross border smuggling.<sup>9</sup>

Compounding this early situation was the entry of Russian-based organised crime groups, who sought to establish themselves throughout the Baltics and Eastern Europe.<sup>10</sup> Russian and Chechen groups thus fought for supremacy over the Baltic underworld, which was considered

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<sup>5</sup> In Finland, organised crime is understood as a group of at least three people acting together to commit a serious crime; see “Järjestäytynyt rikollisuus vaikuttaa laajasti yhteiskuntaan”, Sisäministeriö, n.d., available at: <https://intermin.fi/poliisiasiat/jarjestaytynyt-rikollisuus>. In the Baltic states, there is no single definition of organised crime. In Lithuania, Article 25 of the Criminal Code distinguishes between an “organised group” – of two or more people who commission crime(s), where tasks or roles are divided – and a “criminal association” – of three or more people “linked by permanent mutual relations and division of roles or tasks”. In Latvia, Section 21 of the Criminal Code defines an organised group as two or more people, with divided responsibilities, involved in serious crime. In Estonia, Section 255 of the Penal Code also provides a similar definition to the one used in Latvia.

<sup>6</sup> “Järjestäytynyt rikollisuus vaikuttaa laajasti yhteiskuntaan”, Sisäministeriö, n.d.

<sup>7</sup> Anne Orjala, “KRP: Liivijengeillä yhä vahva jalansija Suomessa – Cannonballin tilanne ei vaikuta”, *YLE*, 19 July 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Dina Siegel and Hans Nelen, “The Mobility of East and Central European Organized Crime: The Cases of Lithuania, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania”, Hans Nelen and Dina Siegel (eds.), *Contemporary Organized Crime: Developments, Challenges and Responses* (Cham: Springer, 2017), p.93.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the activities of the *Vilnius brigade*: “Vilniaus brigada’ tebealsuoja mirtimi”, *Respublika*, 13 July 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Galeotti, *Crimintern: How the Kremlin uses Russia’s Criminal Networks in Europe*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2017.

fundamental to their wider aspirations.<sup>11</sup> The results were often extremely violent, as seen during Estonia's "bloody autumn" of 1994, when an estimated 100 murders were connected with the ongoing turf war.<sup>12</sup>

Many of these crime groups attracted attention from the authorities, media, and public for their infamy throughout the 1990s. The Vilnius brigade, for example, carried out the high-profile murder of journalist Vitas Lingys in 1993, as well as the murder of priest and art collector Ričardas Mikutavičius in 1998.<sup>13</sup> Other groups such as *Tulpiniai*,<sup>14</sup> the *Princai* group in Šiauliai,<sup>15</sup> Henrikas "Henrytė" Daktaras' gang in Kaunas,<sup>16</sup> and Sigitas Gaidjurgis' group in the port town of Klaipėda,<sup>17</sup> also earned reputations of violence and notoriety.

A change in behaviour occurred in the mid-2000s, with groups moving away from public brutality towards more inconspicuous operations. Lithuanian police observed groups becoming more entrepreneurial and professional in their business models, structures, and operations.<sup>18</sup>

Estimates of the number of crime groups – and of the number of individuals involved – are difficult to come by. It is unknown, for example, how many are operating in Latvia and Estonia.

In Lithuania, in 2009 authorities reported there were 18 organised crime groups active – involving approximately 600 people<sup>19</sup> – while in 2016 the General Police Commissioner, Linas Parnas, stated "several dozen" groups were operating in the country, with the number remaining "stable".<sup>20</sup>

In Finland, the National Bureau of Investigation estimates there are between 80 and 90 groups in operation, involving approximately 1,000 members.<sup>21</sup> This marks a substantial growth in numbers in the past two decades: in the year 2000, there were only a few organisations and several groups tied to organised crime, concentrated mostly in the south and the Helsinki metropolitan region in particular.<sup>22</sup>

The most visible Finnish crime groups are outlaw motorcycle clubs (MCs), such as the *Bandidos MC*, *Cannonball MC*, *United Brotherhood*, and *Hell's Angels MC*. The result is a crime scene that is "heavily domestic" in its composition.<sup>23</sup> Both Hell's Angels and United Brotherhood have over 100 members, and several active chapters throughout the country. Bandidos and Cannonball have over 200 members – though several Cannonball chapters closed in 2017 after the organisation fractured<sup>24</sup> – with chapters

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11 Ibid, p.2.

12 Ibid.

13 "10 įtakingiausių kriminalinio pasaulio atstovų", *Veidas*, 7 December 2015.

14 Ibid.; "'Tulpiniai' buvo pažįstamų 'angelų' gauja", *Respublika*, 13 February 2008; "Tulpių gatvės berniukai", *Lietuvos žinios*, 13 July 2011.

15 "Šiaulių Princų pasaka, aptaškyta krauju", *TV3*, 6 August 2011.

16 "Naujoji Kauno mafijos karta: žiaurūs, godūs ir negyvi", *15min*, 16 December 2011.

17 "'Gaidjurginių' auka tapo ir vadeivos bičiulis su drauge", *Vakarų ekspresas*, 4 November 2004.

18 "Gaujos Lietuvoje: kas su jomis yra susidūręs", *Spinter Research*, 24 October 2013.

19 "Lietuvos nusikaltėliai Europoje garsėja savo universalumu, lankstumu ir ryšiais", *Veidas*, 6 October 2010.

20 "Linas Parnas: 'Lietuvoje veikia keliasdešimt organizuotų nusikalstamų grupuočių'", *15min*, 28 December 2016.

21 "Järjestätynyt rikollisuus vaikuttaa laajasti yhteiskuntaan", *Sisäministeriö*, n.d.

22 "KRP: Ulkomaalainen järjestätynyt rikollisuus hermostuttaa suomalaisjengejä", *MTV*, 24 January 2018.

23 Transcrime, *From Illegal Markets to Legitimate Businesses: The Portfolio of Organised Crime in Europe*, Università degli Studi di Trento, 2015, p.96.

24 "SK: Cannonball lopettanut toimintansa kahta osastoa lukuunottamatta – tunnuksot poistettiin klubitalolta Ulvilasta", *Aamulehti*, 19 July 2017.

and activity in various parts of Finland. Both Bandidos and Cannonball have also expanded to Estonia.<sup>25</sup>

## Activities and Locations

Crime groups carry out a range of activities, such as the trafficking of drugs, prostitution, extortion, and loansharking. These have traditionally been a key source of income for biker gangs in particular.<sup>26</sup> According to the Finnish National Bureau of Investigation, groups are increasingly becoming involved in legitimate businesses; the construction, cleaning, transportation, and restaurant sectors are particularly affected.<sup>27</sup> Crime groups may establish new businesses, or exploit and blackmail already established legitimate ones, to carry out economic crimes such as tax fraud, accounting fraud, and money laundering.<sup>28</sup>

The heroin market is estimated to be the largest in Finland, followed by ecstasy, amphetamines, cannabis, and cocaine.<sup>29</sup> The networks that import these drugs have connections to the Baltics.<sup>30</sup>

Crime groups have moved into new markets. In Finland, organised criminals have sought to exploit the internet to commit offences such as “ransomware, phishing, fraud, money laundering and sexual abuse of children”.<sup>31</sup> Concurrently, groups have become increasingly involved in semi-legitimate businesses across several sectors,<sup>32</sup> and are even “seeking to extend their influence into societal structures and decision-making systems”, according to the Ministry of Interior.<sup>33</sup>

Currently the main biker gangs have chapters or some presence in virtually all major cities in Finland. Several smaller gangs and criminal groups have a more local or regional footprint in throughout the country. The broader organised crime in Finland is increasingly international in its scope, with the more established groups cooperating with overseas partners, particularly those based in Russia and the Baltic states.

Finland has recently experienced the arrival of more international crime groups.<sup>34</sup> In early 2017, *Satudarah* motorcycle club, a biker gang established in the Netherlands in 1990, reportedly established a local chapter in Finland – with a membership between 10 and 15 people – with the support of its Swedish chapter.<sup>35</sup> The club is reportedly active in and around Helsinki, and several of its members have already been convicted of criminal activity.<sup>36</sup>

25 “Näin liivijengit toimivat eri puolilla Suomea,” *YLE*, 7 December 2018.

26 Järjestäytynyt rikollisuus painottuu yhä vahvemmin talousrikoksiin,” *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, 8 October, 2017.

27 “Police: Biker Gangs infiltrating business world,” *YLE*, 3 April 2013.

28 “Järjestäytynyt rikollisuus vaikuttaa laajasti yhteiskuntaan”, Sisäministeriö, n.d.

29 Transcrime, *From Illegal Markets to Legitimate Businesses: The Portfolio of Organised Crime in Europe*, Università degli Studi di Trento, 2015, p.35.

30 *Country Drug Report 2017 – Finland*, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), 2017, p.16.

31 “Järjestäytynyt rikollisuus vaikuttaa laajasti yhteiskuntaan”, Sisäministeriö, n.d.

32 *Ibid.*

33 *Ibid.*

34 Anne Orjala, “KRP: Liivijengeillä yhä vahva jalansija Suomessa – Cannonballin tilanne ei vaikuta”, *YLE*, 19 July 2017.

35 “Kansainvälinen liivijengi tuli nyt Suomeen- kerho sai tunnuksset”, *Savon Sanomat*, 29 January 2017.

36 “Analyysi: Suomen uusien jengien jäseniä poliisissa -se saattaa lopettaa osaston kokonaan”, *Savon Sanomat*, 20 November 2017.

Besides drug *importation*, there is only limited evidence of domestic drug *production* industry in the region. Amphetamines have been found to be produced by the Lapinas gang in Žvėrynas in Vilnius,<sup>37</sup> as well as in Lithuania.<sup>38</sup> The availability of new psychoactive substances (NPS) is a rising market in Finland, where police have seized makeshift production factories.<sup>39</sup> On the whole, however, the countries are transit or destination countries for illicit drugs.

The Baltic states are key transit countries for organised crime networks. The main ports in the region – Klaipėda in Lithuania, Riga and Ventspils in Latvia, and Tallinn in Estonia – represent significant nodes for transnational networks, facilitating access to the rest of Europe. The land border with Russia and Belarus continues to present a major challenge, which has even prompted the Latvian government to begin constructing a wall along the Latvia-Russia border.<sup>40</sup>

In summary, Finland and the Baltics have experienced a range of organised criminal activities, though – as will be shown in the following section – the linkages between these activities and terrorism are limited.

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37 "Lapino grupuotės galas - paskutinė byla teisme", *Diena*, 8 August 2011.

38 "Lietuvos nusikaltėliai Europoje garsėja savo universalumu, lankstumu ir ryšiais", *Veidas*, 6 October 2010; "Policijos departamentas: Lietuvoje išaugo neteisėta narkotikų apyvarta", *Vakarų ekspresas*, 7 May 2009.

39 *Country Drug Report 2017 – Finland*, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), 2017, p.16.

40 "Robežsardze vēlas vēl 100 kilometrus žoga uz Latvijas - Krievijas robežas", LSM, 14 March 2018.

### 3 Terrorism

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Europe has witnessed a wave of jihadist terrorist attacks in recent years, ranging from coordinated bombings to vehicle-ramming and knife attacks, that have left hundreds killed and many more injured. In contrast to their experiences with organised crime, Finland and the Baltic states have historically only experienced low levels of terrorism.<sup>41</sup>

Finland has seen a surge of extremist activity – especially involving jihadists, though also by the far-right – which has led to an increase in extremist crimes and violence.<sup>42</sup> For instance, there were a string of attempted arsons and firebombings targeting refugee centres in the latter half of 2015 and beginning of 2016.<sup>43</sup> The country experienced its first – and to date, only – jihadist attack in August 2017, when Abderrahman Bouanane fatally stabbed two people and injured eight others in the city of Turku.<sup>44</sup>

In the Baltic states, there is very minimal terrorist activity. There have been no attacks in Latvia and Lithuania in recent years, and neither country has seen substantial jihadist mobilisations.<sup>45</sup> Estonia experienced an arson attack on a refugee centre in September 2015, though it is unknown who the perpetrator was.

#### Jihadism

Finland has long been a relative backwater in the broader European jihadist milieu. Prior to 2012 and the onset of the Syrian civil war, the country had a relatively muted jihadist scene, and had seen very few cases of its citizens travelling abroad to join jihadist groups, receive military training, and participate in armed conflict.

Since then, jihadism in Finland has developed significantly.<sup>46</sup> The country has experienced an unprecedented foreign fighter mobilisation to Syria and Iraq (see below), as well as an increase in homegrown radicalisation and jihadist activism. In January 2018, the Finnish Security Intelligence Service

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41 We define terrorism as symbolic acts of politically motivated violence. See Peter R. Neumann and M.L.R. Smith, *The Strategy of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2008), p.8.

42 Finland's public discourse rarely includes use of the word "terrorism". For more, see Leena Malkki and Daniel Sallamaa, "To Call or Not to Call It Terrorism: Public Debate on Ideologically-motivated Acts of Violence in Finland, 1991–2015", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, advance online publication, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2018.1447191>.

43 There were at least 15 known cases in 2015 alone. *Väkivaltaisen ekstremismin tilannekatsaus 1/2016*, Sisäministeriön julkaisu, 2016, p.14.

44 "Finland's first terror attack: Life Sentence for Turku stabber", YLE, 15 June 2018.

45 Latvia's only terrorist attack took place in 2000, when two explosions in the *Universāleikals Centrs* shopping mall left a person dead. No one claimed responsibility for the attack. For more, see "15 gadi kopš sprādziena 'Universāleikalā Centrs': Dūmi, apjukums un pamatīga izmeklēšana", LSM, 18 August 2015.

46 *Supo Yearbook 2016*, The Finnish Security Intelligence Service, 29 March 2017.

(*Suojelupoliisi*, or Supo), stated that 370 individuals are monitored by its counterterrorism officials.<sup>47</sup> This is an 80 per cent increase from 2012.<sup>48</sup>

The Baltic jihadist scene is virtually non-existent. No attacks have taken place, and there are only a handful of cases of homegrown radicalisation.<sup>49</sup> The Latvian Security Police have, however, identified several residents of the country who have displayed vulnerability to the risk of radicalisation.<sup>50</sup>

## Attacks, Plots, and Arrests

Finland has only experienced one jihadist attack to date, which took place in Turku on 18<sup>th</sup> August 2017. Abderrahman Bouanane, a Moroccan national whose asylum application had been rejected in Finland, fatally stabbed two people and injured eight before being shot and captured by the Finnish police.<sup>51</sup> Though the Islamic State is yet to take responsibility for the attack in its official propaganda outlets (much to the frustration of Bouanane), the attack was inspired by the group.<sup>52</sup>

While the authorities have been reluctant to comment on any other possible plots, the police have intervened early to disrupt suspected jihadist activity, particularly since late 2015.<sup>53</sup> The number of terrorism-related arrests in Finland has been extremely low, though there have been several notable events over the past few years:

- *December 2014*: Finland's first terrorism-related trial took place, where four Somali defendants were accused of funding the jihadist group al-Shabaab.<sup>54</sup> One of the suspects had sent a total of \$2,500 to the group. They were initially found guilty, but the verdict was overturned on appeal in 2016, as Finnish law required definitive proof that the funds were for Al-Shabaab's terrorist activities, and not for other purposes.<sup>55</sup>
- *December 2014*: Awat Hamasalih, an Iraqi Kurd who holds British citizenship, was deported to the UK from Finland for being a threat to national security.<sup>56</sup> In June 2017 British courts convicted him for membership of IS, sentencing him to six years.<sup>57</sup>
- *December 2015*: Finnish police arrested Iraqi twin brothers in Forssa. They were charged with participating in the June 2014 Camp Speicher massacre in Iraq, when the Islamic State killed at least

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47 Supo refers to them as "target individuals", defined as those who may "have links to terrorist organisations, receive training or train others with a terrorist purpose, spread terrorist organisations' propaganda and try to recruit new individuals for terrorist activity, finance terrorist networks or raise finance for them, or participate in terrorist activity"; *Supo Yearbook 2017*, The Finnish Security Intelligence Service, 21 March 2018; Christian Jokinen, "Terrorist intent: How Finland's Justice System Struggles to Tackle Terrorism Offenders", *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, Vol 16, Issue 14, 2018.

48 Ibid.

49 In Lithuania, the conviction of Eglė Kusaitė is the most notable – and controversial – case in the country's history.

50 *Publiskais pārskats par Drošības policijas darbību 2017.gadā*, Drošības policija, 2018; see also *National Security Conception of the Republic of Latvia (2015 – )*, Saeima, 2015.

51 Bouanane was initially misidentified in the media as Abderrahman Meckah, which was a false identity he assumed upon entering Finland in 2016; "Puukotukset Turussa 18.8.2017", *Onnettomuustutkintakeskus*, 14 June 2018, pp.66-67.

52 "Finland's first terror attack: Life Sentence for Turku stabber," *YLE*, 15 June 2018.

53 It is not clear how many of these cases, if any, are connected to jihadism; "KRP: Tempeliäukion uhkaa vastaavia tilanteita on ollut aiemminkin", *MTV*, 20 June 2017.

54 "Hovioikeus hylkäsi syytteet Suomen ensimmäisessä terrorismijutussa", *YLE*, 23 March 2016.

55 "Hovioikeus hylkäsi syytteet Suomen ensimmäisessä terrorismijutussa", *YLE*, 23 March 2016.

56 Anu Nousiainen, "Suomi karkotti Turussa asuneen ääri-islamistin Britanniaan – Vakava uhka yleiselle turvallisuudelle", *Helsingin Sanomat*, 15 January 2015.

57 "Birmingham man convicted of Islamic State membership", *BBC News*, 16 June 2017.

1,566 Iraqi Air Force cadets.<sup>58</sup> The pair were eventually found not guilty in June 2017.<sup>59</sup>

- *August 2017*: Abderrahman Bouanane killed two people and injured eight more during a knife attack in Turku, Finland. Bouanane was arrested, and in June 2018 was sentenced to life in prison for the attack. Although the defence is appealing the verdict, the case was the first successful prosecution of terrorism-related crimes in Finland.<sup>60</sup>
- *October 2017*: a Finland-based IS supporter was sentenced for incitement, although the case was not prosecuted under terrorism legislation.<sup>61</sup>
- *November 2017*: Three men are charged by Finnish authorities for terrorist offences relating to a plan to join Katibat al-Muhajireen in Syria in 2013.<sup>62</sup> Prosecutors allege the men had funded their trip using criminals means; the cell set up companies which they used to carry out VAT fraud.<sup>63</sup> The court dismissed the terrorism-related charges, but two of the men were found guilty for their economic crimes.<sup>64</sup>
- *November 2017*: Mārtiņš Grīnbergs, a 20-year-old convert from Latvia, is sentenced 10 years and 3 months for participating in the Syrian civil war and joining a terrorist organisation. Grīnbergs had travelled to IS-held territory in September 2014 – accompanied by another Latvian – and was detained by Turkish authorities mid-2016, and subsequently deported to Latvia. The verdict is under appeal.<sup>65</sup>

Simultaneously, jihadism in Finland has become more professional, organised, and connected to extremist milieus and actors abroad.<sup>66</sup> Supo has stated that an increasing proportion of the jihadist scene “have taken part in armed conflict, expressed willingness to participate in armed activity, or received terrorist training”.<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, while the country has not experienced the emergence of a “Sharia4”-type organisation,<sup>68</sup> – as seen in the UK, Belgium, and the Netherlands – an unknown number of active extremist networks have emerged since 2015.<sup>69</sup>

58 “Kaikki syytteet kaatuivat Pirkanmaan käräjäoikeudessa: Terrorimurhasta syytetyt irakilaiskaksoset syyttömiä”, *YLE*, 24 May 2017.

59 Ibid.

60 Christian Jokinen, “‘Terrorist intent’: How Finland’s Justice System Struggles to Tackle Terrorism Offenders”, *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, Vol 16, Issue 14, 2018.

61 He received a 45-day long suspended sentence; “Isisiä tukenut suomalainen 45 päivän ehdolliseen vankeuteen – houkutteli terroritekoihin ja solvasi shioja”, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 6 October 2017.

62 “Käräjäoikeus hylkäsi kaikki syytteet suomalaismiesten terrorismirikoksista – tuomio tuli talousrikoksista”, *YLE*, 24 January 2018.

63 “Syyttäjä: Terrorismirikoksista syytetyt yrittivät liittyä Syyrian hallitusta vastaan taistelemaan ryhmään – hankkivat varusteita talousrikoksilla”, *YLE*, 7 November 2017.

64 “Käräjäoikeus hylkäsi kaikki syytteet suomalaismiesten terrorismirikoksista – tuomio tuli talousrikoksista”, *YLE*, 21 January 2018.

65 “Dalibā Sirijas konfliktā apsūdzētais jaunietis Mārtiņš vainu neatzīst”, *Diena*, 2 February 2017; “Latvian Daesh volunteer gets sentence increased to 10 years”, *LSM*, 16 November 2017.

66 See, for example, *Supo Yearbook 2017*.

67 Ibid.

68 While Anjem Choudary declared that Sharia4Finland was established when he visited in spring 2013 – albeit as an idea rather than an organisation, according to his own words - there are very little signs that it has been active since. Laura Halminen, “Radikaali muslimisaarnaaja esiintyi Helsingissä”, *Helsingin Sanomat*, 28 March 2013.

69 These networks seek to promote jihadist ideology in the country and radicalise and recruit new members. *Supo Yearbook 2016*, p.21

An added complication has been the unprecedented arrival of asylum seekers from conflict zones – particularly Afghanistan, Syria, and Iraq – in 2015.<sup>70</sup> Finnish authorities have assessed up to 500 of these to have an increased “risk of violence”.<sup>71</sup> It is possible that several individuals are connected to jihadist groups in their countries of origin, though the exact figure is not known.

These are among the key domestic factors that have forced Supo to upgrade their terrorism threat assessment on three separate occasions between 2014 and 2017. On a four-level scale, the terrorism threat facing Finland is currently “elevated”.<sup>72</sup>

## Foreign Fighters and Returnees

More than six thousand Europeans “foreign fighters” have joined jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq. From Finland, more than 80 adult individuals – approximately a fifth of whom are women – and 30 children are confirmed to have travelled to Syria and Iraq.<sup>73</sup> Relative to the country’s Muslim population, this is one of the highest per capita rates of foreign fighters in the world.<sup>74</sup>

Finnish foreign fighters are a heterogeneous group, comprising a range of socio-economic backgrounds, motives for travelling, and activity in the conflict zone. The cohort consists of at least 19 different ethnicities – including Finnish converts – and approximately 60 per cent of those that travelled were Finnish citizens.<sup>75</sup>

Most have joined the Islamic State or its smaller affiliates.<sup>76</sup> According to Supo, some of these have risen to “significant positions” within the group.<sup>77</sup> As a result, Finland is now better known among jihadist actors, particularly in Syria and Iraq, and it has been featured in IS’ official propaganda several times.

There is collective anxiety in Europe regarding the threat from returning foreign fighters, given that many have been trained in the use of weapons and explosives, and likely remain committed to jihadist ideology. To date, more than 20 individuals have returned to Finland, albeit most returned by the latter half of 2014.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, at least 15 to 25 individuals have died fighting in the conflict.<sup>79</sup>

There is little information available on Finnish returnees, and the potential threat of attack planning they may pose. Some may also become active

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70 On average, Finland has received between 1,500 and 6,000 asylum seekers per year throughout the 2000s. In 2015, Finland received a record 32,476 asylum seekers. “Pakolainen pakenee vainoa kotimaassaan,” Sisäministeriö, available at: <https://intermin.fi/maahanmuutto/turvapaikanhakijat-ja-pakolaiset>.

71 “Radikaalin islamin uhka Suomessa tutkitaan – ministeriö selvittää myös propagandan määrän”, *Turun Sanomat*, 30 January 2018.

72 The threat levels are low, elevated, high, and severe. *Supo Yearbook 2017*, p.11.

73 Additionally, an unknown number of children – likely to be in the double-digits – have been born in the conflict zone to women connected to Finland; *Violent Extremism in Finland – situation overview 1/2018*, Ministry of the Interior, 1 June 2018.

74 Päivi Happonen, Mikko Leppänen and Heidi Sullström, “Supo: Suomesta lähteneitä taistelijoita noussut korkeaan asemaan Isisissä”, *YLE*, 22 November 2016.

75 *Väkivaltaisen ekstremismin tilannekatsaus 2/2015*, Sisäministeriön julkaisu, 2014, p.15.

76 *Väkivaltaisen ekstremismin tilannekatsaus 1/2017*, Sisäministeriön julkaisu, 2017, p.19.

77 Happonen, Leppänen and Sullström, 2016.

78 Yrjö Kokkonen, “Supo: Syyriasta palannut noin 20 ihmistä Suomeen,” *YLE*, 13 October 2014; *Ibid.*

79 *Violent Extremism in Finland – situation overview 1/2018*, Ministry of the Interior, 1 June 2018, p.25.

in the domestic jihadist scene – without ever carrying out an attack – and so particular attention should be paid to their possible recruitment, propaganda, and logistical activities.

The Latvian authorities have not released figures on the country's foreign fighters, though it is believed a handful of its citizens have travelled.<sup>80</sup> The country's most high-profile case is that of Oleg Petrov, the former chairman of the Latvian Islamic Culture Centre, who produced Latvian and Russian-language propaganda after joining IS.<sup>81</sup> The Latvian Security Police have opened four criminal investigations for "illegal participation" in the Syrian conflict.<sup>82</sup>

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80 "Pair of Latvian Muslims may have Joined ISIS in Syria", *LSM*, 10 June 2015.

81 *Publiskais pārskats par Drošības policijas darbību 2017.gadā*, Drošības policija, 2018.

82 As per Article 77.1 of the country's Criminal Code.

## 4 A Nascent Crime-Terror Nexus in Finland?

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**W**hile there is no evidence of an institutional nexus between organised crime and terrorism in Finland – and it is highly unlikely that one would emerge in the near-future – there is some indication of an emerging *social* nexus where criminal and extremist milieus have begun to overlap, particularly in Finnish prisons.

In the Baltic states, meanwhile, there are no overlaps between criminals and terrorists. Given the minimal presence of terrorist groups, networks, and individuals in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, there is no crime-terror nexus to speak of. In contrast to the picture in other European countries,<sup>83</sup> the few jihadists that have emerged from these countries have not had known criminal backgrounds.

According to a Finnish Interior Ministry report from 2018, individuals with the potential to commit terrorist crimes can be divided into two groups: 1) those who are highly ideological; and 2) those who only have a loose connection to jihadist ideology but have criminal backgrounds and a subsequently lower threshold for violence.<sup>84</sup>

This second, violent group forms a substantial minority of jihadists in Finland. An Interior Ministry report published in 2016 stated that at least 25 per cent of “risk individuals” have been previously suspected of violent crimes, with a few dozen individuals suspected of committing multiple violent crimes.<sup>85</sup>

A minority of jihadists have also been involved with non-violent crime. In 2015, approximately 20 per cent of Supo’s target individuals were suspected of such crimes, including fraud and forgery, while others were also suspected of drug-related crimes.<sup>86</sup> Yet it is not known how many jihadists are involved in *both* violent and non-violent crime.

These data points suggest a crossover between criminal and jihadist behaviour, though there is little detail available on their radicalisation trajectories. In turn, this makes it difficult to gauge whether their criminality had a strong influence on their involvement in jihadism.

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83 Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, “Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 10, No 6, 2016, pp.25-40.

84 *Väkivaltaisen ekstremismin tilannekatsaus 1/2018*, Sisäministeriön julkaisu, 2018, p.17.

85 *Väkivaltaisen ekstremismin tilannekatsaus 1/2016*, Sisäministeriön julkaisu, 2016, p.17.

86 *Ibid.*, pp.17-18.

Developments in the Finnish criminal scene may increase the chance of the two milieus merging closer. Clusters of new, international biker gangs – such as *Outlaws* and *No Surrender*<sup>87</sup> – as well as foreign organised criminals – such as Albanian, Kurdish, and Moroccan groups<sup>88</sup> – have begun to establish themselves in the same areas, in and around Helsinki and Turku, that have been home to jihadists. This proximity naturally increases the chances of overlaps. There is already some evidence that biker gangs are now recruiting from the pool of refugees and migrants – particularly those from Iraq – that have arrived in Finland since 2015, though it remains to be seen how this will develop in the coming years.<sup>89</sup>

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87 "Jälleen uusi liivijengi Suomeen? Moottoripyöräkerho No Surrender hakee jalansijaa", *MTV*, 21 March 2018.

88 Taika Dahlbom, Poliisi seurasi albanialaista huumejengiä vuoden – löysi yhdessä takavarikossa yli 20 kiloa kovia huumeita," *Iltalehti*, 25 February 2017; Annette Blencowe & Emmakaisa Jokiniemi, "Lähes 50 irakilasta järjestettiin Suomeen laittomasti – tuomiot pysyivät ennallaan hovioikeudessa," *YLE*, 31 March 2017; Sanna Pekkonen, "Rikoskomisario: Valtava huumeilasti kertoo amfetamiinin kysynnän kasvusta", *YLE*, 13 October 2015.

89 Poliisi huomasi ilmiön: rikollisjengeihin liittyy nyt paljon maahanmuuttajia – Helvetin enkelit vahvistui uudella kerholla", *Iltalehti*, 13 February 2018.

## 5 A Potential Prisons Nexus

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Prisons also represent intuitive locations where a stronger crime-terror nexus in Finland could emerge, and this possibility that has been identified as a pressing security concern by the Finnish authorities.

A 2017 study by the Finnish Crime Sanctions Agency examined prison radicalisation and the crossover between radicalisation and organised crime in Finnish prisons.<sup>90</sup> The study found signs of radicalisation were seen amongst 84 extremists (or suspected extremists) within a year-long period, most of whom were connected to jihadism. Almost half (39 inmates) of this cohort have already been deported or released from prison.

The report noted violence between inmates (suspected to be religiously-motivated), prisoners celebrating in the aftermath of terrorist attacks, proselytization of extremist interpretations of Islam (labelled as “Salafi-Jihadist gangster-Islam”), and incitement and glorification of terrorism.<sup>91</sup>

It is likely that many of these individuals radicalised within the prison walls, as there have been very few convictions of individuals who *already held* jihadist ideas in recent years. Indeed, Abderrahman Bouanane’s conviction in 2018 – for the Turku stabbings – was the only successfully prosecuted jihadist-related case in the country’s history. Other recent cases have collapsed due to a lack of evidence and the prosecution failing to prove terrorist intent.<sup>92</sup>

Furthermore, the study also suggested indications of contact and networking between organised criminals and extremist prisoners. Yet the lack of detail in the study makes it difficult to gauge the strength of these associations, and it is unknown whether these networks will persist upon release.

It is unclear how the jihadist prison population will evolve over the coming years. Radicalised inmates may not only reinvigorate the Finnish jihadist scene upon release, but they may leave prison having developed a network of orthodox criminal contacts. The Finnish authorities are well aware of these risks; it is likely that their management of extremist offenders will become an even more focal point in the near-future.

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90 Juha Eriksson & Jouni Holappa, “Etelä-Suomen rikosseuraamusalueen projekti väkivaltaisen ekstremismin ja radikalisoitumisen tunnistamiseksi,” Väiliraportin julkinen versio, Rikosseuraamuslaitos, August, 2017.

91 Ibid.

92 Christian Jokinen, “‘Terrorist intent’: How Finland’s Justice System Struggles to Tackle Terrorism Offenders”, *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, Vol 16, Issue 14, 2018.

## 6 Recommendations

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**T**his paper has examined potential links between crime and terrorism in Finland and the Baltics. The extent to which crime and terrorism are linked differ depending on the countries in question. There is hardly any terrorism in the Baltic countries, which means that there is currently no crime-terror nexus. In Finland, the situation is more complicated, given the existence of a small but relatively active jihadist scene, which has produced problems that are similar to other European countries. We believe that the government and other actors should be alert and keep monitoring the situation in order to ensure that such links remain limited.

We recommend the following actions and/or good practices:

### 1. Effective monitoring

We recommend that authorities continue to periodically review their statistics on organised crime and terrorism, and consciously monitor them for emerging linkages between the two phenomena. Some areas – such as the link between drugs and terrorism – may require further research.

### 2. Re-thinking radicalisation

Given the partial merging of terrorist and extremist milieus, core assumptions about radicalisation need to be reconsidered. The behaviour of jihadists with criminal pasts often contradicts the notion that extremism correlates with religious behaviour. Where needed, we recommend that authorities update their checklists, indicators, and training materials in order to reflect changing patterns and profiles.

### 3. Safer prisons

The authorities in Finland have recognised the importance of prisons as potential incubators of links between crime and terrorism. We encourage them to move forward with implementing systematic efforts to make prisons safer from crime, terrorism, and any links between them. It is also important to systematically measure and assess the impact of these changes, and consider post-release arrangements, which involve re-integration as well as monitoring.

#### **4. Countering all streams of terrorist financing**

Efforts to countering terrorist finance have excessively focused on the international financial system – with meagre results. In light of Finland’s global commitment to counter the financing of terrorism, we recommend that authorities broaden their efforts at countering terrorist finance to include small-scale and petty crime, such as drug dealing, theft, robberies, and the trafficking in goods.

#### **5. Information sharing**

As the lines between terrorism and “ordinary” crime have become increasingly blurred, relevant agencies need to become more effective at sharing relevant information across departments and “disciplines”, as well as forming new “coalition” of individuals and institutions that may not be used to working with each other.

We recommend that governments continue to review existing channels and systems of information exchange, explore creating new partnerships (such as with local authorities, civil society, and the private sector), and make appropriate changes reflecting the new – and multi-dimensional – nature of the threat.





# Crime Terror Nexus

## **THE CRIME TERROR NEXUS**

The Crime Terror Nexus is a project that investigates links between crime and terrorism, and identifies better ways to counter them.

Over the course of 18 months, we are documenting links between crime and terrorism across the European Union. Our findings are disseminated through reports, events, and workshops.

We are partnering with officials and local stakeholders to create new and innovative approaches that contribute to countering crime and making our countries safer.

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