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International Experience In The Social Reintegration Of Persons Involved In Destructive Ideological Communities

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ABSTRACT

From a socio-philosophical perspective, the article examines international approaches to the social reintegration of people involved in violent extremist networks and those affected by destructive ideological influence. Drawing on documents of the UN, OSCE, UNESCO and the European Union, legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and selected national practices, it considers education and global citizenship, the media and digital environment, arts and sports, and the psycho-pedagogical resocialization of adolescents. It compares approaches used in Norway, Denmark, Northern Ireland, Austria, Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Reintegration is understood as restoring social ties and opportunities to participate in family, education, work and community life. Because evaluation criteria differ and independent long-term studies are limited, the article does not rank the models by effectiveness.

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1. Introduction

The spread of violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (hereinafter VERLT) remains one of the serious challenges facing contemporary society. Young people are particularly susceptible to this influence: they are searching for their place in life, actively use social media and often experience a sense of injustice, isolation and lack of prospects, which recruiters skilfully exploit. At the same time, the experience of the past decade shows that states relying solely on coercive methods do not achieve sustainable results. In their efforts to counter violent extremism and terrorist radicalization, governments should focus primarily on prevention rather than punishment [1].

An equally pressing task is the reverse one: returning to society those who have already fallen under the influence of destructive religious movements. After the defeat of the so-called “Islamic State”, many countries, including the states of Central Asia, faced the question of the fate of their citizens, above all women and children, who had remained in zones of armed conflict. In resolution 2396 (2017), the UN Security Council called on states to develop comprehensive and tailored prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies [5]. Thus, the resocialization of former adherents of destructive movements has become part of the international agenda.

From a socio-philosophical point of view, both radicalization and resocialization represent a change in the individual’s relationship to society, its values and norms. Radicalization destroys the familiar world of meanings and ties in which a person lives and replaces it with a closed ideology. Resocialization, on the

contrary, implies the restoration of this world: the person's return to the family and community, to education and work, and to socially recognized norms. The aim of the article is to summarize international experience in the social reintegration of persons involved in destructive ideological communities and to identify which of its elements may be useful for the Republic of Uzbekistan. The research question is which social institutions and mechanisms ensure the most sustainable return of a person to society.

2. Materials and Methods

The research material comprised four groups of sources: UN documents, including the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and Security Council resolutions 1624 (2005), 2178 (2014), 2250 (2015) and 2396 (2017) [2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 7]; materials of the OSCE, UNESCO and the European Union [1; 8; 9; 10; 11; 12; 13; 14]; legislation and official materials of the Republic of Uzbekistan, as well as media reports on the practice of the Republic of Kazakhstan [21; 22; 23]; and scholarly works and descriptions of national deradicalization programmes [15; 16; 17; 18; 19; 20; 24; 25; 26].

The study used comparative analysis of national models, document analysis and institutional analysis, which makes it possible to identify the actors of prevention and resocialization and their functions. The theoretical framework of the study draws on the socio-philosophical understanding of resocialization as a change in the individual's subjective reality developed by P. Berger and T. Luckmann [24], J. Horgan's distinction between disengagement from violence and abandonment of ideology [25], and A. Kruglanski's significance quest theory [26]. The work is theoretical and analytical: no original empirical research was conducted, and quantitative data are cited from official sources.

3. Results

3.1. The international legal framework for countering VERLT

The role of prevention in preventing violent extremism and in reversing the radicalization of young people has gained global recognition relatively recently. An important step in this direction was the UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, presented in December 2015 [2]. It recognizes the importance of quality education, employment, youth engagement and strategic communications in addressing the drivers of this phenomenon.

Particular attention was also paid to this issue in UN Security Council resolutions 2178 (2014) [3] and 2250 (2015) [4]. In resolution 2250, the Council, in particular, stresses the need for quality education for peace that equips young people to engage constructively in society, and calls on relevant actors to consider instituting mechanisms to promote a culture of peace, tolerance, intercultural and interreligious dialogue that involve youth and discourage their participation in acts of violence, terrorism, xenophobia and all forms of discrimination [4].

On 1 July 2026, the UN General Assembly adopted the resolution "The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy: ninth review". In this article, the document is used as evidence of the UN's continuing attention to comprehensive counter-terrorism and to new technological challenges [7].

At the regional level, consistent work in this area is carried out by the OSCE, which uses the term VERLT. As early as 2012, a joint expert roundtable of the OSCE Secretariat and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights formulated recommendations on youth engagement in countering VERLT [1]. In 2020, the OSCE published a guidebook on non-custodial rehabilitation and reintegration addressed both to state authorities and to non-governmental organizations [14]. In the European Union, the EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation has been operating since 2024, building on the work of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) [13].

3.2. Education and global citizenship education

Formal and non-formal education are of great importance in countering the spread of VERLT among young people. Young people must have the knowledge and skills necessary to understand and reject this phenomenon. They must understand that violent extremism and terrorism are not a means of restoring justice or resolving the conflicts in which they are involved or with which they identify. Educational initiatives can help increase knowledge about violent extremism and terrorist radicalization and promote ideas that reject VERLT and are based on respect for human rights, tolerance and democracy [1].

The spread of violent extremist ideas among students calls for special initiatives to prevent this phenomenon. However, education professionals are often unprepared and reluctant to address issues such as terrorist radicalization. Educational institutions need support so that they can play a more targeted and proactive role in preventing VERLT [9].

Formal education can be used to prevent VERLT by transforming the school into a space based on respect for human rights, first of all the rights of the students themselves, and by changing teaching methods and curriculum content. While many states emphasize "education through knowledge", more attention should be paid to developing core skills and competences such as critical thinking, dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Such skills are necessary for young people to reflect, interact with others, formulate and express their opinions peacefully, and reject calls for violence and intolerance [1]. According to UNESCO, education should:

– help learners develop critical thinking so that they can properly assess sweeping claims, verify rumours and question the legitimacy and appeal of extremist beliefs;

– help learners build resilience to extremist messaging and the social-emotional skills needed to overcome their doubts and engage constructively in society without resorting to violence;

– nurture critically informed citizens able to engage constructively in peaceful collective action [8].

Outbreaks of violent extremism among young people are often a consequence of discrimination, exclusion and marginalization. Fostering a sense of belonging to society and supporting active civic participation are therefore an effective means of countering terrorist radicalization. Experts have suggested that the formation of a "hybrid" identity, which unites different facets of the personality into a single whole, rather than "multiple" identities that may compete with one another, is a more productive way of developing a pluralistic society in which people, despite their differences, unite around shared, universal values [1].

According to UNESCO, global citizenship education provides opportunities for this. Global citizenship refers to a sense of belonging to a global community and a common humanity, whose members are characterized by solidarity and collective responsibility towards one another. Global citizenship education is an approach to education focused on developing the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes needed for active participation in the peaceful and sustainable development of society; it implies fostering respect for human rights, social justice and gender equality [10; 11].

Formal and non-formal education should foster respect for diversity and convey that crimes, terrorism in particular, cannot be identified with particular ethnic, racial or religious groups. Religious educational institutions and respected religious figures should be involved in this work, and interreligious approaches in education should be supported [1].

Since many students have no direct connection with international events or receive distorted information about them, it is advisable to discuss local manifestations of violent extremism alongside an analysis of its international forms. Such discussion helps students understand the links between local and global problems, deepens their understanding of the real risks and consequences of violent extremism, and shows young people the role they can play by making the right choices in their own circumstances. However, it requires linking the topic to the curriculum, understanding the social, cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of local conditions, and a balanced presentation of different points of view [8].

3.3. The media and the digital environment

Terrorist groups increasingly use both traditional and new media to spread their ideology and attract new followers. Younger generations are particularly at risk of being drawn into violent extremist activity because of their intensive use of social networks and messaging apps combined with various subjective and objective factors. Human rights and fundamental freedoms apply both offline and online; however, freedom of expression cannot be protected by violating the rights of others. Young people need to be taught to use the internet safely and helped to recognize and reject material that incites intolerance, hatred and violence [1].

Efforts to counter VERLT should target not only new but also traditional media, which remain the main source of information for a significant part of the population. The media have unique opportunities to counter the spread of VERLT among young people by giving them a platform for self-expression and for

bringing their problems to the attention of society. They can also be useful in establishing contact with vulnerable young people who are isolated from their communities and from society as a whole [1].

The media, in particular the internet, make it possible to establish direct contact between former violent extremists, victims of terrorist acts and those who are vulnerable to terrorist radicalization. This allows them to share their experience and offer young people alternatives in order to prevent their involvement in violent extremist activity or to help them break away from it. Young people should be not only the target audience of counter-narratives but also their authors: engaging in journalism and running online projects that promote tolerance and intercultural and interreligious understanding. Their activities are particularly effective among peers, but this requires supporting them by training them in media skills and public expression [1].

In addition to young people and communities, journalists, civil society institutions and the private sector can contribute to countering VERLT through the media. Journalists should avoid biased coverage of terrorism-related events and the reinforcement of stereotypes. The private sector, above all companies that operate social networks, video-hosting services and search engines, is a key partner in countering the spread of calls to violence on the internet [1]. Whereas in 2012 the discussion concerned mainly voluntary cooperation between law enforcement agencies and internet service providers, today such cooperation is legally regulated. For example, Regulation (EU) 2021/784, which has applied since 7 June 2022, obliges hosting service providers to remove terrorist content within one hour of receiving a removal order from a competent authority, while also providing safeguards for freedom of expression [12].

At the same time, the regulation of the internet remains a matter of debate. Some researchers stress the need for a legislative framework and effective monitoring mechanisms, while others believe that monitoring should not turn into censorship. Security Council resolution 1624 (2005) calls upon states to prohibit by law incitement to commit terrorist acts [6]. However, prohibiting and filtering content is not only technically difficult but also insufficient, since terrorist groups easily move to new platforms. Therefore, the right to privacy, freedom of expression and free access to information must be respected both offline and online, and governments should use the opportunities that the media provide for educating young people and marginalizing terrorist ideology [1].

3.4. Arts and sports

Arts and sports have a positive influence on young people and on society as a whole. They give young people the opportunity to take part in socially useful activities with their own rules, help them develop their talents and increase their self-confidence and self-esteem, that is, realize their potential for bringing about positive change. Arts and sports initiatives promote intercultural dialogue, reconciliation and integration and can help build bridges between divided groups by giving young people the opportunity to take part in joint activities [1].

Arts and sports also provide an opportunity to discuss problems and conflicts in a peaceful setting and can serve as a means of reaching out to those at risk of being drawn into violent extremist groups. However, they cannot counter VERLT on their own. Such initiatives should be neutral, appealing to young people, and carried out in an open and safe environment with broad participation, including that of girls and women. It is essential to define the target audience in advance: some activities may be intended for everyone, others for particular groups, for example young people who want to leave violent extremist groups [1].

The attitude with which educators and teachers do their work is of decisive importance. Trusting relationships and dialogue are the fundamental principles of youth work. Arts and sports initiatives create opportunities for informal communication, which over time can develop into a deeper dialogue through which a mentor can win a young person’s trust; such dialogue is much harder to establish during compulsory school lessons. This requires long-term projects, recognition and funding from public authorities, and the training of social workers and teachers, including on the issue of violent extremism [1].

The greatest impact on young people comes from combining prevention and intervention measures with the participation of former violent extremists, who can share their stories and most convincingly debunk violent ideology. According to evaluations carried out in a number of OSCE participating States, small-group discussions, especially with the participation of former extremists, role-plays, and watching and discussing

films are more effective methods in schools than exhibitions or the use of computer technology alone [1]. At the same time, states are recommended to take into account the specific features of different violent extremist groups and ideologies and the different attitudes of young men and women towards violent extremism, as well as to promote freedom of expression and refrain from punishing the peaceful expression of non-violent views [1].

3.5. Psycho-pedagogical resocialization of adolescents: the experience of the Russian Federation

A separate area of international experience is the resocialization of adolescents exposed to destructive psychological influence. In the Russian Federation, approaches to this work are set out in methodological recommendations addressed to education authorities [15]. They define destructive psychological influence as the manipulation of a person's consciousness by representatives of pseudo-religious organizations who use manipulation techniques to recruit and retain members and exercise total control over their thoughts, feelings and behaviour. The consequences of such influence are identified as inner conflict, disruption of personal integrity, changes in worldview and a negative perception of the environment by the adolescent [15, p. 1].

The authors of the recommendations point out that one of the main attitudes of terrorist ideology is the view of the world as a set of mutually hostile groups, of the superiority of one's "own" group, and of violence as the most effective way of resolving conflicts [15, p. 1]. Adolescents' vulnerability is linked to their limited horizons and knowledge of ways of intergroup interaction and to a lack of real experience of communicating with people of other cultures. It is also noted that recruitment methods used by destructive groups of different kinds, both religious and non-religious, are largely identical [15, p. 2].

The goal of resocialization is defined as creating a new motivational basis that will shape the adolescent's value orientations and behaviour for many years. To achieve it, the following tasks are set: to create a system of comprehensive psychological influence, corrective sessions and monitoring of the development of value orientations; to develop in adolescents adequate ideas about themselves and the world and flexible self-esteem; to increase their confidence in themselves and their future; and to form a civic identity in new social groups [15, pp. 2–3].

Organizational measures include identifying adolescents exposed to extremist ideology, including through psychological diagnostic methods; establishing centres for psychological resocialization and psycho-pedagogical work with such adolescents, or granting rehabilitation powers to existing organizations (socio-psychological centres, psychological services, pedagogical rehabilitation centres); setting up helplines and hotlines for adolescents and their parents; and defining a set of measures for the social, pedagogical, psychoneurological and physical recovery of the adolescent through the joint work of a physician, a psychologist and a teacher [15, pp. 3–4].

The programme of psycho-pedagogical work consists of three blocks: an informational block that broadens adolescents' horizons; a value block aimed at understanding the common values that unite people; and a behavioural block involving active forms of teaching and upbringing [15, p. 4]. It provides for introducing adolescents to historical and cultural heritage, learning situations of interaction between representatives of different nations and faiths, and the development of reflection, self-control and self-regulation. Another component of resocialization is building a system of new social contacts and working with the family, including in cases where the adolescent's relatives took part in terrorist or extremist activity; individual methods of self-correction, self-regulation and self-development are designed with regard to individual and age characteristics [15, pp. 4–5].

From a socio-philosophical perspective, the value of this approach lies in treating resocialization not as a one-off intervention but as the long-term formation of a new motivational and value basis of the personality in a new social environment. At the same time, the identification and monitoring measures it provides for require strict respect for the rights of the child and for confidentiality; otherwise, prevention risks turning into the stigmatization of the adolescent and his or her family.

3.6. Foreign experience of deradicalization and resocialization

It should be noted that a number of countries have accumulated considerable experience of work by state bodies and civil society institutions to remove people from radical environments and return them to society. An analysis of this experience makes it possible to identify several models.

Local support network model. The Exit project, launched in Norway in 1996–1997, pursued three goals: creating local networks to support the parents of young people involved in racist and violent groups; enabling young people to leave these groups; and developing and disseminating methods for professionals working with such young people. The project was based on cooperation between parents, child welfare services, the police, teachers and youth workers [16]. A similar approach was developed in Denmark, where the so-called "Aarhus model" has been in place in the city of Aarhus since the late 2000s. It combines work with a broad audience (seminars for professionals and schools, dialogue with mosques and cultural associations) with individual work: risk assessment by an interagency team, family counselling, mentoring and exit programmes, including for returning foreign fighters [17].

Youth and family work model. Youth Action Northern Ireland (YANI) works to develop political awareness, critical thinking and tolerance among young people, teaches them to listen to other opinions and to notice manifestations of inequality and discrimination. YANI provides young people with a safe space where they can discuss their problems and events related to violent extremism, and teaches them to analyse and challenge their own beliefs through interaction with young people from other communities. In this way, young people can channel their energy, frustration and anger in a positive direction [1]. Since 2008, the Austrian non-governmental organization Women without Borders has been developing the idea of mothers' involvement in preventing violent extremism. Its MotherSchools programme, consisting of weekly sessions over four to five months, teaches mothers to recognize the first signs of their children's radicalization and to counter influences that could push them towards violent extremism [18].

Psycho-pedagogical rehabilitation model. The Russian Federation provides for the establishment of centres for the psychological resocialization of adolescents exposed to destructive psychological influence, or for granting rehabilitation powers to existing organizations. Work with an adolescent takes into account his or her individual and age characteristics and family situation and combines the efforts of a psychologist, a teacher and a physician (see Section 3.5 for details) [15, pp. 3–5].

Religious dialogue model. In Singapore, the Religious Rehabilitation Group (RRG), a voluntary association of Islamic scholars and teachers, was established in 2003. Its members counsel detained members of the terrorist organization Jemaah Islamiyah and their families, clarifying misinterpretations of the concepts of "jihad", "bai'ah" and "hijrah", and since 2005 they have conducted broad public education; later the group's work was extended to self-radicalized individuals and ISIS supporters [19]. Saudi Arabia has developed a model combining prevention, rehabilitation and aftercare: religious scholars of the Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Interior work with detainees, religious and psychological counselling continues after release within the aftercare programme, and families are involved in rehabilitation and receive financial support if the sole breadwinner is imprisoned [20].

Humanitarian model of return and reintegration. Operations to return citizens from zones of armed conflict carried out by the states of Central Asia occupy a special place in world experience. In the course of Operation Zhusan in 2019, Kazakhstan returned 595 citizens from Syria, including 406 children and 156 women; according to the National Security Committee, all returned women and children completed rehabilitation and adaptation courses [23]. In 2019–2021, Uzbekistan carried out a series of humanitarian operations "Mehr", during which more than 530 citizens were returned home, about 75% of them children. The rehabilitation of returnees follows several areas: restoration of documents, economic support (preferential loans, vocational training, housing assistance), education, spiritual and educational work with the participation of religious figures, and the assignment of a mentor from the mahalla to each family [22]. The National Strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan for Countering Extremism and Terrorism for 2021–2026 notes that over the past four years more than 2,000 convicts who had repented were pardoned, and that in 2017–2018 more than 20,000 people were removed from the preventive registers of law enforcement agencies; it also notes that state and public institutions are actively continuing their work on the social and religious

rehabilitation of citizens who have fallen under the influence of destructive ideas [21]. In May 2024, at the initiative of Uzbekistan, the Regional Expert Council on Rehabilitation and Reintegration began its work, bringing together more than 40 experts from Central Asian countries [22].

A comparison of the models considered is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Models of deradicalization and resocialization in international practice

Model	Examples	Key actors	Main instruments
Local support networks	Norway (Exit), Denmark (Aarhus)	Municipality, police, school, family	Interagency risk assessment, mentoring, exit programmes
Youth and family work	Northern Ireland (YANI), Austria (MotherSchools)	Youth and women's NGOs, community	Safe space for dialogue, training for mothers
Religious dialogue	Singapore (RRG), Saudi Arabia	Theologians, psychologists, family	Religious counselling, aftercare after release
Humanitarian return	Kazakhstan (Zhusan), Uzbekistan (Mehr)	State, mahalla, religious figures, international organizations	Repatriation, restoration of documents, education, employment, mahalla mentor

4. Discussion

The analysis makes it possible to consider resocialization as a socio-philosophical problem. P. Berger and T. Luckmann describe resocialization as "alternation", a change of subjective reality that is possible only in the presence of significant others and a community that supports the new picture of the world [24]. As applied to adherents of destructive religious movements, this means that a person can abandon former beliefs only when he or she has somewhere to return to: the family, the community, education and work. It is no coincidence that in all the models considered, a central place is occupied precisely by such "significant others": parents in the Norwegian and Austrian experience, mentors in the Danish, theologians in the Singaporean, and the mahalla in the Uzbek.

J. Horgan has shown that disengagement from violence and deradicalization, that is, abandonment of radical ideology, are different processes, and the former does not necessarily entail the latter [25]. It follows that programmes limited to control and punishment may stop violent actions but not change a person's worldview. Sustainable resocialization is ensured by combining ideological work with the restoration of social ties. This conclusion is consistent with the theory of A. Kruglanski and colleagues, according to which radicalization is driven by the quest for personal significance, while deradicalization requires the possibility of gaining significance through legitimate means [26].

A comparison of the models also reveals their common limitations. First, most national programmes publish only their own assessments of results, while independent data on reoffending remain limited. Second, the transfer of foreign experience requires taking the cultural context into account: for Uzbekistan, the natural foundations of resocialization are the mahalla, the family and the traditional religious culture of the people. Third, prevention must not lead to the stigmatization of believers: if religiosity as such is perceived as a sign of threat, this only confirms the recruiters' narratives. Promising directions for further research include empirical assessment of the long-term outcomes of the reintegration of returned citizens and the development of indicators of the effectiveness of resocialization.

5. Conclusion

International experience shows that violence prevention and social reintegration require a comprehensive approach that combines legal measures, education, social support and interaction with the family and the local community. UN and OSCE documents affirm the importance of prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration; UN Security Council resolution 2396 (2017) directly calls on states to develop relevant

strategies. Education, global citizenship education, responsible media, arts, sports and social work can serve as elements of prevention, but by themselves do not guarantee that violence will be prevented.

The social reintegration of persons involved in destructive ideological communities implies the restoration of social ties and access to education, work, medical and psychosocial assistance. The national models considered use different combinations of state measures, family support, and the participation of the local community, religious figures and civil society institutions. At the same time, differences in evaluation criteria and the limited independent long-term data do not allow the models to be unambiguously ranked by effectiveness. The experience of the humanitarian operations "Mehr" is a significant example of repatriation and support for returned citizens; assessment of its long-term results requires independent research and transparent indicators. Further development of such programmes implies broader participation of civil society and systematic monitoring of results.

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