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Countering Violent Extremism in Spain: Analyzing the Intervention with Young Jihadist Convicted of Membership of a Terrorist Organization

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the intervention implemented with the five young offenders convicted of membership of a jihadist terrorist organization in Spain between 2014 and 2021. It provides an in-depth analysis of the psycho-socio and educational individualized programs conducted by the Agency for the Reeducation and Reintegration of Young Offenders in the regional Government of Madrid during the custodial measures of the minors, aged between fourteen and eighteen years. It is based on a thorough examination of the files and reports produced by the institution in charge of their reeducation and reintegration following the minors' radicalization and detention, as well as semi-structured interviews with the professionals responsible for the intervention. This intervention, the first of its kind in the country, offers important insights and implications for future programs aimed at confronting the radicalization of minors and the risk of violent extremism.

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Access to information related to juvenile offenders vis-à-vis terrorism is usually limited given the sensitivity of the matter and the protection required by the subjects.¹ Accordingly, research on intervention with young offenders is less frequent than that on adults involved in violent extremism,² an area which in the last years has seen a spate of valuable contributions.³ Furthermore, and as Cherney has emphasized, “the general consensus in the literature is that the evaluation of programs to counter violent extremism (CVE) has been neglected and is an underdeveloped field of expertise”.⁴ Under those circumstances, the challenges that lie ahead on this field increase when dealing with young offenders. The minor's accountability for their criminal behavior differs from that of adults because of their different “physical and psychological development, and their emotional and educational needs”.⁵ Underaged offenders “have not reached cognitive and social maturity”, which can lead to “impulsive behavior and a higher chance of being influenced by (radicalized) others, in addition to diminished capacity to fully understand (the consequences of) their own behavior”.⁶ Thus, when it comes to minors, “the traditional objectives of criminal justice, such as repression/retribution, must give way to rehabilitation and restorative justice objectives”.⁷ Therefore, an evaluation of an intervention like the one implemented in Spain with five

radicalized youngsters who were convicted of membership of jihadist terrorist organization can provide relevant insights.

The age period during which individuals are legally considered as “minors” in Spain comprises between 14 and 18 years.⁸ Since 2004, when the jihadist terrorists attacks in Madrid took place, several minors have traveled to conflict areas but have not been detained.⁹ Others have been detained but not indicted,¹⁰ or were killed in pursuit of terrorist actions,¹¹ or have been convicted of offenses like exalting terrorism and humiliating victims of terrorism,¹² or of transporting and supplying explosives to a terrorist organization,¹³ or self-radicalization.¹⁴ Among those underaged who radicalized, only five of them have actually been convicted of a crime like membership of terrorist organization. These minors received sentences that entailed custody and deprivation of liberty in youth detention centers which were supervised by the Agency for the Reeducation and Reintegration of Young Offenders in the Autonomous Government of Madrid.

Set up in 2004, this institution is instructed by law to “develop and implement programmes and actions that contribute to the aims of reintegration and education” of juveniles who have committed offenses envisaged by the Spanish Criminal Code.¹⁵ The Agency is in charge of putting in place a set of measures to conform an intervention that will guide the youth’s transition through the beginning, developing, and ending of the confinement. Each of these stages is part of a process aimed at gradually strengthening the commitment of the youth in his/her reintegration and reeducation.¹⁶ Accordingly, the five minors, who were detained throughout 2014 and 2016, were subject to individualized intervention programs designed by the Agency while they were held in juvenile centers. Before being sentenced they remained on remand. This is a special regime that cannot be prolonged beyond six months or, should an extension period be granted, for three additional months. Following this period on remand the judge must finally establish whether the underaged is freed or sentenced. The stay at the juvenile center will continue if found guilty.

In order to assess these interventions and their results, the article will firstly analyze the Spanish judicial framework in relation to juveniles so that the aims and guiding principles of the intervention are properly contextualized and established. The youngster’s criminal records will be summarized to place the intervention in its judicial context. Secondly, an analysis of the interventions will be provided structuring it around its four main stages: (1) evaluation of risks and needs; (2) hypothesis formulation of each individual case; (3) design and implementation of actions and activities; and (4) final evaluation. Thirdly, the article puts forward some conclusions and lessons learnt from the intervention implemented. The article is based on a thorough analysis of the reports produced by the Agency which document the design and implementation of the intervention. Three types of reports constitute the basis of our analysis: (i) the inventory for the assessment of the risk factors of each individual and the management of the intervention; (ii) the personal files of each of the minors which consist of all judicial proceedings related to their convictions, the individualized risk assessments conducted by the Agency, the design of objectives and activities for each individual, and registers of the disciplinary and security measures implemented; and (iii) the evaluation reports of the interventions. The analysis of these primary sources is complemented with semi structured interviews with members of the staff responsible for the psycho social intervention implemented by the Agency.

The Legal Framework for the Intervention with Juvenile Offenders

Several pieces of international, national, and regional legislation provide the framework for the judicial response against offenses committed by youths in Spain. In line with the 1989 UN's General Assembly Convention of the Rights of the Child, the 2000 Spanish Law of the Criminal Responsibility of Minors, establishes as guiding principles of any intervention "its sanctioning-educational nature" and the "superior interest of the minor".¹⁷ The 1978 Spanish Constitution already states that sentences that require deprivation of liberty must aim at the "reeducation and integration" of the individual.¹⁸ Furthermore, the specific Law for minors stresses that the "reeducation" of convicted minors is paramount,¹⁹ and that the minor's "superior interest" must be assessed by "teams of professionals with specialization in non-judicial sciences" in accordance with "technical criteria".²⁰ For that purpose the "technical teams will consist of psychologists, educators and social workers which will provide assistance to the minor from the very moment of the detention".²¹ These professionals are also required to act as liaison with judges and attorneys involved in the youth's cases.

The Law of Minors envisages different types of measures following the detention of a youth offender. Among them, "cautionary measures for the custody and defense of the minor pending a firm sentencing" by the judiciary can be implemented when "rational indication of an offense exists".²² A restrictive measure such as the confinement of the youth in an educational center can be implemented when the minor is suspected of a serious crime through involvement in an organization or gang.²³ It is under such framework that the five minors convicted of membership of jihadist organization in Spain spent from six months to over a year under custodial measures in a youth center while waiting for trial and after being sentenced. The centers were under the supervision of the Agency for the Reeducation and Reintegration of Young Offenders in the regional Government of Madrid. Attached to the Regional Department with competence in the area of Justice, this Agency takes on the implementation of sentences imposed on young offenders, including those which involve custody (secure/semi-open/open/therapeutic detention) and those which do not involve custody (probation, services on behalf of the community, living with another family or educational group, attending an attendance center, socio-educative tasks, outpatient treatment, weekend stay at home). This regional body is responsible for liaising with the judicial institutions involved in the youth's case such as the Special Attorney for Minors and the Courts for Minors.²⁴

The remand period envisaged for minors cannot exceed six months or nine when an extension is requested and granted. The remand period must be followed by their release or their sentencing, in which case the minor will continue at the juvenile center if found guilty. The youth can also continue at the center even when he or she becomes a legal adult as long as the staff responsible for the intervention provides a positive assessment of the program. Otherwise, the youth will serve his or her sentence in prison. The confinement period of the five offenders varied, as the following summary of their criminal record shows.

The real names of the minors have been anonymized in order to protect their identities providing them the following ones: NADIA (Minor 1), OSCAR (Minor 2), DAYFA (Minor 3), THAMIR (Minor 4), and CALEB (Minor 5).

NADIA, who was detained when she was fourteen in August 2014, spent eleven months in a youth detention center, nine of them on remand before she received a two-year sentence. She was granted probation in June 2015 as a result of her good behavior during her stay at the center. She accepted the charges, that she was a member of a terrorist organization when she was arrested on her way to Iraq to support the so-called Islamic State and that she had exalted radical ideas and the terror group on social networks.²⁵ The judge also ruled that the minor would have to follow a socio-educational intervention on her release, which she did on her return to her hometown, Ceuta, a Spanish city geographically located in the North of Africa bordering Morocco.

OSCAR was detained in April 2015, in the province of Barcelona, when he was seventeen. In December 2015 he was convicted of membership of terrorist organization involved in proselytizing and plotting terrorist attacks.²⁶ He accepted the charges and as a result of his conviction, his stay at the juvenile detention center under the supervision of the Agency was extended until November 2016, when he was moved to another region closer to his place of residence in Catalonia. Shortly after, and once he was already legally considered an adult, he was transferred to a prison as a result of the negative reports about his lack of improvement. On completion of his sentence for membership of jihadist terrorist organization, he was expelled from Spain in 2019 after being considered a risk to national security.

DAYFA was aged seventeen when she was detained in December 2014 in Melilla, a Spanish city geographically located in the North of Africa bordering Morocco, because of her involvement through social networks in the indoctrination and recruitment of individuals for the terrorist group ISIS. She accepted the charges and following a six-month detention period on remand at the juvenile center was later on released on probation under the supervision of a relative. Her good behavior led to her sentence to be suspended subject to the fulfillment of reintegration measures which she did comply with.²⁷

THAMIR and CALEB were twin brothers aged sixteen at the time of their detention in the province of Barcelona in March 2015, thus frustrating their plan to travel to Syria to follow their brother's steps who had been killed there after joining ISIS. Following their indictment for membership of a terrorist organization, they spent nine months under custodial measures in a youth center while waiting for trial.²⁸ After their release from the center on probation, both of them were expelled from Spain in 2018 on the grounds of being a danger for national security. They were highly radicalized, both their father and mother having been involved in terrorist recruiting, the latter spending twenty months in prison as a result of such activities.

The five offenders shared the following features: i) commission of an offense between the age of 14 and 18, the legal requirement for being considered as an underaged offender; ii) indictment for membership of a jihadist terrorist organization; iii) a judicial custodial measure requiring closed confinement while on remand pending their trial and sentencing; iv) an educational and therapeutic intervention in the period comprising from August 2014 to November 2016.

The Four Stages of the Intervention

In line with the emphasis on the reeducation of the underaged offenders required by Law, the intervention aimed at the desistance of their violent and delinquent behavior

as well as at their positive reintegration into society. In order to meet this key objectives, the Agency designed the intervention around the guiding principles of the Risk-Need-Responsiveness (RNR) model developed by Andrews and Bonta.²⁹ As laid out in the Agency's Central Educational and Therapeutic Treatment Program for Young Offenders, three are the core principles of this model which guided the intervention on the five minors³⁰: (1) *The risk principle*: individuals with higher risk in static factors (criminal precocity, impulsivity, antisocial tendency) have a lower level of modifiability as compared to dynamic factors (system of beliefs, antisocial habits, peer group influence), which can be modified more easily; (2) *The need principle*: the dynamic risk factors directly linked to criminal activity (such as criminal habits, cognitions, and attitudes) should be the real objectives of the intervention; (3) *The individualization principle*: the need to properly adjust interventions to the personal situation of individuals.

The Agency also took into consideration an additional principle, that of professional discretion, by which the technical judgment of the team in charge of the intervention may introduce adjustments in the process if adequately justified. Building up on these principles, the intervention consisted of four stages which will be analyzed below: (1) evaluation of the youths' risks and needs; (2) hypothesis formulation of each individual case; (3) design and implementation of objectives, actions, and activities; and (4) final evaluation.

Stage 1: Evaluation of the Youths' Risks and Needs

This initial evaluation was conducted by the technical team during the first twenty days of the youth's stay at the detention center. The team, which consisted of a psychologist, a social worker, and an educational worker, aimed through this assessment at measuring the risk of recidivism in the youth's criminal behavior. Accordingly, they collected and systematically interpreted a wide range of information that would allow them to predict the likelihood of reoffending. Several sources of information were used for this purpose: (i) the inventory for the assessment of the risk factors of each individual and the management of the intervention ("IGI-J");³¹ (ii) the personal files of each of the minors which consisted of all judicial proceedings related to their convictions, the individualized risk assessments conducted by the Agency, the design of objectives and activities for each individual, and registers of the disciplinary and security measures implemented; (iii) personal interviews with the youths and their families.

The test used by the Agency for the assessment of risks and needs ("IGI-J") is an adaptation of the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI) developed by Hoge and Andrews in 2003.³² This tool, commonly used for the prediction of criminal recidivism, was adapted to the Spanish context in order to conform an inventory of 42 items divided in eight risk factors or "criminogenic needs": (1) past and present offenses and sentences; (2) educational guidelines in family environment; (3) formal education/employment; (4) relationship with the peer group; (5) substance misuse; (6) leisure/hobbies; (7) personality/behavior; (8) attitudes, values and beliefs.³³ This inventory allows for the young offenders to be classified into three levels of reoffending risk (low, medium, and high) for each of the risk factors assessed.³⁴ It

also provides a level of risk for relapse in general, thus constituting a valuable tool for assessing the risk factors that were the object of the educational intervention of the five young offenders. A summary of this risk evaluation is now introduced.

As Table 1 shows, only one of the minors, DAYFA, was initially categorized as low risk following the implementation of “IGI-J”, the test previously referred to. Nonetheless, and following the principle of professional discretion, the technical team adjusted the risk to “High” as a result of the direct and personal interaction with this minor. The team valued that the environment in which the minor socialized considerably increased the risk given the strong influence exerted on her by key figures, particularly among them, her boyfriend.

The “Low risk” of the five minors in relation to the first factor (Past and present offenses and sentences) may appear in contradiction with the type of offense that motivated their confinement. Nonetheless, the low risk in this category was determined by the fact that none of them had previous convictions and consequently neither were there any breaches of judicial orders. Although membership of terrorist organization is a major offense, the test also took into consideration another criteria: that none of the underaged were responsible for three or more offenses.

As regards factors two (Educational guidelines in family environment) and three (Formal education/employment), the following were the main criteria took into consideration: inadequate parental supervision, limited behavioral control, lack of discipline, inconsistent educational guidelines, poor parental relations with youth, school absenteeism, poor schooling, disruptive behavior at school and employment and with superiors, unemployment, and no employment search. A summary of the information

Table 1. initial risk evaluation.

Factor	NADIA	OSCAR	DAYFA	THAMIR	CALEB
1. Past and present offenses and sentences	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low
2. Educational guidelines in family environment	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate	Moderate
3. Formal education/employment	High	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Low
4. Relationship with peer group	Moderate	High	Low	High	High
5. Substance misuse	Low	Moderate	Low	Low*	Low*
6. Leisure/hobbies	High	High	Moderate	High	High
7. Personality/behavior	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
8. Attitudes, values, and beliefs	Moderate	High	Moderate	High	High
General risk level	21 From moderate (9–22) to very high	22 From moderate (9–22) to very high	5 From low (0–8) to moderate	19 From moderate (9–22) to very high	18 From moderate (9–22) to very high

*The team qualified its assessment adding that the absence of consumption of substances constituted a “Protection factor”.

extracted by the test and the technical team for each case vis-à-vis these two factors is now provided.

NADIA³⁵: She grew up in a dysfunctional family with both parents unable to exert adequate educational guidelines. As a result of important deficits local social services in Ceuta took up since 2004 many of the unfulfilled parental tasks.³⁶ In 2005 the girl's school already identified risk indicators such as irresponsible parenting and lack of collaboration with professionals, permanent absenteeism, lack of hygiene, illnesses not properly treated and unsanitary housing. The minor was formally registered in a "helpless situation" in 2010 prompting the authorities to allow one of her sisters to foster her. The situation improved in 2012, NADIA then returning to parental supervision albeit with the acknowledgment by social services of remaining educational deficits. At the time of her detention, her school records were extremely poor, failing all the grades which she was taking once more following her failure the previous year. Disciplinary charges had been filed against her as a result of her disrespectful behavior against school staff. NADIA's mother underestimated the gravity of the offenses committed by her daughter. The minor had three brothers sentenced to jail and her sister's husband was also jailed for membership of a terrorist organization.

OSCAR³⁷: As compared with some of the other minors, his family was a more structured family and not dysfunctional. Nonetheless, after his father's death when OSCAR was just nine, his mother became the only parental figure, emigrating to Spain from Paraguay with him and the rest of her children. The maternal role model was one of overprotection which derived in a flawed supervision of the minor's discipline and control of his behavior. OSCAR's mother justified his offenses attributing them to the traumatic loss of the child's father. High absenteeism was also evident in OSCAR's schooling. He had abandoned school one year before his detention following many previous expulsions. He didn't take part in other formative activities or employment search. Two of his brothers also spent time in jail.

DAYFA³⁸: Part of a structured and functional family with proper educational guidelines and low levels of conflict, she had a good relationship with her parents. Contrary to some of the other minors, DAYFA's parents didn't justify the offenses committed by her. However, insufficient parental control over the girl's social life, particularly in relation to the use of new technologies, was a relevant risk factor. Her school records deteriorated in the years prior to her detention, repeating several grades as a result of her poor results. Another distinctive factor when compared with the other minors is the lack of any criminal records in her family environment.

THAMIR and CALEB³⁹: Part of a dysfunctional family, the twin brothers had not attended school for some time since they dropped out to travel to Morocco in order to attend a Koranic school. Following their return to Spain in 2015, the minors were banned from attending school by her mother. Prior to that, numerous disciplinary charges had been filed against them by the school staff for disobedience. Both respected their parents as authority figures although parental roles were not properly exercised. Their mother was detained on remand for her involvement in a network involved in dispatching recruits to Syria. Their father was released on probation but forbidden to leave Spain given the suspicions against him. She exerted a strong influence on the twins being the one responsible for their education, their father's role being almost non-existent on this area. Two of the brothers of THAMIR and CALEB also had

criminal records, including, in one case, a sentence for membership of terrorist organization. Following his release, he traveled to Syria in 2014 where he died. Although the twins had little contact with their brother, their mother's exaltation of the sibling, depicting him as "a role model to follow", highly influenced the minors' behavior.

In relation to factors four (Relationship with peer group), five (Substance misuse) and six (Leisure/hobbies), a common pattern emerges since all of the minors' socialization took place with peers beyond their age rank, many of them with anti-social behavior, which deprived them of positive role model. The following is a summary of the most relevant information.

NADIA⁴⁰: During her childhood her socialization with youngsters from different religions seemed normal. However, in the months prior to her detention she had stopped socializing with the group of peers more known to the family focusing her social interactions on internet. Social networks became very important in her socialization and radicalization, profusely using material that extolled jihadists. The absence of positive role models in her socialization with other peers was replaced by that of the recruiters with whom she entered into contact through Facebook and WhatsApp. She was also influenced by her sister's husband, whom in 2015 was sentenced to 10-years imprisonment for membership of terrorist organization. No regular patterns of substance misuse were identified.

OSCAR⁴¹: He regularly consumed illegal substances, mainly alcohol and cannabis, which negatively affected his socialization in the family, social and educational contexts. As he acknowledged himself, he was a loner without "friendships", just "conflictive relationships" that emanated from common interests such as the consumption of drugs and disruptive behavior against teachers until he dropped out from school.⁴² Social networks reinforced OSCAR's radicalization, heavily influenced by the leader of the terrorist cell who recruited him and provided him with radical speeches and contacts. His socialization in the year and a half before his detention was with radical Muslim men older than him. Although he attended the mosque regularly, he preferred to stay outside with radicals from whom he "learnt a lot", as he admitted to the technical team.

DAYFA⁴³: Her boyfriend was a key figure in her radicalization exerting a strong influence on her even though she was for some time reluctant to accept his radical thinking. His pressure changed her attitude to the extent that she became the administrator of WhatsApp and Facebook groups used for the recruitment of women. Her leisure was mainly devoted to radical activities through social networks. She did have a female friend with whom she questioned some of the radical messages extolled by her boyfriend, although the latter managed to overrule her. She idealized him, negatively affecting her, increasing her risk and vulnerability. No regular patterns of substance misuse were identified.

THAMIR and CALEB⁴⁴: their socialization took place mainly among themselves and scarcely with peers to the extent that one of them acknowledged that he had never had a friend of his age. They only labeled as "friends" those they had met in Morocco while they attended Koranic school following her mother's orders. This was the case although both of them played in a football club where they were praised as very skillful to the extent that they seemed to have a promising career, as suggested by the interest in them shown by a major club. However, this hobby was interrupted

one year before their detention because of their mother's prohibition. No regular patterns of substance misuse were identified.

Finally, as regards to factor seven (Personality behavior) and eight (Attitudes, values, and beliefs), the following patterns were discerned, as contained in the inventories of each of the minors. Unlike the other minors, DAYFA showed no dysfunctional personality features but normal levels of impulsivity and frustration control. However, and contrary to the others, she did show a significant low self-esteem. DAYFA was also the exception when it came to accepting the intervention and acknowledging the need for the reeducation and reintegration program. Opposition to the intervention by the rest of the youth emerged from its initial stages. Fits of rage were a prominent feature in those four reluctant minors: NADIA, OSCAR, THAMIR and CALEB. Also characteristic of these four minors was their very low frustration control, the great difficulty in empathizing with others, and the denial of responsibility for the actions that motivated their detention and confinement. Similarly, all of them with the exception of NADIA experienced traumatic events be it in the form of OSCAR losing his father at an early age, the twin brothers' losing their brother who died in Syria, and DAYFA's feelings as a result of the police breaking in her home to detain her in front of her parents. High impulsivity and self-control deficits were evident in NADIA, OSCAR, and CALEB. All of the five minors shared their lack of repentance and guilt transfer in relation to the offenses committed. Equally, all of them showed cognitive rigidity and cognitive distortion, as well as a high social desirability. The former was illustrated by the youths' difficulties in adapting themselves to different contexts and situations, offering alternatives to conflicts and problems, and also refusing to listen to different views or being incapable of understanding them. The latter manifested itself in a deep need of approval from their peers but also from the practitioners in charge of the intervention, leading the minors to biased responses so that the technical team would see them in a positive manner. Limited social skills, as well as poor skills for the resolution of conflicts and problem solving were also common features in all of the cases with the exception of DAYFA. Particularly vulnerable to the influence of peers were NADIA, OSCAR and THAMIR. Verbal aggressiveness was common in NADIA, DAYFA and CALEB. Coldness and emotional toughness were distinctive of OSCAR, THAMIR and CALEB. All of the five minors adhered to values and ideas linked to radical Islam, with the three males exposing even more rigidity and fundamentalism in their thinking, as well as coldness and emotional harshness regarding this aspect. Furthermore, the twin brothers were particularly detached from the well-being and feelings of others which could be depicted as part of an out-group.

Stage 2: Hypothesis Formulation of Each Individual Case

Once the evaluation of risks and needs was conducted, the team proceeded to put forward the hypothesis formulation for each of the minors involved. The hypothesis formulation aimed at providing relevant information about the origin and maintenance of the criminal conduct. It tried to do so by answering the following question: which are the endogenous (cognitive, emotional, and behavioral) as well as exogenous factors related to the underage's life that can explain why he/she initiated and maintained a criminal conduct?⁴⁵ Therefore, the hypothesis formulations guided the activities aimed

at addressing the deviation, both at the sociological and psychological level. This methodological approach allowed the intervention team to assess the relationship between the dispositional or facilitating risk factors with those variables that contributed to triggering the criminal conduct. A summary of these hypothesis is now provided.

NADIA: Her family environment was “multi-problematic” given the lack of parental supervision and control over the minor’s behavior.⁴⁶ The absence of a key parental figure as a result of his imprisonment on several occasions,⁴⁷ was very relevant. Hers was an unstructured family with eleven siblings, NADIA being the penultimate one. The imposition of norms by her parents was scarce with constant conflicts. This conflictive environment was hindered by the scarce economic resources, also a relevant factor in NADIA’s fostering by one of her elderly sisters. The young girl experienced significant deficits on an education, health, and economic level.⁴⁸ She also experienced high levels of frustration, distraction, instability, and very little empathic capacity to the extent that she was described as emotionally unstable and with high levels of anxiety.⁴⁹ All these factors contributed to a low school performance and general lack of motivation. As a result of these features, she was very vulnerable to the influence of peers, with a submissive tendency and a high level of social desirability. This led her to become highly involved in social networks through internet. She was extremely impressionable by radical models who aided her progressive idealization of radical values linked to a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam.⁵⁰ She was recruited through social media by a support network of the terrorist organization which fascinated her. The first contact with a group of female radicals occurred through Facebook six months before her detention at her hometown. During this time, she considered traveling to Iraq in order to join ISIS and the jihad, a course of action seen in such radical environment as “fashionable”.⁵¹ She believed that such behavior would make her “the center of attention”, distinguishing her from other women in the eyes of men who would see her as “a jewel”.⁵²

OSCAR: An evasive, hermetic, solitary young boy with a very introverted personality, and even depressive features, with high social desirability, considerably vulnerable to the influence of peers.⁵³ His family detachment and uprooting was complemented with the lack of a paternal figure whom he lost at the age of nine. A migratory process from Latin America to Spain hindered what would turn into a pathological mourning which fostered his insecurity. Lack of motivation in school and poor grades occurred in parallel with his involvement in anti-social behavior and substance abuse. His erratic behavior increased with his school dropout. His search for identity through his conversion to Islam brought him into contact with radicals. He was prone to submit to the will of others in the hope that this would lessen his personal unease.⁵⁴ Religion became for him a means to confront his constant disquiet. It provided him, in his own terms, “a kind of peace” that he had not experienced until then.⁵⁵ This comfort and search for identity lead him to intensify contact with extremists and ISIS sympathizers who extolled a fundamentalist interpretation of Islam and jihad.⁵⁶ As his sister pointed out, this new socialization turned him into somebody “obsessed with his girlfriend’s movements, what she did, who she was with, ordering that she could only leave the house if accompanied by his mother and wearing a burka”.⁵⁷ His adherence to radical Islam strengthened his rigidity and lack of empathy toward the out-group,

non-Muslims, and the justification of violence against them. He argued that “Muslims were not treated well throughout the world”.⁵⁸ Accordingly, he interpreted that his duty as a “good Muslim” was to pursue a violent course of action in response to the injustices being committed in Syria.⁵⁹ He felt he “had to spread the cause” and “encourage others to travel to Syria” while acknowledging that he did not want to go there himself.⁶⁰

DAYFA: Although she grew up in a structured family environment with adequate educational guidelines, the lack of parental control in relation to the new technologies was an influential factor in her radicalization.⁶¹ A shy girl at a vulnerable age, she experienced an identity conflict at the heart of her radicalization. The societal environment in which she grew up was one with important deficits in relation to the unsuccessful integration of some of those who emigrated to Spain from Muslim countries like Morocco. Melilla, together with Ceuta, both geographically located in the North of Africa, are two cities with the highest radicalization rates in Spain and ample discontent with Western values.⁶² This context enabled her access to networks of radicals linked to the terrorist group ISIS.⁶³ She felt attracted by a collective identity provided by a radical ideology like jihadism in a location where terrorist cells exerted considerable influence over closed communities in marginalized environments. Accordingly, DAYFA tried to resolve the “conflict between her personal identity and that of her group of reference”,⁶⁴ by developing an “online identity”.⁶⁵ As DAYFA acknowledged, the radical ideology around ISIS exerted a strong influence on her since “the shared feeling with other girls made it stronger”.⁶⁶ Her recruitment and intense radical activity allowed her to develop an “online sisterhood”.⁶⁷ This factor was a very relevant one in her radicalization together with the great influence exerted by her boyfriend, to whom she had a strong emotional attachment and dependence. She wanted to get closer to him and she tried to do so by increasing her knowledge of radical Islam through the internet. Her longing for acceptance by him increased her vulnerability and determined him finally succeeding in shaping her attitudes and manipulating her cognitions after she initially rejected some of his radical views.⁶⁸ Following his breaking up with her for his criticism of what he saw as a weak stance by DAYFA in relation to ISIS, she strengthened her religious commitment, ended up justifying violence by the terrorist group, and engaged herself in recruiting and indoctrinating.⁶⁹ She confessed she never wanted to go to Syria, she just wanted “to please” her boyfriend because she “dreamt of forming a family with him”.⁷⁰

THAMIR and CALEB: Their adherence to very fundamentalist cultural and religious traditions as established in the family environment was a determinant factor in their radicalization. This contributed to a significant cognitive rigidity vis-à-vis cultural and religious values related to Islam. As part of those traditions, their mother, a key role model in their upbringing, sent them to a Koranic school in Morocco, a stay that would also be of relevance in their problematic socialization on their return to Spain. They hardly socialized with peers their age on their return from North African, remaining in contact with those whom they had met at the mosque there. Parental roles were not positively exercised but, on the contrary, were geared toward the indoctrination and recruitment of the youths into the terrorist network that their mother was part of.⁷¹ Her mother’s influence and adherence to an ideology that extolled intolerance toward other cultures prevented them from maintaining their membership

of a sports club.⁷² This sheltering from other cultural outlooks reinforced their socialization into a subculture of violence which idealized the jihad that his brother had conducted in Syria. Strong feelings of revenge and hatred toward the out-group, non-Muslims, were inoculated by their mother and the terrorist group they joined in order to follow their brother's steps, whom they regarded as a role model. They regarded their membership of the terrorist organization as a "duty of a good Muslim".⁷³ Their parents' severity was such that they accused the staff at the center where the intervention took place of being "infidels", and the minors of having their "hearts softened by them".⁷⁴

Stage 3: Design and Implementation of Objectives, Actions, and Activities

This stage was based on a cognitive model which considered that the emotions and behaviors of individuals are influenced by their perception of events to the extent that is not a situation in itself what determines their feelings, but how they interpret it.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the intervention of the five youths took place in a context in which, as research on the subject demonstrates, there is a lack of consensus on what exactly an effective de-radicalization entails.⁷⁶ Horgan and Braddock emphasize the difficulty of ascertaining "what is expected from programmes that claim to be able to de-radicalize terrorists".⁷⁷ Consequently, risk reduction is often seen as a reasonable objective when dealing with terrorist offenders even though clearly defined goals and strategies to achieve them are not always that clear.⁷⁸ As Khalil and Zeuthen point out, risk reduction is a "more flexible term" than "disengagement or deradicalization" that allows to implement programs with a wide range of activities aimed at preventing offenders from returning to violent extremist activities.⁷⁹ Given the limitations of the intervention as a result of time constraints derived from the youth's judicial measures, a realistic approach dominated the program implemented, which was mainly geared toward the referred risk reduction. Accordingly, and in consistency with the literature on criminal desistance,⁸⁰ a set of activities were designed with the aim of developing a pro-social identity, pro-social bonds, and ties. Since the intervention was based on the Risk-Need-Responsiveness (RNR) model developed by Andrews and Bonta, at this stage the dynamic risk factors previously evaluated were targeted with various actions and varying degrees depending on the youth's different level of risk.

The minor's intervention was structured around the "Central Educational and Therapeutic Treatment Programme for Young Offenders" designed by the Agency in charge of the intervention. This program, following a cognitive-behavioral methodology, requires to undertake the following seven modules: characterization of criminal behavior; emotions involved in aggression; control of negative emotions; beliefs that sustain criminal behavior; modification of aggressive habits; personality, and its influence on social deviance; and relapse prevention and strengthening of change.⁸¹ Simultaneously, the youths also completed the "General Formative Programme of the Center" which included a schooling scheme for five hours every day, school support and encouragement for reading for three hours daily, as well as various set of activities during the week such as vocational training, book binding, restoration, pottery, modeling, sculpture, decoration, handcrafted wood turning, dance workshop, painting on canvas, decoration, models, sports, video-forum, group leisure, individual leisure. The "General Formative

Programme of the Center” also included a “Programme on Personal Development and Social Competence” which consisted of a couple of sub-programs on “Personal Development and Civic-Ethic Education”, and “Preparation for an Independent Life”, as well as a workshop on equal opportunities (Table 2). The particular features and objectives of each minor determined different emphasis on the modules and activities undertaken, as it will now be outlined.

NADIA⁸²: In light of her relevant educational deficits, a main objective of the intervention was to develop a motivational sense of achievement vis-à-vis her education.⁸³ Accordingly, the intervention team tried to foster regular study and work habits through several activities. First of all, the team integrated the minor in the school system run by the juvenile center in order to resume the studies she had neglected before her confinement. This integration also implied her taking up support activities inside and outside the classroom. Secondly, a specific plan for the organization of her work was designed so that she could improve her competences to face tasks inside and outside the classroom.

Another major goal was the need to achieve an emotional openness from NADIA enabling her to properly express her thoughts and emotions. Closely related to this aim was that of familiarizing her with the use of healthy regulatory and stabilization strategies for the normal expression of her thoughts and emotions.⁸⁴ Both objectives were pursued through a Psychotherapeutic Program which required individual sessions with the psychologist in which the minor was trained in the acquisition of emotional self-regulatory strategies and resources.⁸⁵ Self-control in the face of difficult and stressful situations was also exercised by the psychologist with the support of other members of the technical team involved in her educational activities. In parallel with the previous objective, the intervention also set out to reduce NADIA's levels of emotional

Table 2. Summary of activities.

Area	Activity	NADIA	OSCAR	DAYFA	THAMIR	CALEB
Formative	School classroom at the Center	X	X	X	X	X
	School support and encouragement for reading			X		X
Pre-work	Vocational training			X		
	Book binding	X	X		X	
	Restoration	X	X			X
	Pottery	X				
	Modeling, sculpture, decoration			X		X
Personal development and social competence	Hadcrafted wood turning				X	X
	Central Educational and Therapeutic Treatment Program for Young Offenders	X	X	X	X	X
	Program on Personal Development and Social Competence	X	X	X	X	X
	Program on Personal Development and Civic-Ethic Education	X	X	X	X	X
	Program on Preparation for an Independent Life		X			
	Workshop on equal opportunities	X		X	X	
	Dance workshop	X				
Occupational workshop	Painting on canvas, decoration, models	X	X	X	X	X
Leisure and free time	Sports	X	X	X	X	X
	Video-forum	X	X	X	X	X
	Group leisure	X	X	X	X	X
	Individual leisure	X	X	X	X	X

containment which were preventing her from expressing her feelings. She undertook nine sessions devoted to dealing with emotions related to aggression and controlling negative emotions.⁸⁶ Activities on the identification of situations inductive to rage were developed as well as techniques for managing anxiety in the face of conflict or problems.

NADIA's intervention scheme also aimed at facilitating critical attitudes in relation to her peers in order to encourage assertive exchanges with them.⁸⁷ Thus, conflicts with peers were analyzed through tutorials where the education team role-played strategies of alternative responses with the view of enabling a proper communication and a normalized coexistence. The minor's everyday life situations in peer groups were role played in order to practice alternative responses to aggression. This activity was complemented with the minor's involvement in the so-called Assemblies of the Group of Coexistence in which the problems for a normalized coexistence among the minors were discussed and common objectives set out. This group brought together all the minors held at the center and the educational staff. This allowed the former to participate in the organization and functioning of the center while providing a space for the reflection on the daily life issues that affected them.

The intervention also aimed at achieving a real perception of the gravity of the crime committed. The crime was analyzed from a personal perspective through the reflection and introspection around the cognitions, emotions and conducts related to the offense.⁸⁸ The consequences of the crime were also assessed as well as its implications for her future with a view to instill a critical revision of the actions committed. The achievement of critical thinking in relation to the values related to radical Islam which were behind the crime constituted another goal of the intervention. To this extent the minor assessed with the team the ideas and values associated with a radical and fundamentalist interpretation of Islam. The activities in which she engaged tried to foster an alternative life to aggression and violence, also training her in the cognitive restructuring of ideas used to justify violent actions. For some time, the minor was not opened to reflecting on the gravity of consequences derived from her acts as a result of her childish and fanciful attitude. This facet was undertaken with the psychologist in individual sessions. Previously, examples provided by the educator introduced her to the identification of situations where criminal behavior had taken place, also working on the analysis of thoughts and emotions arising before, during and after the criminal behavior.

The intervention set out to involve the minor's parents and siblings in order to enhance her adequate integration in the family context.⁸⁹ Family sessions focused on activities of supervision and control of the minor through norms and limits, improvement of communication skills, and strengthening of social bonds. Finally, the intervention aimed at arousing the minor's self-awareness of her risk factors.⁹⁰ This was pursued through individualized sessions on "Getting to know myself" in which the difficulties experienced by the minor were assessed together with the relevance of psychological assistance on her release to reinforce her personal process.

OSCAR⁹¹: The acquisition of study habits and work routines, together with the continuation of his schooling with a view to enhance his prospects were two of the aims of his intervention.⁹² He was integrated into the school system of the center and undertook support activities inside and outside the classroom. He also took up a course on hairstyling.⁹³ The assessment of family relationships and his life history was

another of the objectives pursued. This was implemented through individualized sessions with the technical team which also included the minor's relatives so that he could understand the impact of traumatic events in his personal development, particularly his father's death. Strategies to deal with the consequences of such loss were performed.⁹⁴ The improvement of communication skills with relatives was also acted on. The relevance of norms and limits in the family context and the consequences of its absence received special attention. By way of example, one of the sessions involved OSCAR and other minors completing an individual project to assess the importance of establishing rules for any activity, no matter how simple it may seem. Each participant was asked to design a part of the project, trying to figure out what the others were doing. The practitioner chose the object to be drawn. Subsequently, all parts were stuck together with Sellotape and the result was observed. Then, the participants were asked to give their opinion on the result. Finally, a short questionnaire named "The project" was completed, the participants debating what the result was, what happened, what was missing, how a better result would have been obtained, and how could they ensure that rules were respected.

The joint activities also focused on increasing OSCAR's awareness of the negative effect that his distortions had on his mother's health. Simultaneously, the intervention aimed at increasing his emotional openness, enabling his expression of thoughts and emotions, as well as at the acquisition of self-regulatory strategies.⁹⁵ One of the goals set was to control his unease in the face of situations of uncertainty.⁹⁶ Through individualized sessions the psychologist trained the minor in techniques on the adequate channeling of the emotions he was experiencing. As scheduled in the Psychotherapeutic Program, the practitioner helped the minor analyze the components of anxiety in problematic or conflict situations: cognitive, motor, physical and emotional. Once the components were properly explained, the minor was taught basic strategies for controlling anxiety at those levels and practiced coping with potentially anxiogenic situations.

Another objective was to increase awareness of the risk derived from his socialization with radical peers and to assess his social environment prior to his radicalization.⁹⁷ The activities emphasized the critical assessment of the strong influence played by his peers and the features he sought in them. Related to this goal was that of fully acknowledging the implications of the violent acts of the terrorist group he joined, avoiding justifications, distortions, and their minimization. The activities developed in order to deal with the characterization of his criminal behavior included reading examples of imaginary situations which showed antisocial/criminal behavior after defining them. A functional analysis of the criminal acts included in the examples was conducted by the underaged and the practitioner. Through other examples of imaginary situations, the practitioner explained the differences between norms, offenses, and judicial measures, also working on the identification of violent conducts and the different types that could manifest. The minor was also asked to prepare a self-report on the components of functional analysis concerning some inappropriate behavior that might take place in the interval between sessions.

Another objective of OSCAR's intervention was to acquire skills in conflict resolution abandoning the justification of violence.⁹⁸ Through different sessions the minor practiced the identification, expression, and reception of emotions. Examples were provided

so the minor practiced how to put himself in somebody else's place, thus being able to understand their feelings, thoughts, and actions. Empathy sheets, practicing empathy sheets, and empathy self-reports, were among the materials OSCAR completed in order to learn to respond appropriately to other people's emotional state and to get to know what empathy was and its importance in relating to others. Additionally, through personal interviews and newspaper articles the consequences of the offense committed were assessed so that empathy with the victims could be put into practice.

Special emphasis was placed on the module on "Beliefs that sustain criminal behavior". Through practical exercises OSCAR was trained in the identification of distorted ideas and the search for alternative thoughts. Additionally, through group exercises he worked on the connection between his distorted thoughts and his antisocial behavior. Examples of conflicts that arose in the daily life at the center as a result of such connection were analyzed and acted upon. These activities were complemented by tutorials with the psychologist in which a more realist and adaptative frame of mind was exercised.

The intervention also pursued to confront the minor's radical prejudices with moral values respected in society.⁹⁹ Moral dilemmas and practical exercises were assessed with a view to foster alternative responses to the fundamentalist religious ideas he adhered to. Similarly, the intervention aimed at increasing his emotional expressiveness working on his own life line as developed by him with the team.

DAYFA¹⁰⁰: The continuation of her education at school level maintaining her interest in it was one of the main objectives.¹⁰¹ An individual plan was designed so that she continued with her education and fulfilled the school tasks, including the preparation of exams. Individual study sessions were combined with support group activities supervised by the practitioners. She was also trained in study techniques and learning strategies. A careers adviser offered DAYFA assistance with a view to continue her education after her internment.¹⁰²

As with the other minors, another major goal was the need to achieve an emotional openness from her and the acquisition of regulatory strategies for the stabilization and correct expression of her feelings.¹⁰³ Individual sessions with a psychologist focused on assessing the values and beliefs system of DAYFA, the correct channeling of her feelings and emotional reactions as a result of the situation she was going through, as well as training in anxiety control techniques.¹⁰⁴ There was a special emphasis on the module devoted to the "Emotions involved in aggression". Through examples provided by the practitioner the girl identified and analyzed the main features of anxiety, its consequences and how to handle it. Sheets on learning to breath, learning to relax, changing and controlling of thoughts, structured the intervention on this facet. Various situations were read, the practitioner commenting on the cases used and providing examples that facilitated the practice of the minor. By way of example, the exercises of anxiety control were practiced at least three times, applying them to situations that had cause nervousness at that particular moment or had caused it in the past. Once DAYFA had identified her personal situation in that context, she was required to think what she had learnt about the techniques she could implement to effectively manage the situation identified.

Another goal of the intervention was to increase the girl's awareness of risks derived from her socialization with conflictive peers.¹⁰⁵ Through individualized sessions DAYFA

reflected critically on how group dynamics had influenced her, the consequences on the short, medium, and long term of such socialization, both for her and for other people related to her. The module on the characterization of criminal behavior was particularly relevant in her intervention. The psychological components of an antisocial/criminal act were explained to her. Examples were provided of the thoughts, feelings and behaviors that derived in such act. DAYFA had to provide examples after the explanation of each concept so that the act was understood not as an isolated event, but as a continuum. Accordingly, the antecedents and consequences of an antisocial/criminal act were related and illustrated through situations. Additionally, in order to consolidate the knowledge acquired, she was asked to prepare a self-report on the components of the functional analysis concerning some inappropriate behavior that could take place between sessions.

To reduce the degree of her unease and irritability as a result of the uncertainty generated by her internment, DAYFA analyzed with the psychologist the conditions that motivated her deprivation of freedom.¹⁰⁶ She worked on the cognitive restructuring of the distorted thoughts that had provided justification for her criminal behavior. She was trained in the control of negative emotions through practices in which she had to detect and analyze situations that triggered her reactions of anger. She did it after assessing different examples of responses to a situation of anger. The performance of the minor was rated considering the work done and the assimilation and internalization of the concepts discussed. Assessment questions like the following ones were also posed to the minor: I will only experience anger in situations in which other people offend me or bother me (False); the thoughts I have when I'm angry are usually positive thoughts (False); the situations that can trigger my anger are diverse (True).

Finally, the team placed special attention on the relapse prevention and strengthening of change. The former was understood as "any return to the antisocial/criminal behavior or the lifestyle that existed before the start of the programme, after an initial period of change in the offending lifestyle".¹⁰⁷ Accordingly, the following activities were undertaken: How does relapse occur?; My relapse model; Risk and warning signs in thoughts and emotions; Risk and warning signs in behavior; Other risk and warning signs; Supplementary activity in which the minor had to think about what could have been changed to prevent the character's relapse in each of the examples provided. DAYFA also participated regularly in the Assemblies of the Group of Coexistence. This was aimed at improving her social skills, independence of thought and the emphatic and assertive expression of her opinions.

THAMIR and CALEB¹⁰⁸: The intervention of the twin brothers shared some objectives such as the continuation of their school education¹⁰⁹; to enhance the impulse and management control in the face of situations derived from their internment; to identify social and personal risk factors as a result of their life style encouraging changes in it¹¹⁰; to analyze their family relations and their life stories; to increase the awareness of the risk factors prior to their internment and in relation to the future; the acquisition of resources to properly channel their frustration avoiding an excessive emotional containment¹¹¹; to acquire a critical stance on their antisocial conducts, enabling the acquisition of a new and prosocial value system through the promotion of a more mature moral reasoning; as well as to acquire awareness of their relational

difficulties with a view to improve their social skills, and the peaceful and assertive resolution of interpersonal conflicts.¹¹²

Accordingly, both of them were enrolled in the school program corresponding to their qualifications, the technical team designing a study plan for each of them. This involved support activities for the implementation and organization of the school tasks and assistance in the preparation of exams. Similarly, both of them received individualized training in the functional analysis of their criminal conduct, assessing their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in a comprehensive manner and in comparison with other situations. Through the analysis of the antecedents and consequences of their acts, alternative responses were practiced. Strategies of emotional self-control were also exercised in the face of the frustration and anger that their internment created and with a view to improve their adaptation to their detention. Relaxation techniques were also put into practice and exercises to encourage the change of thoughts were also conducted. By teaching the minors to correctly identify their thoughts it was hoped they would understand how these affected the psychological responses they experienced when they were anxious or nervous. The implementation of strategies to control anxiety was structured through the analysis of situations (i.e. "I argue with my brother because he doesn't lend me his shoes"); thoughts (i.e. "I'm an idiot, because I always lend him everything"); physical and emotional sensations (i.e. anger, rage, knot in the stomach, tension); the proposed techniques (breathing and control of thoughts, breathing and muscular relaxation); and that of the alternative thoughts considered (i.e. "I will wait for a more appropriate time to ask him for them"). The sessions were rated by the practitioners bearing in mind the work done and the assimilation and internalization of the concepts discussed. Also, assessment questions like the following ones were posed for the minors' assessment: The only way to control my anxiety is by managing the physical symptoms (FALSE); If I identify the situations in which I usually get nervous, I will control my anxiety better (TRUE); What I think in a particular situation will not influence my getting anxious (FALSE).

When it came to identifying social and personal risk factors as a result of their life style, with a view to encouraging changes in it, interviews were conducted to develop their recognition, awareness, and personal targets. The minors worked on the improvement of social skills, assertiveness, empathy, conflict resolution and active listening through individual and group sessions.¹¹³ Other activities such as physical education and sports were implemented in order to train them in the acquisition of prosocial values, respect toward individual differences, communication skills and conflict resolution. The analysis of their family relations was particularly relevant given the criminal conduct of their parents and the impact on their life stories. The involvement of their relatives was sought, but as it will be outlined in the next section, the evaluation of the intervention showed that it didn't favor a positive evolution of the minors. Their relational problems required them to increase their awareness of such deficits. This was attempted through the analysis of the difficulties detected during the internment in their socialization with other inmates. Their participation in the Assemblies of the Group of Coexistence contributed to their training on social and communication skills. These gatherings provided the right context for them to exercise alternative ways to express their opinions about daily life situations through dialogue and with empathy toward others. This approach was complemented with individualized sessions so the

minors could work on their communication skills and their capacity to tolerate different views as expressed by others.

Stage 4: Final Evaluation

The Radicalization Awareness Network evaluation of exit programs understands that “success for exit programs usually consists of disengagement (leaving a radical environment and violent behavior), deradicalization (leaving a radical ideology), functional integration (such as housing, employment and health care) and social reintegration (family, friends, community) in the long term.”¹¹⁴ In a similar line, and given the limitations of the intervention which have already been outlined, the evaluation focused on the degree of risk reduction that could be envisaged as a result of the minor’s progress on their education and formation, the development of a critical attitude toward the extremist ideology and the terrorist group, and their social and family integration.

The evaluation was periodically conducted throughout the intervention and at the end of the program. The periodical assessments allowed for adjustments as the scheme was progressing rating the activities according to the following criteria: (1) *Implementation*: efforts have been made by the practitioners who remain awaiting the assimilation and response by the minor; (2) *Development*: the minor has assimilated ideas and has begun to respond making some efforts; (3) *Reinforcement*: the minor has made considerable progress, but it is necessary to continue supervising him/her; (4) *Finalized*: the minor has met the objective; (5) *Interrupted*: it has not been possible to work on the objective and/or activity.¹¹⁵ A summary of the final evaluation of the minors will now be provided.

Given the relevance that school absenteeism had had in the minors’ radicalization, their integration into the school system and other educational activities was particularly valuable and positively assessed. The intervention managed to increase the youngsters’ sense of achievement in relation to their education. The experience of success as a result of such reintegration into the school system allowed them to relate it with increasing possibilities of work insertion in the future. Their feeling of personal worth was also enhanced, leading the team to assess that their vulnerability had somehow decreased. A reinforced personal identity developed as a result of the gains on this area and the positive endorsement derived from them. All of them expressed their desire to continue their education acknowledging the relevance this would have in their prospects for the future. However, the evaluation reports produced by the team shed light on the limited degree of accomplishment achieved by the minors in relation to many of the objectives set out for each of them, as it will be outlined below. It must be stressed that the intervention was initiated while the youths were on remand pending their trial and sentencing as a result of judicial custodial measures. Therefore, most of the intervention took place while they awaited their sentencing. This factor clearly influenced their attitude toward the intervention. They often conducted themselves with caution when it came to sharing information related to their radical beliefs and socialization with extremists given the repercussion it could have in their judicial process. To this extent the team detected a common pattern of hermeticism (understood as a resistance to openness and lack of willingness to open up to the practitioners), distancing, superficiality, and manipulation of information.

NADIA: She made good progress in the adaptative and behavioral front,¹¹⁶ showing some respect for norms and limits,¹¹⁷ increasing her involvement in the activities of the center, improving her interest for her studies and her integration with her peers.¹¹⁸ Nonetheless, as a result of her instability and childish personality with search of attention, her behavior experienced up and downs in relation to her self-control, acceptance of authority figures, and relations with others.¹¹⁹

NADIA's commitment to the intervention increased gradually, positively working on the recognition of emotions and their influence on aggression, practicing positive emotions, the management of anxiety and strategies for managing anger. She made progress in the identification of situations and factors that triggered reactions of rage and anger. However, she was not that successful when it came to applying those strategies for anger control. Despite the contradictions that emerged in her discourse vis-à-vis radical Islam, the team concluded that she did not adhere to a solid value system that would make it impossible for her to break away from the extremist ideology behind her actions. Her proximity toward radicalism stemmed from a "fashion" among youngsters in her hometown. Her lack of maturity, underdeveloped consciousness of the impact of her acts and detachment from reality were at the root of her criminal conduct. Little progress was made in strengthening her defense toward extremist ideas, frequently expressing incoherent responses, and showing little collaboration with the practitioners.¹²⁰ Her manipulations of reality, lies, exaggerations and fantasies were frequent almost until the end of the intervention, hindering the process of confronting her past life.¹²¹ She frequently victimized herself denying any responsibility for her antisocial conduct. NADIA's progress was only evident at the later stages of the intervention to the extent that two months prior to the end of her internment a report stated: "there has been no progress at the psychological level as a result of her lack of interest and little self-reflection. She is not aware of the difficulties she faces and of the help she requires".¹²²

Her family was also reluctant to assist the practitioners, her parents' ambivalence ranging from a lack of communication to some calls to enquire about the minor's state. When communication with her parents was maintained, they showed no critical reflection of the risks of their daughter's situation, constantly minimizing its gravity. They didn't aid the team with information about the minor's previous life, even contradicting themselves.¹²³

Most of the objectives set out by the team were not met and the team concluded that little progress was made regarding the need to collaborate with the practitioners and the awareness of her personal difficulties.¹²⁴ The main progress was reported at the educational level, since she improved her involvement at school showing increasing interest for her academic formation.¹²⁵ It was only a month prior to the end of her internment that the team reported some "reinforcement" vis-à-vis "the building up of a critical conscience towards the values of Islamic radicalism" and "keeping the emotional stability" she was showing at that particular stage.¹²⁶ The evolution of the protective and risk factors was also limited. The team only reported a meaningful development in a protective factor such as the "minor's interest for her academic formation".¹²⁷ Although the team valued that at the end of the intervention she was more emotionally stable and aware of the risks derived of her situation, it was still necessary to continue working on her personality.¹²⁸ The following risk factors remained:

lack of family supervision, multiproblematic family, prone to frustration easily, little empathic capacity, search for attention through risky behavior, negative role models in family and friend's environment, high social desirability, and strong vulnerability to the influence of others. Two protective factors were noted: interest on academic formation and finishing her studies, and weak and ambivalent beliefs that may prevent consolidation on the extreme ideology.

OSCAR: His adaptation to the intervention program increased gradually to the extent that he ended up being fully integrated in the scheme maintaining a correct and cordial relation with other inmates and practitioners.¹²⁹ His educational gains were also positively assessed since he managed to pass a course on hairstyling and start a new school course highly motivated.¹³⁰ There were, nonetheless, some setbacks since the minor went through stages when he did not adhere to the norms of the center and was sanctioned as a result of his behavior.¹³¹

At the beginning of the intervention, he showed a marked emotional toughness, being reluctance to collaborate with the team when it came to facing his past life and personal issues.¹³² He started the intervention with frequent lies and manipulations that were confronted by the practitioners. The diffusion of responsibility and self-justifications were also a common feature. However, nearing the end of the intervention the team reported an improvement, OSCAR appearing as "communicative", "approachable", and "open to the evaluation of the risks" derived from his situation.¹³³ There was concern that this improvement could be merely instrumental since he was trying to earn a move to Barcelona. In fact, subsequent sessions with the minor revealed his motivation for change was not real, his attitude when confronted with important issues being shallow and avoiding self-questioning. He went from arguing that "everything was a trap by the infiltrated agent" that was a key element of the police operation in which he was detained, to victimizing himself claiming he "was being groomed", and diminishing the gravity of the offense alleging it was not a "terrorist cell" but a mere "association".¹³⁴ Once the minor was sentenced by the Court the practitioners were able to confront him with the judicial ruling. This stated that it had been proven that he was not being groomed, but he was actually involved in grooming others and he had actually selected targets for terrorist attacks.¹³⁵ Nonetheless, the minor remained firm in his denials, showing himself as a controlling and astute person, careful with his words in an attempt to benefit his judicial process. The team concluded that OSCAR's main concern was his early release. To that end he pretended to be concerned, involved and open to collaboration. He also simulated concern for his family, leading the team to observe that he had not opened up and that they had unsuccessfully tried to stir him up to expose the truth.¹³⁶

The minor's family was in constant communication with the center and genuinely concerned about his wellbeing. Nonetheless, the boy's mother constantly defended and justified his son's conduct, avoiding criticism and being distrustful of the practitioners' proposals.¹³⁷ One of the final reports notes "a constant absence of critical capacity towards OSCAR's attitudes when he used his father's death to justify them".¹³⁸

His main achievement was the control of his unease in the face of situations of uncertainty.¹³⁹ On the contrary, other objectives such as the acquisition of awareness of his personal difficulties with a view to improve his personality, and the assumption of the consequences of his actions and decisions, avoiding their justification,

minimization, manipulation and even lies, remained unfulfilled.¹⁴⁰ Other objectives were not met but some progress was reported vis-à-vis his capacity to adapt to life in the center. The “interiorization of norms and the acceptance of authority figures”,¹⁴¹ as well as the “increasing trust in the practitioners” were pointed out in the evaluation,¹⁴² together with his motivation toward formative and educational activities. Although his awareness of the risks associated to the socialization with peers in situations of social conflict improved, relevant risk factors remained unresolved, his progress on the following being scarce or nonexistent: mother’s overprotection of the minor and flawed supervision, strong hermeticism, lack of flexibility to reason and to empathize with the other, apathy, depressive features, low disposition to change, high social desirability, pathological mourning finding in radical Islam a means of coping thus showing strong adherence to extreme ideas, vulnerability to the influence of others, and low tolerance to frustration. In contrast, two protective factors were highlighted: family environment detached from radical religious ideas related to the criminal offense that motivated his internment and affective family environment.

DAYFA: The team assessed positively her good behavior at the center and her acceptance of the charges which motivated her detention. Nonetheless, the evaluation noted that her stay at the center, six-months, shorter than that of the other youths, prevented further progress when much work was still required.¹⁴³ Her progress on the following objectives set out at the intervention was also pointed out: interiorization of the normative framework, respectful relationships with others and interest in education and academic formation.¹⁴⁴ However, most of the risk factors identified at the beginning of the intervention remained unaltered at the end of it, particularly her low tolerance to frustration, her strong adherence to traditional religious values, the maintenance of relations with radical peers, returning to the same environment, and the lack of supervision in the family environment vis-à-vis education and the use of new technologies. Some progress was reported on her disposition to change and the realization of the need to enhance the avoidance of risk factors.¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, the limited time period of the intervention prevented the team from determining how consolidated those factors were. The minor’s lack of clarity and cautiousness, together with the fact that the intervention had to focus considerably on her adaptation to detention, guaranteeing she was in the right state of mind for her court appearances, also prevented an efficient confrontation by the team.¹⁴⁶

One of the assessments refers to DAYFA’s self-victimization because of his relationship with her boyfriend. Although she expressed regret for her acts, the idealization of her boyfriend prevented her from making progress in the intervention. She felt that what her boyfriend had taught her was “the most beautiful thing in the world”, this being the reason for facing such difficulty in criticizing what he had instructed her.¹⁴⁷ Her family tried to be involved in the intervention but coordination with the practitioners was complex since the parents hardly spoke Spanish and were going through a difficult time. Nonetheless, the role of DAYFA’s sisters was positively assessed since they got involved in the intervention advising and even putting pressure on her to collaborate with the team.¹⁴⁸ The latter was regarded as a protective factor together with the absence of consumption of substances and lack of interest in substance misuse.

THAMIR: The evaluation reported only minimal advances as revealed by the fact that he combined periods in which he adequately fulfilled norms and showed respect

toward the others with other stages when sanctions were imposed on him as a result of his misbehavior. Some of the sanctions were precisely because of his offensive remarks toward other inmates.¹⁴⁹ Similarly, on some occasions he appeared well integrated into the program before getting into conflict with some of his peers. On occasions he appeared committed to the workshops he took part in and to the school program, while on others he neglected them to the point that he was unable to achieve the diploma he pursued.¹⁵⁰ His limited communication skills hampered his progress together with his cognitive rigidity and lack of trust in the practitioners.¹⁵¹ Sometimes he appeared to be trying to be more open to share personal facts of relevance to the intervention. However, the team detected an instrumental rationale. These episodes coincided with court appearances and meetings with his lawyer. By way of example, one report points out the minor's interest in knowing the contents of the assessments provided by the team to the court.¹⁵² He wanted the team to report progress in his collaboration so that the court would positively consider it. However, while attempting to show a positive image of himself he incurred in contradictions that raised doubts about his real progress.

As a result of the previous shortcomings, THAMIR did not meet in full any of the objectives set out in the intervention. The evaluation pointed out his failure to develop a critical attitude toward the anti-social acts he had been involved in and those he maintained during his stay at the center; to develop an awareness of the risk factors of his situation in view of his release in the future; and to reduce his marked hermeticism.¹⁵³ The lack of commitment and interest on the minor's part was complemented with that of his parents.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, when he left the center he maintained a similar level of high social desirability, low tolerance to frustration, and poor self-control. He refused to question his radical ideals, going back to an environment with a mother imprisoned for radicalizing him and a father with important deficits in terms of his capacity to supervise the minor's education and that of his twin.¹⁵⁵ In the face of such negative outcome and maintenance of important risks, the team registered two protective factors with the potential to act as firewall: the absence of consumption of substances and the nine-month period of absence of contact with radical religious environment as a result of his detention, allowing him to listen to different views and experience different forms of life from those he was used to.¹⁵⁶

CALEB: He showed progress at the adaptive level. After initial conflicts derived from his adherence to strict religious beliefs that led him to refuse the food provided by the center and the rejection of activities that clashed with his prayers, he ended up accepting the norms.¹⁵⁷ He gradually diminished the number of sanctions imposed on him for his misbehavior. He even established some relations with other inmates.¹⁵⁸ His initial indifference and lack of interest toward the activities assigned also shifted, participating in them more actively later on. The same applied to his motivation to the school scheme after his initial lack of commitment.¹⁵⁹ His attitude toward the practitioners also varied from his early distrust to their acceptance as figures of authority even resorting to them for the resolution of problems.¹⁶⁰ Nonetheless, the final reports assessed that the individual sessions were characterized by his resistance to deepening reflection on the issues put forward, his fundamentalist religious values completely influencing him.¹⁶¹ He was unwavering in his determination to avoid any questioning of his traditional religious beliefs.¹⁶²

Despite progress on some areas, relevant deficits remained at the end of the intervention. His lack of communication skills prevented him fully integrating into the group. The fact that never before had he had friends of his age as a result of his family impositions weighed heavily on him.¹⁶³ Nonetheless he made some advances and became aware of the situations in which his excesses created problems, even apologizing for them. He was therefore able to empathize with others and ponder what may have inconvenienced others.¹⁶⁴ His capacity to identify wrongness which he had previously understood as normal, allowed the team to remain hopeful for progress in the acquisition of behavioral prosocial patterns. Also, and like his twin, he refused to take responsibility for his offense, engaging in guilt transfer, and showed scant tolerance to ideas different from his.¹⁶⁵ However, one of the reports referred to his “internal battle”, since his engagement with others during his internment, peers who came from a different cultural background, had led him to consider whether his intolerant stances might after all not be correct.¹⁶⁶ At the same time, on one occasion he broke into tears after acknowledging to the educator that “I could not accept that what I believe is wrong because that would disrespect Allah”.¹⁶⁷ The educators assessed that in the end his beliefs prevailed overcoming the doubts that started to arise. At the end of the intervention, he argued he could still conduct jihad in Spain without combatting abroad and living according to Quran, but should “the war” reach the country, he would have to get involved with his Muslim brothers.¹⁶⁸

Whatever progress was made at the individual level stumbled when he got in touch with his twin. The negative role of his mother and father was pointed out in the evaluation. The former used her phone calls to the twins from prison to blame them for the situation they found themselves in.¹⁶⁹ The evaluation reported a reversal in the minor’s intervention coinciding with her calls. The father did not express criticism of the twins’ offenses. Despite the efforts by the practitioners to facilitate meetings with him, the father failed to attend many of them, arising in the twin brothers’ feelings of frustration and incertitude.¹⁷⁰ When he showed up, he was cold and uninterested. Accordingly, a report stated that the father had no interest in acting as a role model and figure of authority or supervising the minors so that they could reduce their risk factors.¹⁷¹

Three protective factors were emphasized: absence of consumption of substances, a nine-month period of absence of contact with radical religious environments, and his obtaining his diploma in compulsory secondary education. The following risk factors remained: difficulty to express personal opinions and thoughts with the adequate emotional openness, contact with a radical figure such as her mother and flawed communication with his father who showed little involvement in the minor’s intervention, scarce social skills, cognitive rigidity and lack of flexibility and adaptability to new environments, low disposition to change, low frustration to tolerance and flawed self-control, and a lack of a group of peers that could act as a positive role model.

Conclusions

The intervention on the five underaged took place in the absence of “any special programmes designed for juvenile or young violent extremist/terrorist offenders” in the European Union.¹⁷² At the time important lacunas existed in relation to what

should be the aims of work with individuals convicted of terrorism offenses and regarding what success might look like with this type of offenders.¹⁷³ The Agency in charge of the intervention had to respond to an unprecedented situation with considerable deficits and limited human and material resources. The Agency's remit had not included terrorist offenders and had to take up a new challenge reacting within a short space of time. Accordingly, the intervention implemented was based on a model for youth delinquency aimed at the distancing of violent conducts and avoidance of relapsing as a result of the reduction of the risk factors manifested in the underaged. The different type of violence involved in a terrorist offense like membership of terrorist organization and the relevance of the ideology behind it provided distinctive features that the intervention also had to take into consideration, leading the practitioners to adapt their working materials and approaches. The intervention was therefore a learning process for the institution and the practitioners involved who have, as a result of this valuable experience, adapted their tools and protocols for working with minors involved in terrorist offenses. By way of example, the Agency has created a new model for the intervention aimed at the risk reduction related to violent extremism,¹⁷⁴ a guide of indicators for the detection and management of the radicalization of jihadist motivation,¹⁷⁵ also abandoning the previous criteria for the evaluation of the program.¹⁷⁶ The practitioners have also improved their training on terrorism related issues with a view to provide a more specific and appropriate intervention when ideologically motivated violent extremism occurs.

Time constraints derived from the type of cautionary judicial measures imposed on the youths was a determinant factor in the intervention. Their internment on remand while they were awaiting sentencing clearly influenced the minor's attitude toward the psychoeducational program. The pending judicial process affected the youth's willingness to open up and confront the offenses committed. Also, the lack of a compulsory minimum period of intervention hindered the planning and implementation of the intervention. The Minor's Law allows the judge to suspend, reduce and replace the duration of the measures imposed,¹⁷⁷ and in the five cases their internment ended earlier than the sentences envisaged. Therefore, the intervention was interrupted even though the minor's distancing from the radical environment in which they had socialized and committed their offenses was showing some positive albeit limited results. Their socialization in a new and different environment enabled a break up with previous patterns that put them in a position to learn new pro social attitudes. However, their integration in the new environment was incomplete, time constraints derived from the judicial measures imposed preventing a more adequate planning of the activities designed for the objectives set out. Since objectives were assessed and updated if necessary as the intervention evolved according to the minor's progress or lack of it, the scheme would have benefited from a more ample and certain time frame. The Agency's own assessment of the implementation of intervention programs on nine hundred minors concluded that in those cases in which the intervention exceeded the nine-month period, ninety percent of them showed positive progress.¹⁷⁸ Therefore, empirical evidence demonstrates a correlation between the duration of the intervention and its success. Accordingly, and bearing in mind the principle of proportionality as well as the time limit that the law imposes for sentences that entail custody and deprivation of liberty in youth detention centers, interventions in semi freedom or open regimes could be

developed and improved. Nonetheless, the experience of the twin brothers, who continued their intervention on a probation regime after their ninth month, reveals that success is not guaranteed over an extended intervention period.

The Agency in charge of the program sought out the collaboration of external practitioners with the aim of incorporating valuable information about the minor's radicalization. To this extent, in addition to their family, other socialization entities such as the schools in which the minors had been registered, as well as the social services in their home towns were contacted and consulted. This allowed the Agency to learn about previous lines of work with the minors following some of those initiated by other social agents, strengths, and weaknesses of interest for the intervention. Such a multiagency approach was extremely valuable for the Agency. However, when the minors left the center, and once the Agency had lost its remit, the pattern was not reversed leading to a lack of involvement of the institution that had initiated this particular intervention.

The absence of the commission of further terrorist offenses by the minors following their release may be interpreted as a success of the intervention. However, the three male youths were subsequently expelled from the country on the grounds of being a danger to the national security.¹⁷⁹ These three minors were part of two families of illegal immigrants with limited job opportunities and other deficits that hindered the abandonment of the subculture of violence. In line with Hirschi, the minors' embracement of the subculture of violence was related to the weakening and breaking of the ties that linked them to society.¹⁸⁰ Additionally, the tight control exerted on the twins by their family further isolated them from positive influences raising even more obstacles in a process that led to their expulsion from Spain. On the other hand, the two females continued their educational and therapeutic measures in different regions reintegrating themselves into their communities of origin but without any reported involvement in criminal activities.

Finally, it can be concluded that the intervention program that has been assessed was a necessary but insufficient step in the youths' deradicalization. For the reasons that have been analyzed, the intervention could not be defined as a full deradicalization program as such. The factors that constrained the intervention, as previously outlined, prevented a more thorough approach that would have enabled the practitioners to confront the multicausal factors at the root cause of the minor's radicalization. As it stood, and within the parameters that the intervention took place, the work of the technical team at the personal level was an important phase that opened up the ground for a deeper and complex intervention. It provided a favorable context for the stabilization and awareness of the reality of the situation the youths were going through, its causes and consequences. The intervention emphasized the training of social skills in the belief that this approach would increase the awareness of the minors' emotions in order to develop personal resources to face the situation they found themselves in. The Agency's experience on other types of delinquency led the technical team to stress this facet which was seen as a first and necessary step toward developing ideas, attitudes and behaviors of a prosocial nature and, accordingly, aid the youths in distancing themselves from the jihadist extremist ideology. Nonetheless, the ideological dimension of the youth's radicalization, so deeply affected by their cultural background, required a very thorough intervention that the Agency's program was only able to initiate.

Notes

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144. Assessment Report and Review Individualized Model of Intervention, register number 1859, 15/04/2015; Final Report of Remand Measure, register number 3067, 18/06/2015.
145. Final Report of Remand Measure, register number 3067, 18/06/2015.
146. Ibid.
147. Interview with the technical team, 04/05/2016.
148. Ibid.
149. Assessment Report and Review of Individualized Model of Intervention, register number 3805, 20/07/2015; Psychosocial Reports, Reform File 2/2015, register number 4979, 17/09/2015; 5567, 16/10/2015.
150. Psychosocial Report, Reform File 2/2015, register number 4979, 17/09/2015.
151. Final Report of Remand Measure, register number 6837, 29/12/2015.
152. Psychosocial Report, Reform File 2/2015, register number 6121, 17/11/2015.
153. Individualized Model of Intervention, register number 2087, 24/04/2015; Final Report of Firm Sentencing, register number 6837, 29/12/2015.
154. Assessment Report and Review of Individualized Model of Intervention, register number 5567, 16/10/2015.
155. Final Report of Remand Measure, register number 6837, 29/12/2015.
156. Ibid.
157. Psychosocial Reports, Reform File number 2/2015, register numbers 4188, 05/08/2015; 5531, 06/10/2015; 5898, 03/11/2015; Final Report of Remand Measure, register number 6836, 29/12/2015.
158. Psychosocial Reports, Reform File number 2/2015, register numbers 3052, 17/06/2015, 3411, 03/07/2015; 4188, 05/08/2015, 4769, 07/09/2015; Assessment Report and Review of Individualized Model of Intervention, register number 5566, 16/10/2015.
159. Psychosocial Report, Reform File number 2/2015, register numbers 6384, 02/12/2015; Final Report of Remand Measure, register number 6836, 29/12/2015.
160. Psychosocial Report, Reform File number 2/2015, register numbers 4448, 19/08/2015; 6123, 17/11/2015.
161. Final Report of Remand Measure, register number 6836, 29/12/2015.
162. Interview with the technical team, 04/05/2016.
163. Psychosocial Report, Reform File number 2/2015, register number 3052, 17/07/2015.
164. Psychosocial Reports, Reform File number 2/2015, register numbers 5898, 03/11/2015.
165. Final Report of Remand Measure, register number 6836, 29/12/2015.
166. Psychosocial Reports, Reform File number 2/2015, register numbers 5898, 03/11/2015.
167. Interview with the technical team, 04/05/2016.

168. Ibid.
169. Psychosocial Reports, Reform File number 2/2015, register numbers 5350, 06/10/2015.
170. Psychosocial Reports, Reform File number 2/2015, register numbers 5898, 03/11/2015; Psychosocial Reports, Reform File number 2/2015, register numbers 6123, 17/11/2015.
171. Final Report of Remand Measure, register number 6837, 29/12/2015.
172. "Juvenile and Young Violent Extremist Offenders. Prison Study Visit to Wiesbaden and Frankfurt," 7th–8th June 2018, Ex Post Paper, RAN Center of Excellence, Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), 9.
173. Sarah Marsden, "Conceptualising 'Success' with those Convicted of Terrorism Offences: Aims, Methods and Barriers to Reintegration," *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 7, no. 2 (2015): 143–65.
174. María Teresa García Membrives, Rogelio Alonso, and Luis Cieza, *MIREV-A: Modelo de Intervención para la Reducción de Riesgos asociados al Extremismo Violento-ARRMI* (Agencia para la Reeducción y Reinserción del Menor Infractor, Comunidad de Madrid, 2022).
175. María Teresa García Membrives, Rogelio Alonso and Luis Cieza, *Guía de Indicadores para la Detección y Tratamiento de la Radicalización de Etiología Yihadista (ARRMI)*, Agencia para la Reeducción y Reinserción del Menor Infractor, Comunidad de Madrid, 2019.
176. Rather than rating the evaluations with the previous criteria (implementation, development, reinforcement, finalized, interrupted), objectives and activities are now assessed as achieved, partially achieved, and not achieved.
177. Law 8/2006, of 4th December which modifies Law 5/2000, of the Criminal Responsibility of Minors, Spanish Official Bulletin, n° 290, p. 42704.
178. Agency for the Reeduction and Reintegration of Young Offenders, 2021 Annual Report, Consejería de Presidencia, Justicia e Interior, 75.
179. OSCAR was expelled in 2019 and THAMIR and CALEB in 2018. This is a decision that the judiciary can take after assessing intelligence reports that do not have to demonstrate the commission of terrorist offences but a strong degree of radicalization and a lack of integration in society, factors that may be deemed to pose a high security risk.
180. Travis Hirschi, *Causes of Delinquency* (Berkeley: The University of California, 1969), 16.