



Annual report 2023

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PREFACE

2023 has been a turbulent year. The terrorist attack by Hamas on 7 October led to an escalation of violence and countless civilian casualties. The conflict is polarising across the world and is a powerful emotional trigger.

In this tense climate, an attack took place in Brussels on 16 October, in which two Swedish football supporters were killed and a third injured. According to his social networks, the perpetrator appeared to have been motivated by the Quran burnings in Sweden and Denmark earlier in the year, but the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was also clearly a factor. This incident led to a sharp rise in threat reports in October and November, forcing us to raise the general threat level to 3 for Belgium.

The threat emanating from the Islamist movement remains the main threat to our country. Numerous investigations and arrests were again carried out during 2023, with a peak in the spring. It is striking to note that the protagonists are often very young. However, this is not a new phenomenon. It should be noted here that these protagonists only knew each other on the Internet, and had no other connection. At the end of 2023, a series of arrests also took place in right-wing extremist circles in several European countries, including Belgium. These police operations again targeted an online network.

The focus on traditional threat models should not blind us to the fact that the threat has become much more diverse. Almost half of the threat reports received by CUTA last year could not be associated with any clearly delineated ideology. All kinds of conspiracy theories, anti-establishment feelings, but also personal or psychological problems often form a cocktail of motives that is difficult to define. I would also like to mention the importance of the threat posed by state actors, although it is often less visible. Certain foreign actors, for example, try to accentuate the polarisation in our country, to influence our elections or to undermine our democratic values through targeted information operations.

On the legislative front, CUTA brought its support to the draft law on the Common Database (CDB). Thanks to the automatic exchange of information, the CDB is the cross-cutting instrument that

forms the backbone of the National Strategy against Extremism and Terrorism. But the Royal Decree that regulated the Database until now, needed

updating. In November 2023, the draft law was presented to Parliament by the partners in the CDB working group.

In the same vein, CUTA brought its support to a cooperation agreement with the Local Integrated Security Cells concerning radicalism (LISC-R). These local prevention networks have been strengthened, in particular through this cooperation agreement, but also through the creation of similar cells in the penitentiary system, so that the reintegration of people can already start in a prison context. CUTA has also actively supported improved monitoring of radicalised individuals with psychological problems, following the attack on a police officer in Schaerbeek in November 2022.

CUTA has not been idle. We published no fewer than 1,630 punctual assessments and closely monitored the latest developments through strategic notes. We have proposed benchmarks for managing societal polarisation, and shared these notes with prevention and education professionals, in consultation with the relevant federated authorities. There is also a strong demand for more information at the level of the federated entities. As a federal centre of expertise, CUTA has a duty to provide correct information and to assist everyone at all levels of authority, in order to guarantee the safety of all our citizens as far as possible.

I would like to thank all the CUTA staff for their unfailing commitment, as well as all our partners for the good collaboration and for their trust.



Gert Vercauteren - director a.i.

Gert Vercauteren 

1. THREAT PICTURE IN BELGIUM

1.1

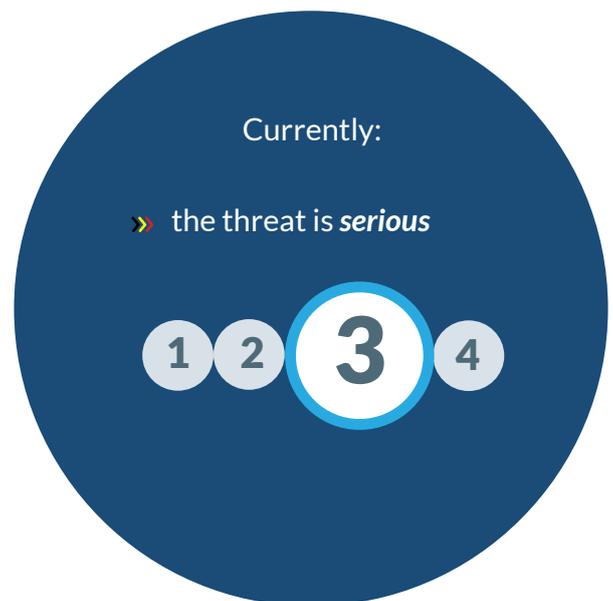
General threat in Belgium in 2023

In 2023, CUTA received 332 threat reports. By way of comparison, in 2022 our service received a total of 236 reports. The number of threat reports rose sharply last year. Most of the reports were recorded in October and November, following the attack in Brussels (see also below) and the escalation of violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Analysis of the threat reports reveals that most of them were inspired by an Islamist-Jihadist ideology. However, for almost as many reports, the underlying ideology could not be clearly defined. Threats inspired by right-wing extremism were less numerous, although violent action coming from these circles cannot be ruled out. The profile of potential perpetrators still corresponds in the majority of cases to that of a lone actor, although the services also noted a resurgence of small cells and restricted networks. Radicalisation takes essentially place on the Internet, and often very quickly.

Threat level 3

The **general threat level** in Belgium was set at level 2 (medium). However, on 16 October, following the **attack** on three Swedish football supporters, CUTA decided to raise the threat level for Belgium to **level 3 (serious)**. Despite the rapid closure of the federal phase launched after the Brussels attack (the perpetrator having been neutralised and there being no indication that other individuals linked to the perpetrator intended to commit violent acts), CUTA considered it necessary to maintain the level 3. Initially, the investigation into the attack was still ongoing. In the first few weeks after the event, several people were arrested in connection with the investigation. In addition, the possibility of a copycat effect – one act of violence provoking others – could not be ruled out in the wake of an attack. **In October and November**, CUTA observed a **sharp rise** in the **number of threat reports**, which can be explained by **increased vigilance** on the next line and a **rise in the level of activity** on the other.

The **international geopolitical context** also played an important role. The first findings about the perpetrator's motives revealed that the



Quran burnings in Sweden earlier in the year were an important trigger. **Tensions** had been heightened by the escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Extremism does not stop at borders, and incidents have taken place in several of our neighbouring countries.

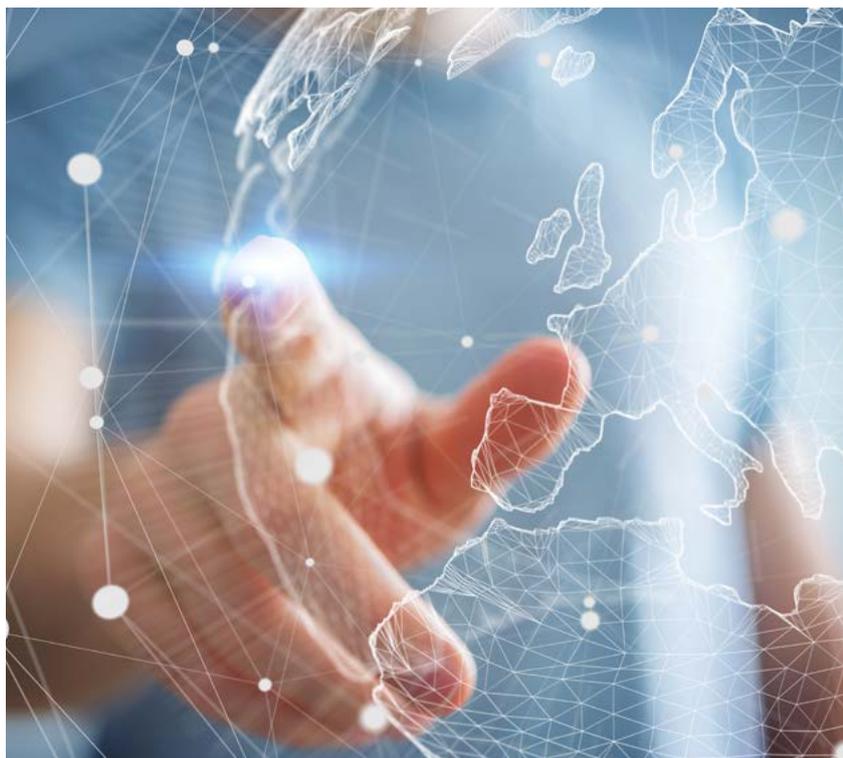
Contextualisation of the threat

The **main threat** to Belgian citizens and interests came from **violent action by a lone, home-grown actor**. The most serious risk of incident in Belgium, as elsewhere in Europe, was (and is still) that individuals self-radicalise and choose to carry out violent actions in their own country.

Even in the absence of structural and formal links with terrorist groups, individuals can be **influenced by terrorist or extremist propaganda** and commit violent actions. The perpetrators thus no longer necessarily associate themselves with a terrorist group as such, but draw abundant inspiration from what they find in the public space.

Should an incident occur, the **most likely scenario** would be that of a perpetrator inspired by the **ideology or propaganda of jihadist terrorist groups** such as Islamic State (IS), Al Qaeda (AQ) or one of their “branches” such as ISKP. As a result of the **geopolitical situation**, particularly in Israel and the Gaza Strip, polarisation has increased both in the short and longer term. This increased the risk of violence.

Violent action inspired by right-wing extremism cannot be ruled out either. Although a relatively small number of threat reports were recorded, a few larger cases resulted in arrests. The **anti-establishment and anti-government feelings** generated by the Covid-19 policy have not disappeared. **Such rhetoric** continues to circulate on the **Internet**. A small group of people continue to exploit discontent and distrust vis-à-vis the government, in particular using **disinformation**. They sometimes associate their discourse with the **war in Ukraine**, sometimes with the **conflict**



in the Middle East, or with the **rising cost of living** and other crises. The threat from the **left-wing extremist** spectrum was considered **low** in 2023.

However, analysing the threat solely in terms of **traditional ideologies (right, left, jihadism)** was too restrictive. **Radicalisation** is always an **individual (and complex)** process. The classic ideologies have certainly not disappeared, but we notice a shift towards more diffuse ways of thinking. Extremists create a **patchwork of different aspects from various ideologies**, but also from **conspiracy theories** and **disinformation**. They develop their own vision of the world, often inspired by personal experiences, **grievances and frustrations**. The **Internet and especially social media** play an important role in this, as people increasingly fall into an “ideological bubble” where they are only exposed to information or propaganda that confirms their worldview. In addition, it has been shown that **psychological problems can sometimes reinforce** their willingness to act.

Profile: lone actors and small, unstructured cells

Since the end of 2022, there has been some **change in the profile of perpetrators**. Although most threat cases and incidents (75%) involve **individuals** who want to take violent action on their own, the services are also observing a **resurgence of small cells and networks**, mainly – but not exclusively – in the jihadist milieu. These networks exist **mainly online** and are not very structured. They are made up of both Belgians and foreigners, **generally young people**, sometimes minors, **with no extremist or terrorist background**. Propaganda circulates abundantly within these networks. Often, a few individuals take the lead and announce their intention to carry out an attack in the long term, finding their inspiration mainly on the Internet, without especially being directly guided by external extremist or terrorist groups. **Several arrests** of small independent cells operating around one or two protagonists took place in 2023 in this context. Several Islamist cells were dismantled in the spring, and a small right-wing extremist cell in the autumn.

Ideology

The **motivations** of the perpetrators have become **more blurred and multiform**. Whether and when someone takes action is always an **individual dosage of ideology, propaganda and copycat effect**. The perpetrators no longer necessarily associate themselves with a terrorist group as such, but draw abundant inspiration from what they find in the public space. **Personal grievances** can also play an important role, as can **psychological problems** or certain symbolic events that act as **catalysts**.

Jihadist Islamist-inspired extremism remains the **main motivation** as far as indications of threats are concerned (just under half). For an **almost equal proportion** of threats, however, the underlying **ideology is difficult to define precisely** (41%). **Threats linked to a context of political opposition abroad** make up the third largest group (7%, albeit significantly less than the first two), followed by **threats emanating from right-wing extremism** (5%) and **anti-establishment feelings** (3%). The number of threats **from left-wing extremism** also remained **low** in 2023 (1%), as did the proportion of threats from **eco-extremism** and **incel extremist circles** (1% together).

Threat analysis by trend

Legende

- Anti-establishment (3%)
- Eco-extremism (0.5%)
- Incel (0.5%)
- Islamism (42%)
- Left-wing extremism (1%)
- Unknown (41%)
- Political opposition (7%)
- Right-wing extremism (5%)



Targets

The **targets** of the threat reports depended very much on the **ideology** to which the (potential) perpetrator adhered. The main targets of threat reports in 2023 were, in order of magnitude: **specific individuals or communities**, the **security services**, **public buildings**, **political authorities** and the **public** in general.

Modus operandi

In 2023, the majority of threats were made by **phone**, **e-mail** or **anonymous letters**. In 2022, most threats were made via social media and messaging applications. The **anonymity** and the “**ease**” with which threats can be spread around the world via these platforms certainly plays a part in this.

Threat level (seriousness and probability of the threat)

Just over half of the threat reports were assessed as “**low**” (**level 1**), while around **1/3** of the threats were defined as “**medium**” (level 2). Only **7.8%** of the threats were at some point assessed as **serious (level 3)** and **1 threat** was assessed as very serious and imminent (**level 4**) (see also page 22). In the vast majority of threat reports (around 75%), the potential perpetrators presented a **profile of lone actor**, regardless of the ideology associated with the threat report.



Religiously inspired terrorism and extremism

Between 2014 and 2018, the Western world and Europe in particular experienced a **wave of attacks bearing the mark of IS**. Following IS' **defeats** in its Syrian-Iraqi stronghold, the **threat** posed by the terrorist group gradually diminished for the Western states, which **does not mean it has disappeared**. In 2023 (as is still the case today), **IS remained active**, both physically in the Syrian-Iraqi region and in its outer provinces in (Central) Asia and Africa, and through its **propaganda and influence** on an international scale. The fight against IS therefore remained a major international challenge in 2023.

The terrorist group's influence has remained perceptible in Europe, where **most attacks inspired by jihadist terrorism** still bear the **mark of IS**, because the perpetrator has **sworn allegiance** to the terrorist group (as was the case for the Brussels attack on 16 October and the attacks in France in the autumn), because **IS claims responsibility for the attack** (also the case for the Brussels attack), or because the **modus operandi** or the choice of **target** echoes IS propaganda. Finally, **IS takes advantage** of attacks in the West to praise the assailant, without systematically claiming responsibility for the attack. The fact remains, however, that the link between the perpetrators and the terrorist group is becoming increasingly tenuous. The attacks of recent years were no longer directed and organised directly from jihadist conflict zones.

Although the direct operational threat from IS in terms of carrying out attacks in Europe significantly diminished, the group and its former "caliphate" **still provide an ideological anchor**. The propaganda disseminated by IS or its relays may have diminished in both volume and quality, **recycled old propaganda** and **more general jihadist reference works** continue to be disseminated

and consulted in 2023, including in Belgium. In its propaganda, the terrorist group continues to call for attacks to be carried out, particularly using tools that are relatively easy to obtain (bladed weapons, ramming vehicles). The **power of attraction** emanating from the propaganda and the **nostalgia** for an own "caliphate" should not be underestimated. What's more, the messages are **always attractive to a young audience**, who often seems to radicalise shortly after being exposed to these narratives. We also need to remain **alert** to the possibility of a **copycat effect**.

Like IS, **AQ has remained an important actor in the global jihad**. Although AQ's direct influence in Europe in 2023 was less than that of IS (both in terms of followers and propaganda), the **texts and speeches** of the **former ideologues** still speak to the imagination of supporters of jihadism. Some content was even shared beyond these circles, such as **Osama bin Laden's 'Letter to America'**, shared virally via various social media platforms in late 2023.



Blasphemy, a trigger for jihadist groups

Within jihadist networks, an **increasing attention** is paid to incidents that they describe as “**blasphemous**”. **Insults, criticism and mockery of the Prophet, Islam or certain theological concepts** are considered to be a **serious provocation** requiring a strong response. This response can range from the organisation of **demonstrations** and calls for **boycotts to incitement to violence** in extreme cases.

Blasphemous incidents, such as the publication of cartoons of Mohammed, often provoke reactions and can be seen as trigger events. In the past, such trigger events led at times to serious incidents and attacks in several European countries. Trigger events of this kind occurred in **Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands** in 2023. Following the **Quran burning** by a far-right activist in Stockholm in January 2023, calls for **revenge** were made in jihadist circles. Not only was the perpetrator of the Quran burning targeted, but there were also calls for **attacks on public infrastructure and events** in Sweden and on Swedish interests abroad.

For both the **threat in Belgium** and the threat to **Belgian interests abroad**, such trigger events (symbolic acts or acts perceived as blasphemous, geopolitical context) could play a **catalytic role**.

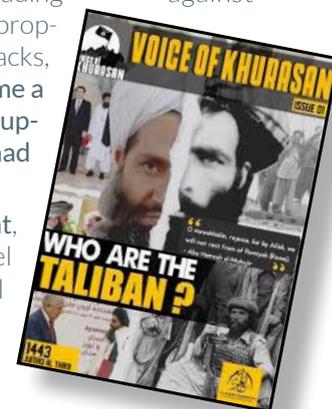
Some local jihadist branches and militias remain active

Branches of IS, also known as “**external provinces**” or *wilayat*, were also active in different parts of the world in 2023. These pose a real threat to the stability of these regions. Also AQ has **ramifications and influences** that can have a **negative impact on the security situation, particularly if there is competition** between the two terrorist groups.

In Afghanistan, we have seen an **increase in the activity of the terrorist group ISKP** since the Taliban took power in August 2021. Open sources also reveal that **the propaganda machine of IS and ISKP is running at full speed and that** they do not tolerate any foreign interference. Diplomatic interests of certain major powers have already been targeted by the propaganda and certain actions of the terrorist groups.

In 2023, the **ISKP’s propaganda also found an international echo**, not least through the publication of a **magazine** available in many languages, including English (“the Voice of Khurasan”). Readers are regularly **urged to carry out attacks outside Afghanistan**, including against the West. Through its propaganda and regular attacks, **ISKP seems to have become a source of inspiration for supporters of the global jihad around the world**.

On the **African continent**, and particularly in the Sahel and in North and Central Africa, various groups are fighting **under the banner of IS**. In 2023, IS branch-



es were extremely active in the south of the Sahara. The continent is considered to be an “**operational centre**”. In contrast to the propaganda in Syria-Iraq, the **propaganda** of IS African ramifications displayed a great **willingness to take part in the fight**: cars and motorbikes with dozens of heavily armed men were meant to demonstrate increased capabilities and clear intent. The **unstable political situation in the Sahel**, along with the failings of the official armies and the presence of the Wagner militia, seems to benefit both IS and AQ.

Geopolitical tensions as a trigger

Given the strong emotions stirred by the escalation of the **Israeli-Palestinian conflict** since 7 October, it cannot be ruled out that this **polarisation could act as a trigger** for **jihadi-inspired violence**. Both AQ and IS have called for violence against Israeli and Jewish targets, often mentioning the **United States** as well.

Disinformation and anti-establishment feelings

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, we are seeing a sharp increase in conspiracy narratives and disinformation (the deliberate use of false information to serve a specific agenda), particularly on social media. During the pandemic, disseminators exploited existing frustrations and fears about the circulation of the virus and the reactions of governments, reinforcing thereby the polarisation.

But also after the health crisis, disinformation and a certain distrust of public authority persisted. **Anti-establishment** feelings continued to circulate on the Internet even in 2023, and all kinds of crises were exploited by extremist groups of all ideological sorts. In this context, it is worth emphasising the **hybrid** nature of the threat; it often cannot be assigned to a specific ideological “framework”. In 2023, a number of individuals tried to find a new impetus in the **war between Ukraine and Russia**. Some leading figures within the phenomenon (both nationally

and internationally) have adopted a pro-Russian stance, claiming that the population is being slavishly dragged along by the government’s alleged anti-Russian propaganda. This stance is reflected in particular in an **aversion to international cooperation bodies** such as NATO and the EU. **The rise in the cost of living** is adding fuel to this “counter-movement”, even if **the impact has remained fairly limited**.

National and international political developments, such as the attack in Brussels in October and the violent conflict in the Middle East, are proving to be **prime subjects for sowing further discord and fuelling mistrust**. **Conspiracy theories and disinformation** are widely disseminated and shared. It is well known that Russia, for example, is (in)directly benefiting from this and contributing to it as part of its *hybrid war* (see below, p. 12). In 2023, however, there were no signs of violence.

Right-wing extremism

The past couple of years, the right-wing extremist threat has gained a foothold in the extremist/terrorist threat landscape in the West. In Europe and beyond, a number of attacks have been carried out by right-wing extremists. **The increase in activity by right-wing extremists, both online and offline, increases the potential danger emanating from right-wing extremist narratives.** Moreover, in several cases, the (very) young age of the individuals involved was a cause for concern. Although Belgium has for many years been free of serious incidents linked to right-wing extremism, recent developments call for vigilance, including in our country, as demonstrated by the arrests in a right-wing extremist circle in Belgium at the end of 2023.

Certain **trigger events**, such as **geopolitical developments in the Middle East** and **jihadi acts of violence**, can **increase polarisation** and act as a catalyst. This phenomenon is particularly visible on **social media**, although no signs of violence were recorded in 2023.

The perpetrators of right-wing extremist-inspired violent actions share some common characteristics: they usually act **alone**, are on the fringes of organisations and parties, usually radicalise **online** and take action **without any imposed instruction from outside**. Often, **personal grievances** also play a role or perpetrators suffer from psychological problems.

The right-wing extremist threat emanates **mainly from lone actors, but in recent years we have also noticed** that at **international level, small cells** have attempted, here and there, to become operational. In our neighbouring countries, a number of (planned) attacks have been foiled in recent years, at various stages of development. The **virtual world** has played an important role. Right-wing extremists from all over the world find each other on social

networks. **Exacerbated racism** is associated with all kinds of **conspiracy theories around the Great Replacement or the coming race war**, and is spread in ingenious ways (often through memes or *dog whistles*). Various attacks abroad by lone actors showed the extent to which certain **vulnerable people** are **receptive** to this. The major difference between the right-wing extremist network in 2023 and jihadist terrorism and extremism was the **greater online visibility**, which made it easier for young people to come into contact with right-wing extremist propaganda. Nevertheless, a shift towards private online platforms is also noticeable in these circles.

Left-wing extremism

The left-wing extremist movement in Belgium has been **fairly quiet over the last years**. The situation has changed somewhat since the **Covid-19** pandemic. **Belgian and foreign** left-wing extremists have been very **active** in certain, sometimes violent, **demonstrations** against the **government's health crisis policy**. However, it is too soon to speak of a resurgent trend in 2022-2023. The threat from the Belgian left-wing extremist scene remained **fairly limited**.

The **escalation of the conflict in Israel and the Gaza Strip** has had repercussions in left-wing extremist circles. In 2023, there was a **relatively high level of activity** around the conflict, both on **social media** and in the real world, through **demonstrations and protests**. **Responsibility** for the Hamas terrorist act is attributed **almost exclusively to Israel**, which, through its policy of occupation and colonisation, would have left the Palestinians and Hamas no choice but to undertake such actions.

1.2

Russian invasion of Ukraine

When war broke out in Ukraine on 22 February 2022, there were fears of repercussions for the security situation in the rest of Europe and in our country, particularly following the sanctions imposed by the West on Russia. Overall, this impact remained limited in 2023, although vigilance is still required with regard to possible attempts to exert influence and cyber threats.

Hybrid warfare

The main threat to the West in 2023 was again that of an “hybrid war”. Over the last few decades, Russian President Vladimir Putin has developed a doctrine that goes far beyond the purely military-technical aspect. In addition to the war in Ukraine, we also have to consider **cyberattacks**, **propaganda** and **disinformation**. The aim of the Russian regime is to completely imbue the population with its own narrative, both in Russia and abroad.

Propaganda and disinformation

Belgium has not been spared from Russian influence operations. In particular, there have been attempts to **manipulate the stakes in previous**

elections and to exploit and profit from discontent over health measures. There is every reason to believe that these manoeuvres **are being repeated** for the 2024 elections. Belgium has inexorably been in the front line of foreign powers, given the **European presidency** it held for the first six months of 2024.

By spreading disinformation internationally, the regime aims to **destabilise** the opponent and sow discord. Russia continues to apply this strategy to countries imposing sanctions on Russia, and in particular to **NATO and EU member states**. However, the **impact** of these operations **on our country** remained **minimal** in 2023. Developments in the war and their impact on inflation and fluctuating energy prices may, of course, change this situation in the long term.

Cyberthreat

In 2023, the West remained alert to **cyberthreats**, given **Russia’s capabilities** in this area and its **possible intention to use countermeasures** following the European sanctions. However, **most of the cyberattacks, and the most significant, were directed against Ukraine**. Ukraine’s neighbours, particularly Poland, were also targeted, albeit to a lesser extent, as were the Baltic states.

The finding was that **Western countries are specifically targeted** when they undertake **ostensible actions in support of Ukraine**. These were primarily DDoS attacks (system overloads), of



which the impact is generally “low” and temporary, as the systems themselves are not damaged. However, they incur a financial and economic cost that can escalate depending on the interventions required to prevent, repel or repair the damage caused by such attacks.

War volunteers

President Zelensky has set up an **international legion of volunteers**, the “International Legion of Territorial Defence of Ukraine” (ILTDU). Individuals all over Europe, including Belgium, have expressed their willingness to answer this call. Candidates wishing to provide support to the regular armed forces cannot be categorised as “Foreign Terrorist Fighters” (or FTF).

However, the security and intelligence services are vigilant for individuals willing to join the combat, as we cannot predict how the situation on the ground will evolve. This is why regular consultation and exchange of information takes place in order to gather all available data and obtain an overview of (potential) individuals willing to leave for this purpose. In addition, the services, including CUTA, monitor **extremist profiles** (amongst others on social media) who might have the intention to travel to the conflict zone. Their movements are monitored within the framework of the national Strategy against Terrorism and Extremism, including the Radicalisation process (Strategy T.E.R.). The **profile of people who left for the conflict zone remained unchanged in 2023**. Only a minority of those who actually took steps to leave presented a potentially alarming extremist profile.



1.3

Escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the attack by Hamas on 7 October

On 7 October 2023, the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas launched a bloody, large-scale offensive against Israel from the Gaza Strip. The escalation of the conflict is having a security impact in the region and beyond. Tensions between and within communities have increased everywhere, and reports of anti-Semitism in particular have risen sharply.



On 07 October 2023, the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas launched a **bloody, large-scale offensive against Israel** from the Gaza Strip. Hamas and Islamic Jihad fighters attacked several Israeli villages and a music festival attended by thousands of young people. At the same time, the terrorist group launched a **hail of rockets into Israeli territory**. Hamas members also captured dozens of civilians and soldiers and took them back as **hostages** to the Gaza Strip, where they were dispersed to be used as **human shields**. This terrorist attack killed 1,200 Israelis. **Hamas also threatened to execute the hostages** if the Israelis continued their massive air strikes. These strikes have also caused **massive civilian casualties**. The Western world has repeatedly reacted with indignation to the acts of violence committed by both sides. **Israel does not understand this indignation** and interpreted the request to spare the Palestinian civilian population of the Gaza Strip as a sign of support for the terrorist group Hamas.

Situation in Belgium



Since the escalation of the conflict, there has been a **general increase in tension and polarisation**. The same trend has been observed in Belgium in 2023, where the number of threat reports received by CUTA from its partners rose sharply. A significant proportion of the population clearly feels concerned by the conflict.

During the October-November period, there were around **seventy threat reports**, of which around forty related to the conflict, as well as **around forty (minor) incidents**. Anti-Semitism often (but not always) played a major role. We emphasise that these figures must be treated with caution, particularly due to the widely varying seriousness of the reports.

There was no cause to change the threat level regarding the Jewish community and the Israeli interests in Belgium. The level that was in force was sufficient. In the measures taken, the National Crisis Centre (NCCN) nevertheless called for **increased vigilance**.

2. CUTA'S HIGHLIGHTS 2023

In this section, CUTA reviews the main analyses, achievements and developments within the service.

1 CDB Act and framework of the Strategy T.E.R. (the CDB T.E.R.)

The **Parliamentary Committee of inquiry** on the circumstances of the Brussels attacks in March 2016 found that **the Law on the Police Service** – which includes the provisions relating to the creation of the Common Database (CDB) since 2016 – was **not the appropriate legal basis**.

A **working group**, led by the FPS Justice, was set up in **2021** with the main partners of the Common Database. As operational manager of this database, CUTA played an active role in this respect.

In **November 2023**, the **draft law** was **submitted to Parliament**. The draft law takes into account the opinions of the various control bodies (COC, Committee I and Committee P), the Council of State, the Data Protection Authority and the French- and Dutch-speaking delegates general for children's rights.

The aim of the draft law is above all to **optimise the coherence and effectiveness** of information exchange between the services and authorities involved in the fight against terrorism and extremism, including the process of radicalisation. It was also an opportunity **to clarify the aims and improve the operation** of the CDB, particularly in response to the attacks that have taken place in Belgium since 2016 and the evolution of the threat picture.

2 Common status intelligence services

In the light of the recommendations of the Parliamentary Committee of inquiry following the attacks of March 2016 and the provisions of the Coalition Agreement of October 2020, the Military Intelligence Service, the State Security and CUTA have agreed to draw up regulations during the current legislative period **aimed at harmonising the status of the civilian staff** of these three services. The development of an own status is justified by the nature of their missions, methods, procedures and availabilities, which are both very specific and very similar.

At the end of 2020, a **working group (WG)** comprised of representatives of the State Security, the Military Intelligence Service and CUTA was set up.

The **strategic cells** of the ministers responsible for the three services concerned (Interior, Justice and Defence) as well as the Administration of the FPS BOSA and the strategic cell of the FPS of the Minister for the Civil Service are regularly kept **informed of the progress** of the WG. Informal meetings were also held with the staff representative bodies.

In 2023, the **cost** of this new status was estimated and a draft Royal Decree was submitted to the Finance Inspectorate for its opinion. The texts were also discussed with the trade union delegations and within the inter-cabinet working group with a view to making a proposal to the Council of Ministers during 2024.



3 Trainings Strategy T.E.R.

To support its partners within the Strategy T.E.R., CUTA lent **its support** and expertise in 2023 to **training courses on the Strategy T.E.R.** for members of the Integrated Police services and for participants in the LISC-R.

In 2023, **three three-day training courses** were organised by the **Integrated Police services** for the members of its services active within the various platforms and structures of the Strategy T.E.R. These training courses presented a programme **identical to that of the Information Officer training courses**, but were aimed at a **wider target audience**. CUTA was invited to talk with its partners about the **Belgian strategy on extremism and terrorism**, the **threat picture**, the **basic legal instruments**, the **competences** of the various partners, the management and **exchange of information** and the existing procedures. During these training courses, particular attention was paid to the **role of the IO** (in his police zone, within the LTF and within the LISC-R), with an emphasis on **case studies** and the **exchange of good practice**. In 2023, **CUTA** also contributed to **two dedicated days organised for the IOs** and members of the police who had already taken part in IO trainings in previous years.

In 2023, CUTA also coordinated **two two-day information sessions** for **LISC-R participants** organised by the **Prevention working group** of the Strategy T.E.R. On these occasions, the Strategy T.E.R., the **theoretical and practical frameworks of the LISC-R** and the role of the various partners were presented. The extremist and terrorist threat picture, the elements and triggers at work in the radicalisation process and the issue of professional secrecy were also addressed. Here too, the practical approach was emphasised through case studies and the exchange of best practice.

4 Internal reorganisations within CUTA

At the beginning of October 2023, CUTA carried out **two major internal reorganisations**.

In order to optimise the work related to the **Common Database (CDB)** and to the **individual threat assessments**, it was decided to bring together the various teams working in this area in a single department, namely the **Individual Assessment department**. In 2021 and 2022, CUTA commissioned a study from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel to evaluate its Root37 methodology developed in-house for drafting individual threat assessments. The results were associated with a number of recommendations for 2022. One of these was to entrust these assessments to a small, specialised team, with the aim of increasing their consistency and reliability.

A **Strategic and Coordination Unit** was also created. This unit supports the direction in managing and monitoring CUTA's **strategic, legal and cross-functional issues**. The unit helps to define the service's strategic objectives and is responsible for interdepartmental coordination. This will ensure a clearer division of the roles and greater consistency.



5 Cooperation agreement on the creation of LISC-R and PISC-R

The Act of 30 July 2018 regarding the creation of local integral security cells concerning radicalism, extremism and terrorism provided an **initial legal basis** for the **creation of the LISC-Rs**. However, this act could only regulate **federal powers**. As many aspects of **prevention** fall within the remit of the **regions and communities**, it was necessary to extend the regulatory framework by means of decrees. At **Flemish level**, the decree authorising Flemish participants and regulating the terms and conditions of the participation in local integral security cells dealing concerning radicalism, extremism and terrorism was adopted on 21 May 2021. The **Wallonia-Brussels Federation**, for its part, adopted the **decree** of 8 June 2023 organising the participation of the services falling within the remit of the French Community in local integral security cells concerning radicalism, extremism and terrorism.

In order to maintain **consistency** in the working of the LISC-Rs, and in order to fill the **gaps** that remain in the various legal bases (inter alia with regard to the communication and exchange of personal data), it is necessary to conclude a **cooperation agreement between the various levels of authority**. CUTA took part in the preparatory work to draw up this cooperation agreement.

In addition, **this LISC-R agreement** provides a legislative framework for a specific form of LISC-R, namely the **penitentiary integral security cell** concerning radicalism, extremism and terrorism (“**PISC-R**”). The PISC-R fulfils the role of the **LISC-R in the prisons**. Indeed, the specific context of the prison environment, where on the one hand the federal prison services are responsible for the psychosocial follow-up of the prisoners, and on the other hand the services that fall within the remit of the communities are active in the provision of assistance and services to the prisoners, can benefit from a **coordinated approach through a joint consultation platform**.

6 Outreach project

In 2022-2023, CUTA's Outreach project (see also page 35) completed the fourth round of its master's thesis competition. The University of Ghent won the first prize for its highly interesting research on the Resistance during the Second World War and the role played by the SNCB/NMBS (the Belgian national train company). The **winner** could **present** his thesis at the **closing colloquium**, held in December 2023, the main theme of which being the need for greater understanding and collaboration on mental health issues and extremism (see also p. 18).

In May 2023, Outreach published the **third edition** of the scientific journal [Radices](#). Each year, Radices highlights promising new academic research in the field of security. The winner of each CUTA's master's thesis competition is given the opportunity to write the first article of the journal. The journal is systematically sent to all CUTA's partners and published on the website.





7 Working towards better cooperation between the security and healthcare sectors

A number of **incidents** in recent years have highlighted the **simultaneous presence of psychological issues and radicalisation issues**. As a result, attention has been drawn within the **Strategy T.E.R.** to the need to strengthen cooperation with the **healthcare sector** and to **establish a coordinated approach between security, preventive and curative measures** within the individual follow-up.

It is essential that the worlds of healthcare and security and intelligence have a **better understanding** of their respective missions, competences and operations, in order to make a complementary contribution to more effective risk management. It is also essential to continue to **develop the multidisciplinary approach** and integrated monitoring of radicalised people with psychological problems and to involve the healthcare sector more closely in the Strategy T.E.R.

There are also a number of **structural difficulties and shortcomings in the follow-up of people with psychological problems**, at various levels. These difficulties and shortcomings go **beyond the issue of radicalisation**, but can also **have a direct and indirect impact on the follow-up** set up in this purpose.

In response to reports from the field, the National Taskforce, coordinated by CUTA, took the initiative in 2023 of drafting a **joint note** to identify and report **problems and shortcomings** in the follow-up of people presenting a radicalisation problem and a (potential) psychological problem at the same time. The note also proposes a number of recommendations to overcome these difficulties. This joint note should be validated by the NTF partners at the beginning of 2024 before being disseminated.

In addition, in order to **raise awareness among as many players as possible**, CUTA (co-)organised **two conferences** and also devoted an **issue of its magazine *Insight*** to the subject. The main theme of the (Outreach) **colloquium in December 2023** was the need to strengthen **multidisciplinary cooperation** in the fight against radicalisation, extremism and terrorism through **greater cooperation** with the **healthcare sector** and the addition of **(forensic) psychological expertise to the platforms of the Strategy T.E.R.** To this end, a panel made up of an academic expert, a practice professional and a specialist from the security sector examined the needs, challenges and possible solutions.

8 Colloquium of the RHID on forensic psychology and extremist violence

In **December 2023**, CUTA took part in a **conference organised by the Royal Higher Institute for Defence (RHID) on the link between extremist violence and psychological problems**. CUTA took part in a **panel made up of international specialists** such as Dr Paul Gill from the University College London and Anne Speckhard from the International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism.



9 Assessments concerning critical infrastructures

The **war in Ukraine**, the **escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**, tensions over Taiwan, the **tense presidential elections in the United States** and other delicate situations around the world are making **the global geopolitical situation increasingly volatile**. There are more and more reports of a growing threat of war. Against this backdrop, critical infrastructures are receiving increased attention in the press. This threat concerns not only countries on Europe's external borders, but also countries that are not directly facing a conflict on their territory.

In its assessments of the threat to critical infrastructures, CUTA, **in collaboration with its partner services and support services** (see page 28), assesses the **capacity** and **the intention** of the threat actors to carry out the threat.

Cases in Belgium and abroad are used to determine the capacity and the intention.

CUTA contributes to the protection of Belgian infrastructures by drawing up specific threat assessments. These assessments are made with the support of the **National Crisis Centre**, which **coordinates the security and protection of critical infrastructures in Belgium**. They serve as a **starting point** for sector authorities and operators in drawing up their **security plans**, aimed at providing better protection for the infrastructures concerned. As part of its legal mandate, CUTA has drawn up various **threat assessments** for critical infrastructures **in 2023**. As provided by law, these assessments went beyond CUTA's mandate, which is limited to terrorism and extremism. Other areas within the remit of the support services were also examined, **in collaboration with them**.

10 Communication

External communication - website

In 2023, CUTA launched a **new version of its website** cuta.belgium.be. Changes were mainly made in terms of **accessibility**. At the end of 2022, an audit was carried out to comply with the new legal framework applying to federal websites. The new version of the website complies with the results of the audit.

Between 1 January and 31 December, CUTA published **15 press releases**. This figure is comparable to that for 2022. In total, the website was visited by **22,087 people** in 2023, an increase of 16,639 visitors compared to 2022. This increase can be explained by the events that occurred in 2023 and the visibility of threats such as the attack on 16 October.

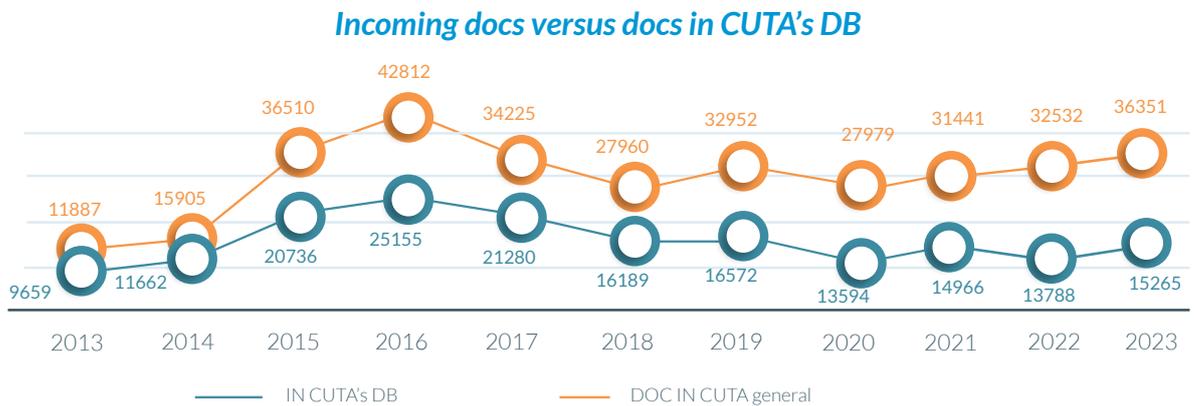
Terminology

In 2022, CUTA launched an **internal project on the terminology** used. The aim was to move forward with the development and optimisation of a coherent nomenclature of concepts and definitions, taking into account the changing threat picture. This working group is **paving the way** for the **collaboration planned with the partner services on a common terminology project**.

3. STATISTICS & PUBLICATIONS

3.1 Figures : handled documents

The figures provide a more concrete illustration of CUTA's work, and show the most significant trends, which appear (and are explained, as far as possible) in the graphs on the following pages.



2023 saw a **further increase** in the number of **incoming documents** received by CUTA, which reached 36,351 (docs IN CUTA general). This figure also includes all documents received via secure networks. There are **many reasons** for this **increase**: several threat files were opened in 2023 (several arrests in both jihadist and right-wing extremist circles), an attack took place in Brussels in October 2023, and a new escalation occurred in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (accompanied in particular by a significant increase in the number of reports and threats relating to anti-Semitism).

However, **not** all incoming documents are **systematically recorded as new documents in CUTA's internal database**. Some incoming documents remain available by other means or are added to existing files. In 2023, we recorded 15,265 new documents in CUTA's internal database, which, like the overall number of incoming documents, represents an increase compared to the previous year.

Due to the national and international situation, the number of outgoing documents has again increased.



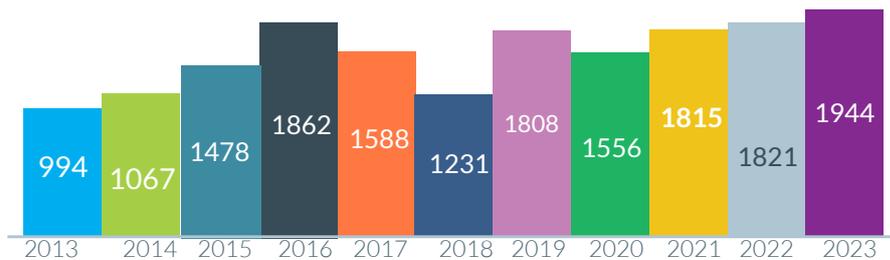
Punctual threat assessments

CUTA carries out punctual threat assessments for events, persons, communities, visits of VIPs, etc. both **at the request of the services** and on its **own initiative**.

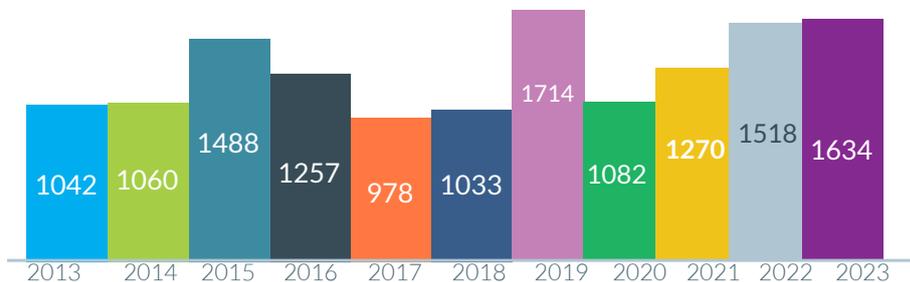
After its creation, CUTA invested heavily in **consultation** with all its partner services on (requests for) relevant information. The terrorist crisis in Western Europe had a **major impact** on CUTA's functioning: both the **number of requests for assessments** and the number of **effective assessments** rose sharply. Once the peak of the crisis had passed (2017-2018), the **number** of assessment requests and effective assessments **fell again**. In 2019, there was again a significant

increase in the number of assessments. This trend can be explained by intensified collaboration with one of our main partners, the NCCN. The Covid-19 pandemic (2020-2021) has also had a considerable impact. The number of assessment requests and drawn-up assessments fell sharply again, as public life was paralysed for long periods. The resumption of "normal life" then had an impact on the number of assessments. For the 2023 reference year, we are also seeing the **impact of national and international crises** (the attack in Brussels, the escalation of the conflict in Gaza, etc.), which have led to **more requests for assessments and more punctual assessments**.

Assessment requests to CUTA (DEVAL)



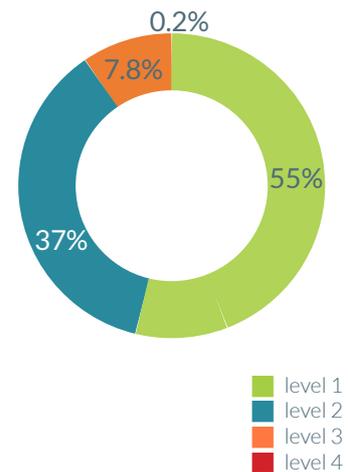
Assessments drawn up by CUTA (EVAL)



Threat level

If we look at the **threat levels** for the different assessments, we see that **just over half of the assessments (55%)** resulted in a **threat level 1 (low)**, and a third in a **level 2 (medium) (37%)**. Only **7.8%** of the punctual assessments were at **level 3 (serious)** and **only one punctual assessment** was at **level 4 (very serious)**.

The **general threat level** for Belgium has remained at **level 3 (serious)** since the attack in Brussels. This does not mean, however, that this general threat level applies to all **punctual threat assessments**. These always focus on a **specific, very precise situation to be assessed**. It is on the basis of these specific threat assessments that the NCCN determines the necessary security measures. The result may therefore be a threat level different from the general level (which has often been the case).



3.2

Analyses and other publications

Strategic analyses

CUTA regularly publishes strategic notes to give its partner services an overview of certain trends, such as the international threat, right-wing extremism, left-wing extremism, the jihadist threat, etc.

Insight magazine

Several times a year, CUTA publishes its magazine *Insight*, each time dedicated to a specific theme. *Insight* is sent to all CUTA's support and partner services, including academic contacts. In 2023, CUTA published 2 editions: one in June and the other in December.



3.3

Persons included in the CDB

evolution of the figures

The CDB is the **instrument** that gives concrete form to the **multidisciplinary approach of the Strategy T.E.R.** (see p. 36). The CDB was created in 2016, after hundreds of Belgians left for Syria and Iraq to join the terrorist group IS. In the wake of the wave of attacks that hit Western Europe in 2015-2016, the government announced a series of measures, including the creation of the CDB, aimed at curbing terrorism and extremism in our society as much as possible.

The CDB is a common tool for **sharing information** in real time between the services that have access to it. Through the CDB, the services involved are constantly exchanging **unclassified information on entities that have to be monitored with priority**. There are several types of access to the CDB which have been established on the basis of the principles of **proportionality** and **subsidiarity**, and above all the *need-to-know* principle. Information from the CDB is used by the LTF's to discuss cases requiring security monitoring.

For each individual in the CDB, CUTA draws up

an individual threat assessment. This threat assessment may be shared by the IO with the members of the LISC-R, if the individual in question is also discussed in the LISC-R. In this way, the CDB also provides indirect support for the preventive or reintegration follow-up provided by the LISC-R.

The CDB comprises **five statuses**. The common denominator of all the statuses is **extremism** and (the **intention to commit**) ideologically inspired **violence** or incitement to ideologically inspired violence. All the people included in the CDB must have a **strong link** with **Belgium** (but do not necessarily have to be Belgian nationals). If a person no longer meets the criteria for inclusion under one of the five statuses, he or she will be removed from the CDB. Individuals may be included in the CDB with dual or even triple status if they meet several criteria. The figures are therefore not always unmitigated; there may be overlaps. There were around 35 dual statuses and 2 triple statuses during 2023.

- 
- **Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF)**: persons who have travelled to a jihadist conflict zone in order to join a terrorist group or have returned from a conflict zone, as well as the persons who have been prevented of leaving or who intend to leave (registered since the creation of the CDB in 2016);
 - **Homegrown Terrorist Fighters (HTF)**: persons who do not intend to leave in order to join a terrorist organisation abroad, but who carry out or support terrorist actions in their own country (added on the basis of the Royal Decree of 23 April 2018);
 - **Hate propagandists (HP's)**: persons who want to justify the use of violence for ideological purposes. With their influence, they aim to radicalise their environment and undermine the rule of law (added on the basis of the Royal Decree of 23 April 2018);
 - **Potentially Violent Extremists (PVE's)**: persons with extremist sympathies who intend to convert these sympathies into actions through violence, but who have not yet taken concrete steps to do so (added on the basis of the Royal Decree of 20 December 2019);
 - **Persons Convicted of Terrorism (PCT's)**: persons who are convicted of terrorism, interned or placed under specific protective measures for terrorism in Belgium or abroad (added on the basis of the Royal Decree of 20 December 2019).

Evolutions in 2023

As operational manager of the CDB, CUTA closely monitors the evolution of the entities in the CDB.

In 2023, the number of entities included in the CDB has diminished from almost 700 at the beginning of the year to around 650 by the end of the year (FTFs, HTFs, HPs, PVEs and PCTs). During the year, CUTA drew up 344 new individual threat assessments or actualisations for individuals in the CDB. These assessments are official documents, that can be provided by CUTA through a validation process. The requesting service can then use these documents in administrative procedures. These assessments are continuously updated.

Ideology

- 87.26% of the entities could be linked to an **Islamist-jihadist ideology**. Although this group remains by far the largest (both in terms of followers/supporters and of threats), we see a decline in this ideology in 2023 compared to the previous year;
- 8.58% of the entities could be linked to a **right-wing extremist ideology**. We notice a reduction compared with the previous year (around 10 fewer entities in 2023 than in 2022);
- 2.45% of the entities could be linked to a left-wing extremist ideology; The number of individuals included in the CDB because of their left-wing extremist ideology remains limited to ten-fifteen;
- The remaining entities are monitored for various threats arising from a **specific theme**, such as anti-establishment feelings, state terrorism or because of a political context abroad.

Gender

- 83.58% of the entities in the CDB are **men**; 16.42% are **women**.

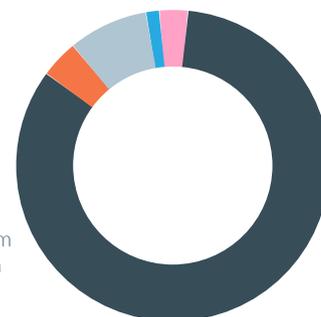
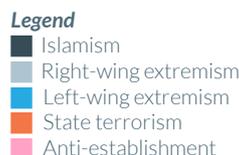
New entities and deleted entities

- 35 new entities were added to the CDB during 2023;
- About 80 were deleted from the CDB (most of them because of a positive evolution on the long term and of the absence of new negative elements).

Detention

- 17.48% of the entities in the CDB were in custody in a Belgian prison at the end of 2023;
- 83% were **men** and 17% **women**;
- 86.3% of the CDB entities in detention adhere to an **Islamist-jihadist ideology**;
- 9.4% of the CDB entities serving a prison sentence adhere to a **right-wing extremist ideology**;
- The remainder of the CDB entities in detention are labelled as belonging to “**state terrorism**”, “**anti-establishment**” or “**left-wing extremism**”;
- The largest group of CDB entities in detention are listed as **PVEs**, followed by the **returnees** (FTF cat. 3).

The CDB entities in detention by ideology



Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF)

In 2023 the **number of FTFs** in the CDB **has dropped significantly**. A lot of FTFs were **removed** (“ventilated”) from the CDB because of a positive evolution or because the time frame with no new information “à charge” was widely exceeded. The FTF status comprises several sub-categories:

CAT 1 : in situ, in a jihadist conflict zone

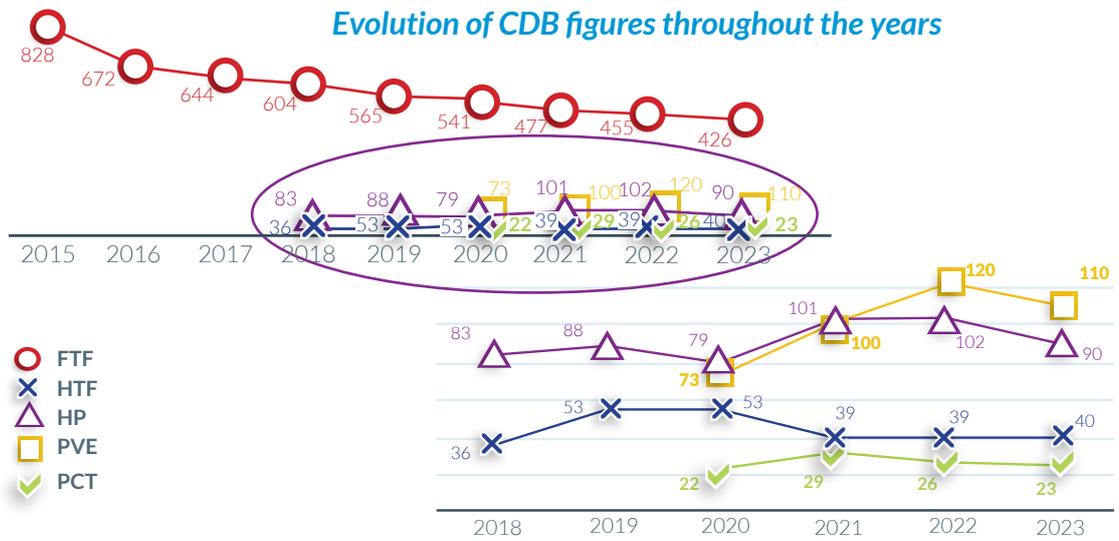
- CUTA has information showing with certainty that the persons are **in the conflict zone** and joined a **terrorist organisation** there;
- According to the information available to CUTA, the latest departure of a FTF cat. 1 from Belgium to the conflict zone in Syria goes back to 2018. The **number of FTFs cat. 1 remained relatively stable in 2023**. Since mid-2023, we have seen a very slight increase due to the fact that **a number of children in the conflict zone have reached the age of 12**. From that age onwards, they are also included in the CDB to ensure better monitoring of their situation. This does not correspond to new departures to the zone.

CAT 3: returnees

- From the moment FTFs cat. 1 **are no longer in the Syrian-Iraqi conflict zone**, they are considered as FTFs cat. 3 and, therefore, are removed as cat. 1;
- When CUTA evaluates the threat of FTFs cat. 3 for 2 years as level 1 extremism/level 1 terrorism and sufficient information “à décharge” is available, the entity is **removed** from the CDB;
- **In 2023, no Belgian FTF returned to Belgium**. The **total number of FTFs cat. 3 has fallen sharply in 2023** because a large number of them have been **removed from the CDB**, either on the basis of a **positive evolution**, because **no new information “à charge”** has been received on these individuals for a previously agreed period, or because the persons concerned have no longer been resident in Belgium for a long enough period.

CAT 4 & 5 : failed departures and potential departures

- When CUTA evaluates the threat of FTFs cat. 4 for 2 years as level 1 extremism/level 1 terrorism and sufficient information “à décharge” is available, the entity is **removed from the CDB**;
- If for two years there is sufficiently solid information that the person in question **no longer has the intention to travel to a jihadist conflict zone**, the person is removed as FTF cat. 5 (potential departure);
- The number of individuals **who remain in the CDB because of their (failed) attempt to leave has fallen sharply in 2023**. Only 30 to 40 individuals remain. The others have been removed because of a **positive evolution or because no new information “à charge” has been received for a previously agreed period**. The number of individuals about whom information was received in 2023 indicating that they would have a (vague) intention to (plan to) leave for a jihadist conflict zone remains below ten. The services note that the attractiveness of the Syrian-Iraqi jihadist conflict zone has significantly dropped.



Homegrown Terrorist Fighters (HTFs)

The Homegrown Terrorist Fighters or HTFs were added to the CDB in 2018 to meet the changing trend in the threat picture: individuals no longer travelled abroad or returned from a jihadist conflict zone to commit a terrorist act. On the one hand, it had become more difficult for individuals to leave; on the other hand, from 2017-2018 on, terrorist groups urged them not to move to the caliphate, but to carry out violent actions in their own countries of residence. The decline of the terrorist group IS, with its concomitant diminishing appeal and waning propaganda, has undoubtedly contributed to this. From 2021 on, there has been a noticeable drop in the number of HTFs. This can be explained by the addition of the new statuses PVE and PCT in the CDB and the internal database of CUTA, which resulted in several individuals being labelled as PVEs. In 2023, the number of individuals labelled as HTFs was about 40. The HTF status can cover any type of ideology.

Persons convicted of terrorism (PCTs)

The Persons Convicted of Terrorism or PCTs have been added to the CDB since early 2020 based on the Royal Decree of 20 December 2019. Double statuses are not possible for PCTs. CUTA did not categorise them by ideology either.

Hate Propagandists (HPs)

HPs can adhere to all sorts of ideologies. While the number of individuals being followed up for left-wing extremism has remained quasi-stable in recent years, there has been an increase in the right-wing spectrum. However, in the years 2022-2023, we notice that we have reached a ceiling of around 35-40 monitored entities. As for the number of HPs being followed up because of Islamist-jihadist sympathies, it has stagnated at around 50 individuals.

Potentially Violent Extremists (PVEs)

Potentially Violent Extremists or PVEs have been included in the CDB since early 2020. Thanks to the addition of the PVEs, the phenomena of right-wing and left-wing extremisms can be better monitored. In 2023, the number of PVEs being followed up for left-wing extremist ideologies remains low, involving a dozen of individuals. The number of right-wing extremist PVEs in the CDB has reached a ceiling since mid-2022, and continued to fluctuate around 30 individuals in 2023. Finally, the number of jihadist-oriented PVEs declined slightly over the course of last year, stabilising at around 70 entities.

3.4

Individual administrative measures

CUTA formulates a **reasoned opinion** to the National Security Council, the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Foreign Affairs when taking individual administrative measures (**ID-Ban**, **Pass-Ban** and **freezing of assets**). These are **preventive measures** aimed at deterring individuals from committing terrorist acts.

CUTA's opinion is based on **consultation** and close cooperation with several of its support and partner services, especially with the federal prosecutor's office. All individual administrative measures are registered in the Common Database (CDB).

Passban

Application of the "Passban" measure entails **refusal, withdrawal or non-renewal of the passport**.

Several services (such as the federal public prosecutor's office, local prosecutors' offices, the FPS Foreign Affairs and CUTA) can submit a proposal to have a person placed on the "Passban list". Its execution is the responsibility of the **Minister of Foreign Affairs**.

On **31 December 2023**, the Pass-ban measure on the initiative of CUTA applied to **27** individuals. These 27 individuals therefore no longer have passports, which prevents them from leaving for the jihadist conflict zone or returning discretely. The validity of the "Pass-ban" measure is **not restricted in time** and can only be stopped upon reasoned request by one of the competent authorities.

ID-ban

The "ID-ban" measure entails the **withdrawal or invalidation of an identity card**, or even the **refusal to issue an identity card**. The execution of this measure falls within the remit of the **Minister of the Interior**. An "ID-ban" measure automatically involves a "Passban" measure for the same duration as the "ID-ban". The aim is to avoid the individual leaving Belgium to go to a jihadist conflict zone. The "ID-ban" is **limited in time**. The validity of the measure is **three months** and the procedure can be extended once if substantial elements are provided that justify the extension.

During 2023, CUTA **did not initiate any ID-ban measure**.

Freezing of financial assets

The "Freezing of financial resources and assets" measure involves **freezing a person's accounts**. The individuals who are the subjects of this measure, will appear on the **National List** and the measure will be published via the Treasury in the Official Gazette.

In the course of 2023, 3 administrative measures of "Freezing of assets" were promulgated. CUTA reassesses these measures on a regular basis (at least every six months). Based on these reassessments, **in 2023, 1** individual was removed from the National List and it was decided to end the freezing of his assets.

At the **end of 2023, 264** administrative measures of "Freezing of assets" were active, mainly against FTFs cat. 1 (who travelled to the conflict zone in Syria-Iraq).

4. ABOUT CUTA

4.1

Who are we?

The Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis (CUTA) is the **federal centre of knowledge and expertise** in charge of assessing the **terrorist and extremist threat** in Belgium and towards the Belgian interests abroad as well as of **coordinating** its approach. Our threat assessments enable authorities such as the National Crisis Centre (NCCN) and the **Integrated Police services** to take appropriate **measures** in order to ensure maximum security in Belgium. To carry out our tasks, we rely on the **information and intelligence** provided by our **support services and partner services**. CUTA works in full independence and is under the aegis of the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Interior.

The C of Coordination

The “C” of Coordination is the core of our name. We believe in a **multidisciplinary approach** and in the necessity of **building bridges**, in coordination and in collaboration with our support services and partner services. Relevant information from the different partners should be shared with all services concerned, in order to determine which service is best placed to undertake the most appropriate actions.

Support services

Integrated Police services (Federal Police & Local Police)

State Security (VSSE)

Military General Service for Intelligence and Security (SGRS/ADIV)

FPS Mobility & Transport (Mob)

FPS Interior (IBZ)

Immigration Office (OE/DVZ)

National Crisis Centre (NCCN)

FPS Foreign Affairs (AE/BuZa)

FPS Finance (Fin)

Customs & Excise

Treasury

FPS Justice (Jus)

Department of Religions and Humanism

Directorate General for Prison Facilities

(DG EPI)

Other partners

Financial Intelligence Processing Unit (CTIF/CFI)

Public Prosecution Office (MP/OM)

Center for Cyber Security Belgium (CCB)

Communities & Regions

Local Partners

- *Cities and municipalities*
- *Prevention and deradicalisation officers*
- *Information Officers (IO)*

4.2

Mission, vision and values



Mission

CUTA's mission is defined by law: to guarantee as much as possible the security of Belgian citizens and interests as well in Belgium as abroad while respecting the principles and values of the democratic rule of law.

Vision

The events in the last 10 years have prompted the security services to review and better align their approach to terrorism and extremism. A good security policy requires in-depth cooperation and mutual trust. Sharing intelligence and data is a sine qua non. That is why the "C" of "coordination" in our acronym is so important.



The challenge is now to continue on this path. As coordination unit, we intend to contribute to a good information flow between all partners working on the issues pertaining to terrorism and extremism, including the radicalisation process. Within the framework of the National Strategy against Terrorism and Extremism, including the Radicalisation process (Strategy T.E.R.), we want to contribute to facilitating the information flow between the various levels of government. As expertise centre, we aim to support civil society and politics in the further development of an integrated and joint approach to prevent extremism.

Values

CUTA acts independently within the Belgian national security organisations. We therefore attach great importance to objectivity, transparency and credibility. To carry out our statutory missions, we need to be able to take a step back from the hot topics and to take a critical look at the information we have. In this context, diversity – also within our organisation – is an added value.



4.3

What are we doing?

Since our creation in 2006, our competences and missions have considerably expanded. The missions of CUTA in a nutshell:

- Drawing up **punctual as well as strategic threat assessments** pertaining to Belgian citizens or interests, in Belgium as abroad;
- Drawing up **individual threat assessments** for the entities **listed** in the **Common Database (CDB)**;
- Ensuring the **operational management** of the **Common Database (CDB)**;
- Drawing up strategic threat assessments pertaining to **critical infrastructure**;
- **Coordinating the Strategy T.E.R.** and facilitating the information flow between the Belgian services involved, including through the National Task Force (NTF), the Local Task Forces (LTF), the national Working groups (WG/GT) and the Local Integrated Security Cells concerning radicalism (LISCs-R);
- Drawing up **reasoned opinions** within the framework of **individual administrative measures** (freezing of assets, ID-ban, Passban);
- **Maintaining contacts and relations with counterpart services abroad** by exchanging information and providing relevant information to the Belgian services concerned. CUTA is in favour of a greater European and international collaboration between partner services from different countries (fusion centres);
- **Providing authorities and services with expertise and knowledge** in the fight against terrorism and extremism.

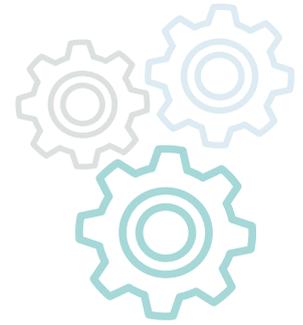


4.4 Staff

In her policy statement for 2022, the Minister of Interior Annelies Verlinden indicated that **CUTA's staff should be reinforced** in order to enable it to fulfil its increasing number of tasks and missions. As a result, the organisation has been authorised to recruit nine additional staff members in 2022. The recruitment procedures have been carried out throughout 2022 in cooperation with the FPS BOSA and the P&O services of the FPS Interior. Taking into account the procedural delays and the need to obtain a “top secret” security clearance, all the additional staff were progressively able to enter service throughout 2022 and 2023.

In 2022, the conditions for the recruitment of a director and a deputy director – as defined in the Act of 10 July 2006 on the Threat Analysis – had been modified. In 2023, the **Royal Decree for the effective appointment** of a **director** and **deputy director** has been drawn up.

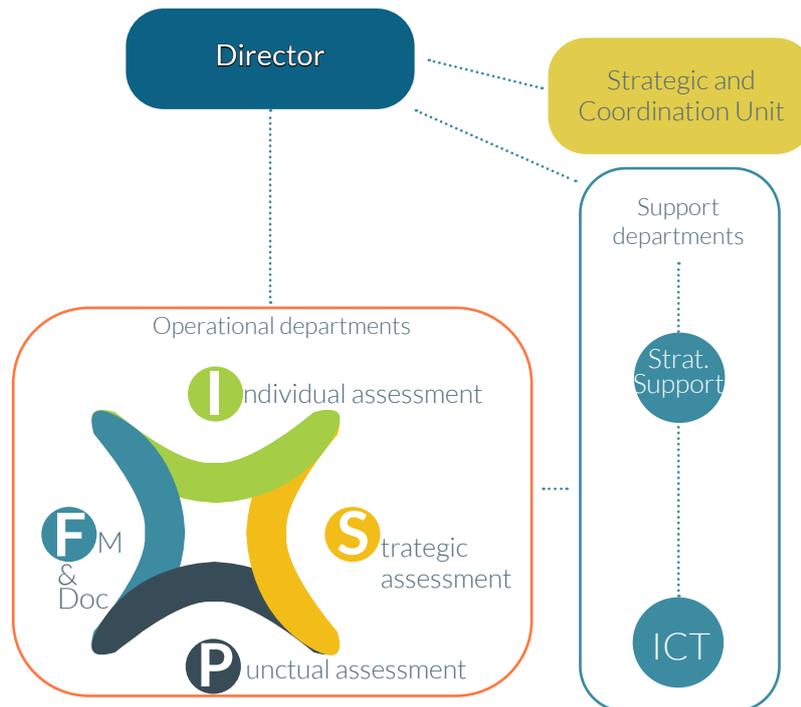




4.5 The departments

CUTA's activity rests on four operational departments of which the competences are complementary in order to address the statutory missions of the unit. The direction is supported by a Strategic and Coordination Unit. CUTA also has a department for strategic and logistical support (Strategic support department) and a department for IT support. CUTA attaches great value to a transversal functioning, in which the various departments work together from their own expertise on certain issues, thus complementing each other.

CUTA's **organisation chart** :



Strategic and Coordination Unit (StratBelCo)



The Strategic and Coordination Unit supports the direction in managing and monitoring CUTA's **strategic, legal and cross-functional files**. The StratBelCo Unit helps to define the service's strategic objectives and is responsible for interdepartmental coordination. This will ensure a clearer division of the roles and greater consistency within the service.

Strategic support



The Strategic support department provides a **functional and administrative support** to the direction and to the four operational departments of CUTA. It comprises a General and Executive Secretariat, a Budget, Accounting and Purchasing unit, a Logistics unit, a Communications unit, a Translation unit, a Legal unit and a Human Resources unit.

ICT



The ICT department is responsible for the **operational functioning** of CUTA's **internal and external databases**. It also makes sure that CUTA's IT infrastructure operates within the framework of the legal requirements and security standards set by our supervisory authorities and partners.

Punctual assessment



The Punctual assessment department is made up of staff members who are **seconded from CUTA's support services**. They act as **Liaison officers** between CUTA and their service of origin. Drawing up punctual threats assessments is their main task. These are assessments of the extremist or terrorist **threat** against **events, persons or buildings** in Belgium or against Belgian interests abroad. A second type of assessments analyses the **threat** arising from **certain persons or groups**. The third category of punctual threat assessments is the **general threat assessment for Belgium**, which is drafted every month at CUTA's initiative for the National Security Council (CNS - NVR).

As part of their missions, these collaborators attend the **coordination meetings of the NCCN**, which then lays down security measures to be implemented depending on those assessments. To do so, the NCCN takes among other things the threat level determined by CUTA as a reference. The Punctual assessment department also answers the questions posed by the various support and partner services (*requests for information* or RFI's). Most of the RFI's come from the Immigration Office and from the CTIF/CFI. Finally, this department also **mans the night and weekend duties** in order to ensure the continuity of CUTA's service and the contact with CUTA's support and partner services.



Strategic assessment



The Strategic assessment department assesses the main **trends** of threats against Belgium and Belgian interests through **analytical papers**. Those papers deal with **cross-cutting topics** as well as with **specific groups or trends** (such as left- and right-wing extremism, Islamist/jihadist extremism and terrorism, etc.). Those analyses are performed **on own initiative** or at the request of **authorities**. The department also drafts strategic assessments of critical infrastructure. In the framework of the Act on critical infrastructure, CUTA draws up an assessment for each national or European critical infrastructure within one year of its designation as such by the NCCN. Those assessments pertain not only to the terrorist and extremist threat, but also to all phenomena coming under the competence of CUTA's partners. Close cooperation with CUTA's various partner and support services is necessary in order to achieve an integrated assessment supported by all services.

This “comprehensive monitoring” includes the **assessment of the threat** emanating from these individuals and the participation in the case consultation within the **local Taskforces (LTF)** concerning these individuals. The department is also responsible for raising **awareness about the importance of the LISC-R** as part of socio-preventive monitoring and reintegration. This comprehensive approach is in line with the **risk management** philosophy, in which the continuous exchange of information, the assessment of the threat and the implementation of measures tailored to each individual alternate and complement each other.

File Management & Documentation



The File Management & Documentation department is responsible for **managing** CUTA's **internal database**. This department is responsible for the **day-to-day running** of the database, which receives all information and documents from the various partners. The department is responsible for **adding** all incoming documents to the database, **registering** them and **sending** all operational documents to CUTA's partners. The department **optimises the flow of information to** CUTA's other departments and is also responsible for processing all this information, depending on its relevance and taking into account the internal processing guidelines, in close collaboration with the other departments. Finally, the department manages the **monthly statistics** relating to operational data and the number of entities included in the CDB.

Individual assessment



The mission of the **Individual Assessment department** is to ensure the **comprehensive monitoring of individuals requiring priority monitoring in our country as part of the Strategy T.E.R.** (see below, p. 36) and who are included in the CDB (see also below, p. 37 and before, p. 23 and following).

4.6

Transversal functioning

CUTA's slogan "Connecting the Dots" translates both internally and externally into cross-disciplinary and multidisciplinary cooperation.

Within CUTA, functioning of the operational teams

In these teams, members of different departments and units **work together** in a **horizontal** manner on a particular issue, region or trend. Based on the way they work, team members complement each other's knowledge, expertise and vision and interact effectively. They decide who will be responsible for **following up cases** (organising and coordinating meetings, drafting notes and reports, searching in the various systems, etc.). This way of working means that we can **react quickly to new trends**. Depending on what's going on, new members can easily join or leave a team.

Focus: Outreach to the academic world

The Outreach Project is about **optimising** ties with the **academic world**. To efficiently tackle security problems within our society, we need more interdisciplinary cooperation. The academic world is an essential partner in this. To strengthen those ties, several projects are ongoing within Outreach:

- **Students@cuta:** Students can submit questions to CUTA in the context of their master's thesis at specific, set times. In March 2023 an on-site edition was organised at CUTA. About twenty students showed up to ask their questions.
- A **thesis competition:** In cooperation with the Belgian universities, CUTA organises a thesis competition every year. The first prize is a speakers' chair at the colloquium gathering the security services and the academic world. The UGent won the first prize for the third time.
- An **annual colloquium:** The networks between the security services and the academic world need to be strengthened. The fourth Outreach colloquium took place in December 2023, of which the main theme was the possible link between psychological problems and violent radicalisation.
- The **scientific journal Radices:** Since 2021, CUTA publishes each year an online journal in collaboration with the academic world. The journal brings together promising and out-of-the-box research. The laureates of the thesis competition get the opportunity to write a contribution. In May 2023, CUTA published the third edition of the journal Radices.
- **Lectures at universities:** Also in 2023, CUTA visited several universities to speak about its functioning and its multidisciplinary approach to extremism and terrorism.
- **Thematic meetings** with the academic world: Regularly, CUTA invites academics to come and present their research (linked with CUTA's competences). The discussions that follow these presentations are enriching both for the researchers, who can test their work against the field, and for CUTA, that gains new insights. In 2023, there were 2 lectures in this context at CUTA's.
- **Briefings for trainee magistrates:** Every year, CUTA and its partner services organise briefings on their functioning for trainee magistrates.



For the Strategy T.E.R. to succeed, cooperation and trust between all services involved are crucial.

With external parties in the context of the Strategy T.E.R.

The objective of the Strategy T.E.R. is to curtail all forms of extremism (including the radicalisation process) in our society as much as possible.

What is important in this regard is that **all forms** of extremism are approached **in an equal manner**. The Strategy T.E.R. – like the Plan R at the time – incorporates various consultation platforms and structures (**the NTF, the LTFs, the National Working Groups (WG)** and the **LISC Rs**), where all services and actors working on the phenomena of terrorism and extremism are gathered around the table and share information with each other. This may involve information sharing at the strategic level (NTF, most of the Working Groups) or information sharing at the individual case level (LTF and/or LISC-R).

CUTA plays a **coordinating role** within this Strategy T.E.R. All operational departments of the service are closely involved in its functioning through participation in various platforms.

NTF The National Task Force

The National Task Force or NTF is the **strategic consultation platform** that steers the Strategy T.E.R. It is chaired by CUTA. Because of the Belgian political constellation, the NTF is the strategic consultation platform par excellence where **all different levels of government** in our country sit down together to tackle radicalisation, extremism and terrorism. The NTF is responsible for the general management and continuous monitoring of the implementation of the Strategy T.E.R. In addition, the NTF can provide feedback at political level if necessary.

LTF The Local Task Forces

CUTA is represented in the 18 Local Task Forces (LTFs), which are the **nerve centres** of the Strategy T.E.R. **in the repressive and security field**. The LTFs are the network where security services exchange information and discuss concrete cases. By mutual agreement, the partners decide whether and how entities are followed up by taking **security measures (LTFs)** or **socio-preventive measures (LISC-Rs)**. The input of the LTFs is important in order to feed the CDB.

WG National Working Groups

The multidisciplinary experts in the various working groups provide **concerted expertise, opinions and analyses** of phenomena, trends or groups in support of the LTF. When the Strategy T.E.R. was introduced, it was agreed that the WG would initially adopt a **more strategic approach**, in support of the case-by-case operational monitoring that takes place at LTF level.

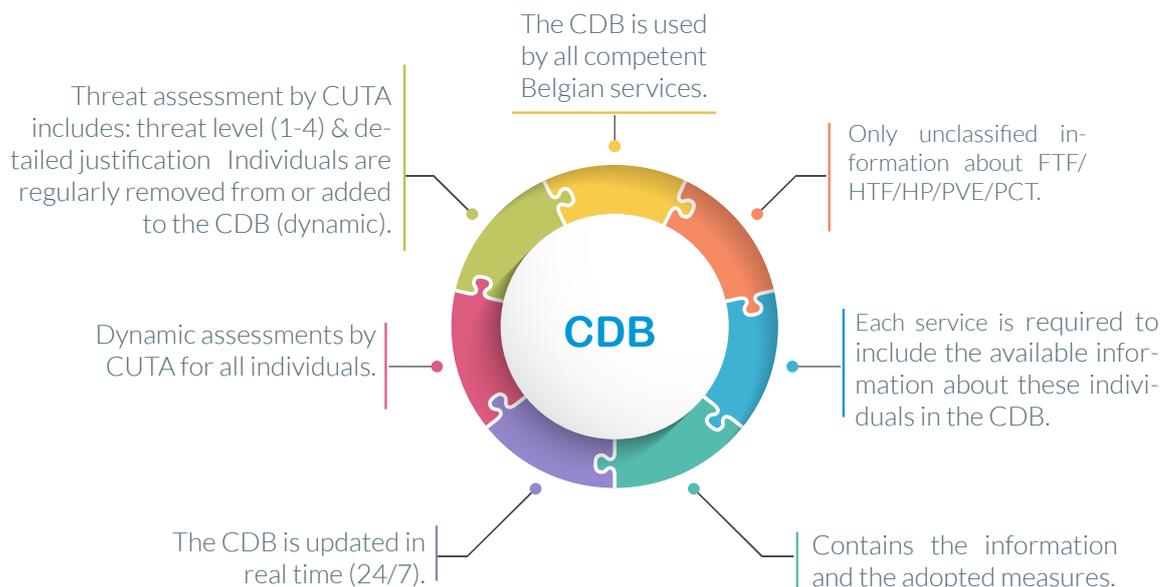


CDB The Common Database

The Common Database (CDB) is an externally shared **transversal tool** that provides the backbone for information sharing **within the Strategy T.E.R.** In the CDB, all competent services share **unclassified information**, in close consultation and according to strict, legally regulated criteria, on Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs), Homegrown Terrorist Fighters (HTFs), Hate Propagandists (HPs), Potentially Violent Extremists (PVEs) and Persons Convicted of Terrorism (PCTs) that are monitored with priority (see also page 23 and the following). The **access** to the CDB is multi-stage. Each of the services can only see and do what they need to do to fulfil their missions. Services that have write permission, are legally required to feed the CDB with relevant information.

CUTA is the **operational manager** of the CDB. As a consequence, it is responsible for the quality check, the **validation** of the entities in the CDB, for the **registration** of new entities, and for the **removal** (ventilation) of entities who do not (longer) belong in the CDB. Rigorous efforts are made to check that all individuals in the CDB still meet all criteria for inclusion in the CDB. For each individual in the CDB, CUTA draws up an individual threat assessment. It includes a threat level between 1 and 4 and a detailed motivation identifying the threat across five risk domains.

In February 2022, a new version (V.3.0.) of the CDB was launched. **In 2023**, this new application was **further developed** to make the follow-up and the assessment of entities simpler and more efficient.



4.7

Legal framework

CUTA's regulatory framework

- Act of 10 July 2006 on the Threat Analysis (organic law);
- Royal Decree of 28 November 2006 (missions and organisation);
- Royal Decree of 23 January 2007 (staff);
- Royal Decree of 24 August 2007 (staff function allowance);
- Act of 1 April 2007 on the insurance against damage caused by terrorism;
- Act of 1 July 2011 on the security and the protection of critical infrastructure;
- Act of 30 July 2018 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data.

Common Database

- Act of 27 April 2016 on the additional measures in the fight against terrorism;
- Royal Decree of 21 July 2016 on the Common Database of Terrorist Fighters;
- Royal Decree of 23 April 2018 on the Common Database of Hate Propagandists and implementing certain provisions of Section 1bis 'Information Management' of Chapter IV of the Law on the Police Service.

Preventive individual administrative measures

(Freezing of financial assets, Passban, ID-ban)

- Consular code of 21 December 2013 (articles 62 to 65/2);
- Act of 10 August 2015 amending the Act of 19 July 1991 on population registers, identity cards, foreigners' cards and residence documents and amending the Act of 8 August 1983 organising a national register of natural persons;
- Circular Letter of 7 September 2015 by the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Finance regarding the implementation of articles 3 and 5 of the Royal Decree of 28 December 2006 with regard to specific restrictive measures against certain individuals and entities in the fight against the financing of terrorism.

Strategy T.E.R. & LISC-R

- Strategy T.E.R. adopted by the Consultation Committee on 8 September 2021;
- Act of 30 July 2018 regarding the creation of Local Integral Security Cells concerning radicalism, extremism and terrorism.

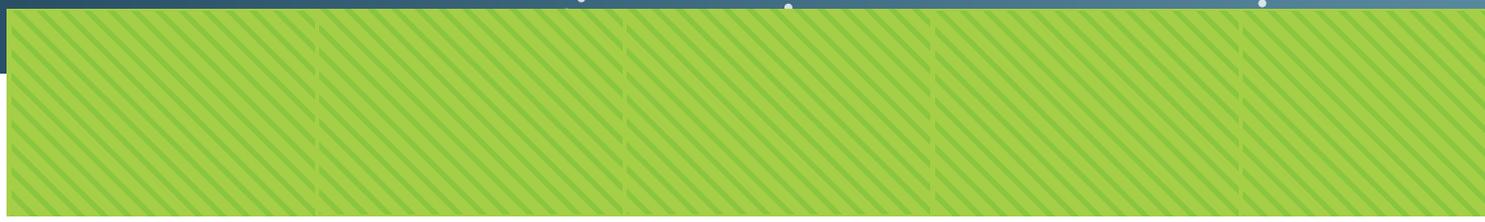
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AQ	Al Qaeda	Strategy T.E.R.	Strategy against Terrorism and Extremism, including the Radicalisation process
CDB	Common Database		
CCB	Center for Cyber Security Belgium	LTF	Local Task Force
NSC	National Security Council	NTF	National Task Force
COC	Supervisory Body for Police Information	VSSE	State Security
LISC-R	Local Integrated Security Cell concerning Radicalism		
PISC-R	Penitentiary Integral Security Cell concerning radicalism, extremism and terrorism		
DDOS	Distributed denial of service		
FM&Doc	File Management and Documentation		
IS	Islamic State		
PVE	Potentially Violent Extremist		
FTF	Foreign Terrorist Fighter		
WG	Working group		
HTF	Homegrown Terrorist Fighter		
ID-ban	Withdrawal of identity card		
IO	Information Officer		
ISKP	Islamic State Khorasan Province		
ILTDU	International Legion of Territorial Defence of Ukraine		
Passban	Withdrawal of passport		
PCT	Person Convicted of Terrorism		
PI	Preliminary investigation		
HP	Hate Propagandist		
Plan R	Action Plan against Radicalism		
RFI	Request for Information		
SGRS/ADIV	Military General Service for Intelligence and Security		

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