



# Evolution of Jihadism in Finland

Leena Malkki and Juha Saarinen

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ICCT Research Paper

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## Abstract

Since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, the broader European jihadist milieu has undergone significant transformation. One of these is the appeal of jihadist activity has expanded significantly beyond its traditional core areas, including Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Belgium. This research report maps the evolution of jihadism in one of the more peripheral countries in the European jihadist milieu, Finland. While Finland has only had limited exposure to the phenomenon, in the last decade the number of people involved in jihadist activism has increased significantly, and their internal organisation and contacts with transnational networks and armed groups deepened. The report also discusses potential future developments and ideas for further research.

**Keywords:** Finland, Islamic State, Syrian war, jihadism, violent extremism, social networks

## Introduction

The conflict in Syria and Iraq and the emergence of the Islamic State (IS) has had a significant impact on broader European jihadist milieu. The conflict has attracted an unprecedented number of foreign fighters from Europe, estimations ranging from 4000 to 7000<sup>1</sup>, eclipsing all previous mobilisations from the region to conflicts in Muslim-majority countries combined.<sup>2</sup> The region has also experienced a wave of jihadist terror attacks and plots.<sup>3</sup> Further, many European countries have also experienced a significant rise in the number of domestically active extremists, and the emergence of various activist Salafist organisations promoting jihadist views and activities, including the Sharia4 groups.<sup>4</sup>

These developments have understandably attracted considerable academic interest. Much of the research so far has focused on key countries and nexuses in the broader European jihadist milieu, e.g. United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Belgium as they have experienced both sizeable mobilisations to Syria and Iraq, and numerous jihadist attacks and intercepted or failed plots. Much less attention has been directed to whether similar developments have occurred in more peripheral areas within the broader European jihadist milieu – in other words, countries where local milieus have remained relatively small, underdeveloped, and isolated, and levels of violent radicalisation and activism have remained low. Among these countries are, for example, Finland, Ireland, and Norway. However, as the foreign fighter statistics alone demonstrate, the appeal of jihadist activity has expanded significantly beyond the core areas in recent years. Indeed, what has happened in these more peripheral countries is an integral part of the phenomenon's evolution in Europe.

This research paper aims at supplementing the knowledge about the evolution of jihadism in Europe by examining how jihadist activity in Finland has developed during the last two decades. What makes the case of Finland particularly noteworthy is the contrast between the situation before the outbreak of the Syrian civil war and after. Similarly to many other European countries, Finland has experienced an unprecedented foreign fighter mobilisation to Syria and Iraq, with at least eighty adult individuals and thirty children having left the country – mainly between 2012 and 2016.<sup>5</sup> While the Finnish foreign fighter contingent may be small in absolute terms, relatively the country has experienced a significant mobilisation. If the numbers are set against the Muslim population size (at least seventy thousand in 2015 according to one estimate<sup>6</sup>), Finland has experienced more departures to the conflict zone than any other western country.<sup>7</sup> What makes this particularly intriguing development is that Finland has a very limited history with jihadism and other forms of militant Islamism prior to the 2010s. Further, unlike was the case in many other

1 See e.g. Petter Nesser, "Military Interventions, Jihadi Networks, and Terrorist Entrepreneurs: How the Islamic State Terror Wave Rose So High," *CTC Sentinel*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2019). Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/military-interventions-jihadi-networks-terrorist-entrepreneurs-islamic-state-terror-wave-rose-high-europe/>.

2 See e.g. Thomas Hegghammer, "Should I Stay or Should I Go? Explaining Variation in Western Jihadists' Choice between Domestic and Foreign Fighting," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 107, No. 1 (2013).

3 See e.g. Lorenzo Vidino, Francesco Marone, and Eva Entenmann, "Fear Thy Neighbor: Radicalization and Jihadist Attacks in the West," *The International Centre for Counter Terrorism – The Hague* (2017). Available at: <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/FearThyNeighbor-RadicalizationandJihadistAttacksintheWest.pdf>; Nesser, "Military Interventions, Jihadi Networks, and Terrorist Entrepreneurs."

4 See e.g. Lorenzo Vidino, "Sharia4: From Confrontational Activism to Militancy," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (2015). Available at: <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/415>.

5 Ministry of Interior of Finland, *Violent Extremism in Finland – Situation Overview 1/2018*, Ministry of Interior Publications 17/2018 (2018), pp. 24, 28. Available at: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-324-226-5>.

6 Johanna Konttori and Teemu Pauha, "Finland," in Oliver Scharbrodt, Samim Akgönül, Ahmet Alibašić, Jørgen S. Nielsen and Egdūnas Račius, eds., *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, Volume 11* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2020). See also "Europe's Growing Muslim Population," *Pew Research Center*, November 29, 2017. Available at: <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/>.

7 See Efraim Benmelech and Estaban F. Klor, "What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?" *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 32, No. 7 (2018).

countries in the region, there were seemingly no Sharia4-like groups to function as enabling environments or hubs for radicalisation into jihadism, or recruitment pools for jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq.

This research paper draws from various primary and secondary sources. The most important data sources have been official documents from criminal investigations and court proceedings; online footprint of Finnish jihadists (particularly their social media accounts on Twitter, Facebook, and to a lesser extent on other smaller platforms, which were largely active between 2013 and 2015); and interviews with individuals connected to the phenomenon and countering it, e.g. Muslim community representatives, journalists, criminal investigators, as well as preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) and counter-terrorism (CT) practitioners. Additionally, the paper draws from pre-existing academic literature and journalistic pieces.

The paper is divided into five sections. We begin by outlining what is known about the history of jihadism in Finland before the outbreak of the Syrian civil war, and look at how these early manifestations connect to later occurrences of jihadist activity in the country. The second part offers an overview on how the Finnish milieu has evolved throughout the 2010s. After that, we discuss the Finnish foreign fighter mobilisation to Syria and Iraq. We explore the backgrounds of the Finnish foreign fighter contingent, dynamics of the mobilisation, as well as the various roles foreign fighters from Finland have taken part in the conflict zone. The fourth part goes through what is known about the current whereabouts of the Finnish foreign fighters. The fifth and final part concludes by summarising the key findings and looks at the prospects for jihadism's development in the future.

## Background: Early Years of Jihadism

Although information about the early years of jihadism in Finland remains scarce, jihadism – and militant Islamism more broadly – appears to have remained a marginal phenomenon in Finland well into the 2000s. Before the 9/11 attacks, the resources invested in counter-terrorism were very modest, so it is possible that even the authorities did not have a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon until much later. It took several years after the attacks before the authorities began to perceive the phenomenon not only as an external threat to Finland and Finnish citizens abroad, but also present within Finland. Mainly for these reasons, it is difficult to create a comprehensive and detailed picture of the Finnish jihadi milieu, particularly during the earlier half of the decade and many gaps remain. One of the key gaps is knowledge of support for al-Qaeda and its various regional branches within the Finnish jihadi milieu, and related support activities that may have taken place in Finland in the 2000s. There is some information about support activities connected to two armed groups affiliated with it as will be shown below, but it is uncertain whether there is more to it.

Up until the latter half of the 2000s, the Finnish Security and Intelligence Service (Supo) stated that the phenomenon mainly manifested itself in Finland through the presence of a few (former) members of armed jihadist groups residing in the country. There is little detailed information available in open sources, but the early activists appear to have included *militant exiles*, i.e. individuals who are members of or have direct links to armed Islamist and jihadist groups in their countries of origin, and whose activism tends to limit itself to other members of the same diaspora.<sup>8</sup> Such activists have been instrumental in importing jihadism to other countries, as is

<sup>8</sup> Petter Nesser and Brynjar Lia, "Jihadism in Norway: A Typology of Militant Networks in a Peripheral European Country," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 10, No. 6 (2016), p. 122. Available at: <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/563>.

exemplified by the case of Najmuddin Faraj Ahmed, better known as Mullah Krekar, in Norway.<sup>9</sup> One such example in the Finnish context is a long-time friend and associate of Mohamed Moumou – a well-known Moroccan-Swedish militant activist and foreign fighter, who was reportedly also a senior leader in al-Qaeda in Iraq before his death in 2008.<sup>10</sup> After reportedly participating in the Afghan jihad in the 1980s, this individual originally from Morocco, who has not been identified publicly, moved to Finland in the 1990s and became a citizen in 2000. Since then, he moved to Sweden but was expelled back to Finland in 2008 by Swedish authorities, as the Swedish Security Service believed he was a leading figure in the radical Islamist network around the Brandbergen mosque in Stockholm although he has denied these claims. It remains unclear what he has done during his stay in Finland. His current whereabouts are publicly unknown.<sup>11</sup>

## Ansar al-Islam

From the early 2000s onwards, interest in jihadism and participating in related activities have existed in at least three contexts. First context is the support network and activities for the Ansar al-Islam group within the Iraqi Kurdish diaspora in Finland. Ansar al-Islam was formed in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2001, co-founded by notable formerly Norway-based jihadist entrepreneur Mullah Krekar.<sup>12</sup> While the group was active in Iraq (and in Syria during the 2010s), it also had support networks in various European countries.

The group's support network in Finland formed within the Iraqi Kurdish diaspora in Finland, particularly among Kurdish refugees resettled to Finland from Iraq in the mid-1990s. The network's existence and activities were made public when Finnish public service broadcasting company Yle reported – and Supo confirmed – in 2004 that approximately twenty Kurds residing in Finland had connections to Ansar al-Islam.<sup>13</sup> Most of the individuals linked to the network resided in the city of Turku in southwestern Finland.<sup>14</sup> Several of its alleged members have been suspected of raising funds for the group through donations and restaurant businesses.<sup>15</sup> There have also been allegations that they have received external funding to aid them in their activism from Krekar. Additionally, it is possible that few of the network's alleged members took part in the group's activities in Iraq in mid-2000s,<sup>16</sup> and one member reportedly participated in a terrorist plot against the Norwegian embassy in Latvia in 2004.<sup>17</sup>

The existence and activities of this network have continued well into the 2010s in Finland under

9 On Mullah Krekar, see *ibid*, p. 122–123.

10 Bill Roggio, "US Forces Kill al Qaeda in Iraq's Deputy Commander", *FDD's Long War Journal*, 15 October, 2008. Available at: [https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/10/us\\_forces\\_kill\\_al\\_qa\\_1.php](https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/10/us_forces_kill_al_qa_1.php). Bill Roggio, "Al Qaeda in Iraq's Second in Command Was a Swedish Citizen," *FDD's Long War Journal*, 16 October, 2008. Available at: [https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/10/al\\_qaeda\\_in\\_iraq\\_se.php](https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/10/al_qaeda_in_iraq_se.php).

11 Malkki and Saarinen, "Jihadism in Finland," pp. 74–76.

12 On jihadist entrepreneurs, see Petter Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History* (London: Hurst & Co, 2015), pp. 13–14.

13 Yle, "Suomesta yhteyksiä terroriepäilyyn? [Terror suspect has connections to Finland?]," 15 October, 2004. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-5193337>. The individuals mentioned in Yle's MOT programme "Pyhä sota Turussa" [Holy War in Turku], subsequently pressed charges against Yle and the reporters. Ultimately, Yle and the reporters were ordered by the Finnish Supreme Court to pay compensations to the plaintiffs for libel. Yle, "Korkein oikeus kovensi MOT-ohjelman tuomiota [Supreme Court Raised the Sentence for the MOT Programme]," 9 December, 2010. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-5683837>.

14 Lydia Khalil, "The Transformation of Ansar al-Islam," *Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor*, Vol. 3, No. 24 (21 December, 2005). Available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/the-transformation-of-ansar-al-islam/>.

15 Supo, Annual Report 2004, p. 6; Toby Archer and Ann-Nina Finne, "Pizzaa islamisteille [Pizza for Islamists]," *Ulkopolitiikka*, No. 4 (2005).

16 According to the aforementioned Yle's MOT documentary, three men with Kurdish backgrounds that had lived in Finland were arrested in Iraq in summer 2005 on suspicion of supporting jihadist activities.

17 Aftenposten, "Ansar al-Islam knyttes till terrortrusel [Ansar al-Islam is Linked to Terrorist Threat]," 2 November, 2004. Available at: <https://www.aftenposten.no/verden/i/jalvz/ansar-al-islam-knyttes-til-terrortrusel>.

the guise of its spinoff, the broader European Rawti Shax network – similarly led by Mullah Krekar. Assessing the network’s evolution from mid-2000s to early 2010s is challenging as individuals connected to the group have largely acted semi-clandestinely and sought little contact outside their own tight-knit community. As far as we know, the Finland-based network was not targeted by criminal investigations that would have led to trials. However, what we do know is that some key activists within the broader network have resided in Finland.<sup>18</sup> The most notable example is Awat Hamasalih, a British citizen of Iraqi Kurd descent. He is a central figure in Rawti Shax and a close associate of its leader Mullah Krekar. Hamasalih married a Finnish resident and lived in Turku between 2013 and 2014 before being deported back to the United Kingdom due to national security concerns in December 2014. He was subsequently jailed in 2017 in the UK for being a member of a proscribed organisation, IS. Supo had recommended Hamasalih to be deported from Finland as early as August 2013.<sup>19</sup>

The activities of Rawti Shax’s Finnish branch seem to have been largely limited to the recruitment, radicalisation, and fundraising activities that it has carried out within its own small community within the Iraqi Kurdish diaspora in Turku and Helsinki metropolitan region. However, the Finnish branch also played a small role in the foreign fighter mobilisation from Finland to Syria and Iraq in the 2010s. Several of its reported members travelled to conflict zone and joined IS. Key individuals belonging to Rawti Shax in Finland, including Hamasalih, also hosted Anjem Choudary’s visit to Finland in March 2013.

## Converts

The second context is extremist converts. The number of Muslim converts in Finland is very small, estimated to be around 1,500 in 2012.<sup>20</sup> A small subset within Finnish convert population has shown interest in jihadism and conflicts in Muslim-majority countries, particularly within the Salafi milieu in Helsinki. This development was also noticed by Supo, which in 2007 noted that potential security threats emanating from radicalised converts were not an unknown phenomenon in Finland.<sup>21</sup>

It is unclear how interest in jihadism first emerged among Finnish converts. Reportedly, it was at least in part influenced by extremists, who moved to Finland from abroad and sought to spread the ideology locally. These reportedly included at least two American Salafi converts, one of whom had attended militant Islamist group Lashkar e-Taiba’s training camp in Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> Many of the extremist converts were connected to and active within *Islamin aika*, a Helsinki-based association established in 2006 as a further step by Finnish-speaking converts to becoming organised. The association carried out *dawah* work and translated key texts of conservative interpretations of Islam - particularly Wahhabism and Salafism. A small number of its active

18 Juha Ristimäki, “Lähde vahvistaa: Suomessa majailee kolme kovan luokan terroristia [Source Confirms: Three Hard-Core Terrorists Live in Finland],” *Iltalehti*, 5 December, 2015. Available at: <https://www.iltalehti.fi/uutiset/a/2015120520779557>. Rebekka Härkönen, “Supo: Jihadistien toiminta jatkuu [Supo: Jihadist Activities Continue],” *Turun Sanomat*, 14 November, 2015. Available at: <https://www.ts.fi/uutiset/kotimaa/828992/Supo+Jihadistien+toiminta+jatkuu>.

19 Anne Kauranen, “Suomesta karkotettu islamisti ei vastustellut Helsinki-Vantaalle saatettaessa [Islamist Departed from Finland Did Not Resist When Escorted to Helsinki-Vantaa Airport],” *Iltalehti*, 16 January, 2015. Available at: <https://www.iltalehti.fi/uutiset/a/2015011619031116>.

20 Konttori and Pauha, “Finland.”

21 Supo, Annual Report 2007.

22 Mikko Marttinen and Heini Kilpamäki, “Sanna eli tavallista elämää, kunnes perheeseen tuli mustaan kaapuun pukeutunut toinen vaimo – IS paljastaa kantasuomalaisten naisten avainroolin radikaalissa muslimiverkostossa [Sanna Lived Ordinary Life Until Another Wife Dressed in a Black Robe Joined the Family – IS Reveals Key Role Played by Finnish Women in Radical Muslim Network],” *Ilta-Sanomat*, 30 March, 2019. Available at: <https://www.is.fi/kotimaa/art-2000006358259.html>. Mikko Marttinen, “Ali toi ääri-islamia Suomeen – sitten hän heräsi ja tajusi virheensä [Ali Brought Radical Islam to Finland – Then He Woke up And Realised His Mistake],” *Ilta-Sanomat*, 14 March, 2021. Available at: <https://www.is.fi/ulkomaat/art-2000007857394.html>.

members travelled to Saudi Arabia and studied Islam in the Islamic University of Madinah. The association changed its name to Helsingin muslimit (Muslims of Helsinki) in 2010 and established its own Salafist-oriented mosque in Roihuvuori in eastern Helsinki.<sup>23</sup>

The early interest in jihadism manifested itself mainly in studying, discussing and to a lesser extent, disseminating texts and following events related to Islamist militancy. While the conflict in Iraq was the key conflict preoccupying European jihadists in the 2000s, it was by no means the only conflict attracting attention. In 2005, the group of activists in the *Islamin aika* association followed especially the conflict in Chechnya with particular interest. According to at least one witness testimony in later criminal investigations connected to suspected jihadist activism, several individuals within active within the convert community expressed interest in travelling to Chechnya to participate in the fight against Russia, and few allegedly went as far as arranging their travel to the conflict zone. In the end, at least one convert attempted to travel, unsuccessfully, to the conflict zone in 2006. He was ultimately detained in neighbouring Georgia and deported back to Finland.<sup>24</sup>

Around the same time, a small number of female converts within the Salafi milieu in Helsinki seemed to express support for jihadist views. Indeed, Salafist interpretations of Islam were not uncommon among female converts in Finland, who were also active online in discussing issues relating to their faith.<sup>25</sup> Some also expressed and promoted jihadist views. There appears to have been at least one female convert who actively propagated radical views and formed a small group of likeminded converts around herself.<sup>26</sup>

The extremist elements within the Salafi milieu in Helsinki have continued their activism in the 2010s. Several converts within these “bunches of guys” - and “bunches of girls” - in Marc Sageman’s parlance<sup>27</sup> and their acquaintances considered travelling, or actually travelled to Syria and Iraq from 2012 onwards.

## Al-Shabaab

Each of the perpetrators’ manifestos will be examined in detail below, however, it seems necessary. There was also support for al-Shabaab within Finland’s Somali diaspora from mid-2000s onwards. However, such activism is likely to have occurred on a significantly smaller scale and later than in other Nordic countries. As late as 2011, Supo noted that support activities connected to al-Shabaab were becoming more prominent in Finland.<sup>28</sup> However, there were few earlier signs of organised al-Shabaab recruitment activities targeting the Somali diaspora in Finland. For example, foreign speakers have spoken in various events in Finland, possibly encouraging participation in fighting in Somalia.<sup>29</sup> One such speaker was Hassan Hussein, a

23 Tommi Sarlin, “Muslimivähemmistö kasvaa Suomessa [Muslim Minority Grows in Finland],” *Kirkko & kaupunki*, April 18, 2007; Minna Rajainmäki, “Islamiin kääntynyt rikkoo paaston kaurapuurolla [Convert to Islam Breaks the Fast with Oatmeal Porridge],” *Helsingin uutiset*, 30 June, 2014.

24 Mika Parkkonen, “Suomalainen muslimi halusi auttaa sodan piinaamia veljiään [A Finnish Muslim Would Like to Help Brothers Tormented by War],” *Helsingin Sanomat*, 15 September, 2006. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/art-2000004425363.html>.

25 Marko Juntunen, *Matkalla islamilaisessa Suomessa [Travelling Through Islamic Finland]* (Tampere: Vastapaino, 2020), pp. 175–176.

26 Marttinen and Kilpamäki, “Sanna eli tavallista elämää.”

27 Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

28 *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, “Terroristeilla Suomi-kontakteja [Terrorists Have Connections to Finland],” 4 January, 2011. Available at: <https://www.ess.fi/2011/01/04/terroristeilla-suomi-kontakteja>.

29 Jukka Huusko, “Supo: Suomessa ei al-Shabaabin järjestäytynyttä värväystä [Supo: No Organised Recruitment to al-Shabaab in Finland],” *Helsingin Sanomat*, 27 September, 2013. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/ulkomaat/art-2000002677095.html>. Erik Nyström, “Somaliliitto: Suomessa ei tietoa al-Shabaabin värväystoiminnasta [Finnish Somali League: No Information

high-level al-Shabaab leader, who reportedly visited Finland in 2009 to seek support and recruit new members for the organisation.<sup>30</sup>

Further, Finland's first terrorism-related criminal trial dealt with activities supporting Al-Shabaab, with the suspected terrorist activities taking place between 2009 and 2011. In an indictment filed in 2014, four Finnish Somalis were charged with financing terrorism and other terrorism-related crimes, including recruitment. For instance, the main defendant was charged with recruiting his brother, and planning to bring his brother's children to an al-Shabaab training camp in Somalia without their consent.<sup>31</sup> While all four defendants were initially found guilty in 2014,<sup>32</sup> the Court of Appeal overturned the sentence in 2016. The Court took the view that "while the defendants had most likely supported al-Shabaab, the prosecution had not shown to which specific terrorist offences in Somalia the funding had contributed, a legal requirement in place at the time the crimes had taken place."<sup>33</sup>

Support for al-Shabaab has also included foreign fighting, as some Finland-based Somalis had travelled to Somalia to join al-Shabaab or smaller groups.<sup>34</sup> The exact number is unclear, but minimum estimates put the number around half of dozen, and they have likely joined the group between 2006 and 2013.<sup>35</sup>

Since early 2010s, interest in Al-Shabaab has declined significantly in Finland, reflecting broader trends in Europe and the Nordic countries. However, Supo estimated in 2015 that there were still people within the Somali diaspora in Finland who were interested in participating in the conflict.<sup>36</sup>

## The New Face of Finnish Jihadism

The Finnish jihadist milieu appears to have been small and atomised as well as relatively isolated until the early 2010s. Local activists and small groups largely remained separate from each other, and Finland – and its milieu – appears to have been rarely given closer attention by jihadist actors abroad. While Finland still remains in the periphery of the broader European jihadist landscape by any criteria, the Finnish scene has undergone significant developments during the past decade. While some of these developments and their causes predate the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, they are primarily tied to the conflict in Syria and Iraq and the emergence of IS in particular. Further, the arrival of an historic number of asylum seekers to Finland in 2015–2016 brought several individuals with ties to armed groups abroad to the country. It remains largely unknown whether they have attempted to influence the development of jihadist activism in Finland.

about Recruitment to al-Shabaab in Finland],” Helsingin Sanomat, 19 October, 2013. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/art-2000002682116.html>.

30 Helsingin Sanomat, “IL: Al-Shabaabin johtomies värväsi Suomessa [Al-Shabaab leader recruits in Finland],” 15 October, 2011. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/kotimaa/art-2000004834842.html>. The visit is also mentioned in the criminal investigation record of the trial connected to al-Shabaab.

31 Paula Tapiola, “Suomen ensimmäisessä terrorismijutussa syytteitä neljälle [Four Prosecuted in Finland's First Terrorism Case],” Yle, 17 September, 2014. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-7475490>. Esitutkintapöytäkirja [Pre-trial records] 2400/R150/11.

32 Tuuli Toivanen, “Suomen ensimmäisessä terrorismioikeudenkäynnissä vankeustuomio neljälle [Prison Sentences for Four in Finland's First Terrorism Trial],” Yle, 19 December, 2014. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-7699971>.

33 Christian Jokinen, “‘Terrorist Intent’: How Finland's Justice System Struggles to Tackle Terrorism Offenders,” Jamestown Foundation Terrorism Monitor, Vol. 16, No. 14 (13 July, 2018) <https://jamestown.org/program/terrorist-intent-how-finlands-justice-system-struggles-to-tackle-terrorism-offenders/>.

34 Jukka Huusko, “Tutkija: Al-Shabaabin riveissä useita suomalaistaustaisia [Researcher: Several Finland-Originated People in the Ranks of Al Shabaab],” Helsingin Sanomat, 27 September, 2013.

35 Hannele Valkeeniemi, “Me tehdään susta rohkea mies [We Will Make You A Brave Man],” Yle, 11 April, 2013. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-6574946>.

36 Supo, “Suojelupoliisin toimintaympäristö vuosina 2015–2016 [Supo's Operating Environment in 2015–2016].”

A key consequence of these developments, and especially the mobilisation from Finland to Syria and Iraq, is that there has been significantly more public attention and resources directed at jihadism and countering it in Finland. Subsequently, there is significantly more information available about how jihadism has manifested itself in Finland in the 2010s compared to 2000s. However, many gaps in our knowledge still remain. This is especially so because the number of criminal investigations and court cases related to jihadist activity remains relatively small, and little detailed information is available to researchers. Moreover, academic research and investigative journalism on the topic has started to emerge only after the outbreak of the Syrian conflict and is still small in scale.

## Network Growth

The Finnish jihadist milieu has grown considerably in size in the 2010s. While this trend is indisputable, it is difficult to give any precise independent estimation of how many individuals have been or continue to be involved in jihadist activities in Finland during the last decade. The best available starting point to estimate the size of the milieu and its evolution is the information shared by Supo of its (non-public) counter-terrorism target individual list.

According to Supo, counter-terrorism target individuals are essentially individuals engaged in terrorism-related activities, regardless of ideology. They “can be radicalised individuals who want to commit an attack, charismatic inciters, distributors of propaganda, foreign fighters who have returned to Finland, or potential significant financiers”.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, it is important to keep in mind that it includes all counter-terrorism target individuals, not only those who have been put to the list because of their participation in jihadist activities. While the organisation has been reticent to give detailed information about how many of those individuals are connected to jihadism in the past, it has stated that most of its current target individuals “are linked to radical Islamist activity.”<sup>38</sup>

The number of counter-terrorism target individuals has doubled within a decade. The numbers may still be smaller than in several other Western European countries, but the increase has been significant. During the first decade of the 2000s, Supo officials talked in the media interviews about “dozens” of individuals who had connections to terrorist organisations without specifying it further.<sup>39</sup> The first public estimate from the year 2012 puts the number at approximately two hundred. By 2014, this number had grown to three hundred.<sup>40</sup> For several subsequent years, the estimate has risen. At the end of 2017, the number reached 370,<sup>41</sup> and by late 2019, the number had plateaued to around 390 where it still stands in March, 2021.<sup>42</sup> Supo has been so restrictive in its communication about the individuals on the list that it is very difficult to assess these numbers and Supo’s application of inclusion criteria independently.

Part of the increase is almost certainly due to increased attention devoted to jihadist activities which has prompted authorities to map potential target individuals more comprehensively than in the 2000s. Equally important, however, has been the exceptional appeal of the Syrian civil

37 Supo, “Terrorismin torjunnan kohdehenkilö voi olla iskijä tai terroristijärjestön kannattaja [Counter-terrorism target individual can be an attacker or supporter of a terrorist organisation],” <https://supo.fi/kohdehenkilot>.

38 Supo, Year Book 2020, p. 10. Available at: <https://vuosikirja.supu.fi/en/frontpage>.

39 For example, Jukka Harju, “Supo: Suomessa muutamia kymmeniä mahdollisia terrori-iskun tekijöitä [Supo: A few dozen potential perpetrators of terrorist attacks in Finland],” *Helsingin Sanomat*, 21 May, 2002.

40 Supo, Annual Report 2014, p. 4.

41 Supo, Year Book 2017, p. 10. Available at: <https://supo.fi/en/year-book>.

42 Supo, National Security Review 2019; Supo, National Security Review 2020. Both documents available at: <https://supo.fi/en/publications>.

war and the cause célèbre it presented to the global jihad movement as well as the emergence of IS – and specifically its state-building project culminating in the declaration of its caliphate in June 2014.

Aside from the increase in the number of counter-terrorism targets, Supo has noted that there have been some qualitative changes among them. In 2018, the organisation noted that its counter-terrorism target individuals “have more connections to international terrorism” and that an increasing percentage of them has “taken part in an armed conflict or received terrorist training.”<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in its Year Book 2020, Supo stated that many of its “target individuals have received weapons training, been involved in armed conflict, or expressed a desire to take part in armed operations.”<sup>44</sup>

It should be noted that not all individuals listed as counter-terrorism targets reside in Finland. The list includes also individuals who live abroad but who are deemed to be relevant in the context of Finland’s national security. This can be because they have lived in Finland before and continue to have connections to the country. Most prominently, the target individuals likely include an unknown number of Finnish foreign fighters still in Syria and Iraq, or possibly in other conflict zones, such as Somalia.

## Internal Dynamics

Concurrently with growing in size, the Finnish jihadi milieu has undergone few notable qualitative developments, especially relating to its internal structures and external connections. Since 2015, the authorities have repeatedly emphasised that jihadist actors in Finland have become more broadly networked within the country.<sup>45</sup> Throughout the 2000s, Finland had a number of relatively unorganised smaller social groups and even networks, which were largely ethnically based and operated independently from each other. With the Syrian civil war as a cause célèbre and mobilising force, some of these different groups and individuals connected to them have begun to form loose multi-ethnic and intergenerational networks and cooperate within them. These networks have sought to promote jihadism in the country, for example, by disseminating jihadist propaganda and recruiting new members. This has been aided by the fact that geographically individuals involved in jihadism are mostly concentrated in the larger cities in southern Finland, particularly in and around Helsinki and Turku – where the majority of Finland’s Muslim population also resides.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, individual activists within jihadist networks in Finland have become more connected internationally. Supo has also stated that individual activists and networks within the Finnish jihadi milieu likely have connections to practically all key jihadist groups in major conflict zones, but there is no detailed public information about these links. The links are strongest to the conflict in Syria and Iraq, and IS. There are also indications that the contacts between individual activists and networks within the Finnish milieu and their counterparts in Europe are also evolving, as exemplified by the continued and evolving presence of the Rawti Shax network in Finland, and Anjem Choudary’s high profile visit to Finland in March, 2013.

43 Supo National Security Review 2018, p. 1. Available at: <https://supo.fi/en/publications>.

44 Supo, Year Book 2020, p. 10.

45 Supo, Lehdistöiedote, Terrorismin uhka-arvio [Press release, Terrorism threat assessment], 3 November 2015; Ismo Virta, “Jihadistinen alamaailma leviää Suomeenkin – ’Huolestuttavinta ovat Suomeen viime vuosina syntyneet radikaali-islamistiset verkostot [Jihadist underground spreading to Finland – Radical Islamist networks which have taken shape in Finland during the recent years give most concern],” Talouselämä, 13 April, 2017.

46 Ministry of the Interior, Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 2/2013, p. 9.

The impact of these qualitative developments should not, however, be exaggerated. Based on openly available data, there is certainly evidence of social clustering among foreign fighters and domestic extremists. At the same time, it is difficult to pinpoint to any locations or communities that would have served as prominent radicalisation hubs or enabling environments, apart from the aforementioned Roihuvuori mosque, which functioned for some time as a place of congregation for some of those interested in jihadism (particularly in the convert community).<sup>47</sup> For instance, there seems to be no dominant locations, such as asylum-seekers centres, prisons or universities, in Finland that would be well-known or especially important for the phenomenon, which is also a sign of the fragmented nature of jihadist activism in Finland. There have not been any mosques or prayer rooms in Finland that are known to openly advocate a jihadist interpretation of Islam (including the Roihuvuori mosque). Some mosques may attract or be visited by individuals interested in jihadism for various reasons. There are also indications that some jihadist activists have sought new recruits among individuals visiting mosques and prayer rooms.<sup>48</sup>

Further, it is noteworthy that no Sharia4-type organisation has emerged in Finland. When Anjem Choudary visited Finland in the spring of 2013, he announced the establishment of Sharia4Finland although – according to his own words – as an idea rather than an organisation.<sup>49</sup> Whatever the plan was, it failed to get off the ground. This may be partially explained by the fact that there have not been any suitable activists in Finland interested in playing a leading role in such an organisation. Choudary visited Finland at a time when many of the individual activists who had interest and potential for a leadership role in Sharia4Finland had already left or were about to leave for Syria. The second explanation may be that Choudary visited Finland at the invitation of the Rawti Shax. This was, arguably, not the best placed organisation to take this initiative, because it was – at least at the time – a semi-isolated and clandestine network based on shared ethnicity and familial ties, which appears to have shown only limited interest in building broader networks and connections within the Finnish jihadist milieu.

## Types of Jihadist Activism in Finland

So far, our discussion about the developments in the 2010s has limited to the number of individuals involved and their networking within and beyond Finland. It is now time to turn to what we know about the forms of jihadist activism. Most of the public attention has been squarely on violent forms of activism, that is, the mobilisation of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq and (the possibility of) attacks in Finland. Both the number of foreign fighters and the threat of terrorist attacks in Finland has increased during the 2010s. Finland witnessed its first jihadist terrorist attack in August 2017. These will be covered in the next section. However, there are also indications that non-violent support activities have become more common as well.

47 Johanna Mattinen, "Suomalaiskäännynnäisten radikalisoituminen tapahtui helsinkiläisessä moskeijassa – 'Olimme joukko suomalaisia fundamentalistimuslimeja' [Finnish converts radicalised in a mosque in Helsinki – 'We were a group of Finnish fundamentalist muslims']," *Iltalehti*, 8 November, 2017. Available at: <https://www.iltalehti.fi/kotimaa/a/201711082200518368>.

48 The best known example of this is the Turku stabbing attack. The perpetrator met a person who was elemental to his radicalisation in a mosque in Turku. The attack which will be discussed later on in this paper. See Safety Investigation Authority, *Turku Stabbings on 18 August 2017. Investigation report 7/2018*. Available at: [https://turvallisuustutkinta.fi/material/attachments/otkes/tutkintaselostukset/en/muutonnettomuudet/2017/oNRjHqmjf/P2017-01\\_Turku\\_EN.pdf](https://turvallisuustutkinta.fi/material/attachments/otkes/tutkintaselostukset/en/muutonnettomuudet/2017/oNRjHqmjf/P2017-01_Turku_EN.pdf). Indications of this kind of activity came up also in the interviews with security authorities and representatives of Muslim communities conducted by the authors in 2018.

49 Anssi Miettinen, "Suomessa käynyt islamisti: 'Bin Laden oli sankari' [Islamist visiting Finland: 'Bin Laden was a Hero']," *Helsingin Sanomat*, 7 April, 2013. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/sunnuntai/art-2000002630199.html>.

## Domestic Activities

Domestic activities predominantly take the form of non-violent activism. This includes many kinds of activities aiming at expanding the support base of the phenomenon, recruiting individuals for violent activism, or accumulating financial and material resources for jihadist groups abroad. In many cases, these activities are connected to each other, and sometimes also to violent forms of activism. Again, the conflict of Syria and Iraq plays an important role as a key focus and context for the support activities.

## Recruitment

The authorities have, in recent years, repeatedly stressed that extremist networks in Finland are seeking to radicalise Muslims and to recruit new members.<sup>50</sup> While it is indisputable that such activities occur more than previously, they remain largely limited in scale and levels of professionalism and organisation. Most of the radicalisation and recruitment efforts seemingly rely on pre-existing social contacts and networks, including through influencing acquaintances, friends, relatives, and immediate family members, and children.<sup>51</sup>

The support activities linked to Rawti Shax represent more organised and professional form of these activities. Their activists residing in Finland have taken part in the efforts to radicalise new supporters for the organisation, especially online. One specific aim of the organisation has been to recruit foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq. As will come out later, a few of those travelling to the conflict zones from Finland have been associated with Rawti Shax.

There are also reports of some relatively amateurish radicalisation and recruitment attempts in which individuals have been approached in public places,<sup>52</sup> such as prisons<sup>53</sup> and asylum centres.<sup>54</sup> The earliest indications that such activities were occurring in Finland are from autumn 2014, when, according to Supo, a small number of persons in Finland were trying to persuade people to travel to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq.<sup>55</sup> The latest indications of such activities in open sources are from the years 2016 and 2017. However, according to the publicly available information, such activities have had little impact.

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Ministry of the Interior, Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 1/2018, p. 23.

<sup>51</sup> Supo, Year Book 2016, p. 20.

<sup>52</sup> A small number of unconfirmed examples of such activities can be found in public sources. See, for example, Markus Kuokkanen, "Helsinkiäisiä on houkuteltu kaduilla Syyriaan taistelemaan [Recruitment to Syria occurring on the streets of Helsinki]," Yle, 26 August, 2014. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-7432389>. Minna Rajainmäki, "Espoolaisnuori kertoo: 'Näin Isis painostaa Suomessakin'" [Youngster from Espoo tells: 'Here's how Isis pressures also in Finland'], Länsiväylä March 21, 2015; MTV Uutiset, "Vaasan Isis-rekrytointi: 'Värvääjät pelottelivat'" [Isis recruitment in Vaasa: Recruiters intimidated], 14 January, 2016. Available at: <https://www.mtvuutiset.fi/artikkeli/vaasan-isis-rekrytointi-varvaajat-pelottelivat/4692916#gs.yz0o5p>.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Neumann, Juha Saarinen and Rajan Basra, "The Crime-Terror Nexus in Finland and the Baltics," Crime Terror Nexus Country Papers (2018), p. 16.

<sup>54</sup> Kari Ikävalko, "Supo: turvapaikanhakijoista merkittäviä vaikutuksia Suomen turvallisuudelle - tulijoilla kytköksiä väkivaltaisiin ryhmiin [Supo: Asylum seekers have a significant impact on Security in Finland – The arrivals have connections to violent groups]," Yle, 3 November, 2015. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-8428033>. Sara Rigatelli, Juha Rissanen and Anna Hurttu, "Isis haluaisi minut - näin taistelijoita värvätään Suomessa [Isis would want me – How fighters are recruited in Finland]," Yle, 17 June, 2015. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-8066530>.

<sup>55</sup> Antti Koistinen, "Supo: Suomessa toimivista terroristivärvääjistä tihkuu aiempaa enemmän tietoja [Supo: Supo: More information about terrorist recruiters in Finland than before]," Yle, 6 September, 2014. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-7456680>.

## Propaganda

While internet has provided possibilities for radicalisation and recruitment activities by local activists (and on rare occasions, by foreign activists<sup>56</sup>), it has also provided an effective platform for various types of jihadist actors to disseminate their material, targeting specific audiences regardless of geographical proximity. IS in particular has allocated substantial resources for this purpose. In fact, it has been noted in Finland (especially in 2013–2014) how material produced by IS has been disseminated at discussion forums used by Muslims, as well as on various social media platforms.

There are also examples of supporters translating such material (for example speeches by Abu Muhammad al-Adnani) into Finnish and disseminating it to local target audiences. The most important example of this is An-Nida Media, a blog, which translated content from various IS online publications into Finnish. It was active for several months between 2016 and 2017.<sup>57</sup> There is also a discussion forum, which had jihadist content and views, shared especially by two individuals – a domestic extremist who was later sentenced for his pro-IS posts and a female returnee from Syria. The postings on the forum have attracted some readership but only a low level of interaction from content consumers. Overall, the amount of jihadist material in Finnish has remained small throughout the decade.

The most visible and probably also most consequential form of online jihadist material in Finnish have been the content created by Finnish foreign fighters, and those who have joined IS in particular, on various social media platforms. We will return to this briefly in the next section.

## Financing

It is clear that money has been sent from Finland to various jihadist groups operating abroad, such as Al-Shabaab and Ansar al-Islam. In fact, authorities have consistently identified fundraising as a key manifestation of non-violent jihadist activism in Finland throughout the 2010s.<sup>58</sup> However, there are very few details available on what these activities actually entail apart from few criminal investigations, which have rarely led to charges being filed and never to upheld convictions on crimes with terrorist intent. However, the assets of a small number of individuals and associations have been frozen under anti-terrorism legislation, mainly individuals directly or indirectly connected to the foreign fighter mobilisations to Syria and Iraq or al-Shabaab support activities.

Broadly speaking, fundraising in Finland is usually carried out by individual extremists or small groups belonging to various diasporas from Muslim-majority countries, and the money is funnelled through various unofficial networks and middlemen (one example being the Hawala system).<sup>59</sup> This has made it exceedingly challenging for the authorities to monitor the flow of funds. Connected to developments in the 2010s, especially the foreign fighter mobilisation to Syria and Iraq, new forms of financing have also emerged. The main form has been self-financing, i.e. foreign fighters financing their own activism and travel to the conflict zone. Additionally, some

56 For example, see Pekka Lehtinen, "17-vuotias kantasuomalainen "Jouni" halusi tarkka-ampujaksi – Imaami värväsi ummikkopojan terroristiryhmään Syyriaan [17 year old Finnish "Jouni" wanted to become a sharpshooter: Imam recruited an inexperienced boy to a terrorist group in Syria]," MTV Uutiset, 19 September, 2016. Available at: <https://www.mtvuutiset.fi/artikkeli/17-vuotias-jouni-halusi-tarkka-ampujaksi-imaami-varvasi-netissa-ummikon-suomalaispojan-terroristiryhmaan-syyriaan/6078546#gs.yz0sud>.

57 For more on translations and this blog, see Malkki and Pohjonen, "Jihadist Online Communication and Finland", p. 70–75.

58 For example, see: Ministry of the Interior, Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 2/2013, p. 9; Supo, National Security Review 2020.

59 Ville Juutilainen, Kati Pehkonen and Riikka Kurki, "Starttirahaa pyhään sotaan [start-up money for holy war]," Yle, 1 April, 2019. Available at: <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2019/04/01/talousrikoksia-hyvauskoisten-lahjoituksia-pikavippeja-nain-terrorisma>.

have also taken part in microfinancing<sup>60</sup>, i.e. becoming a source of funds for the armed groups they joined after arriving in the conflict zone.

Funds for jihadist activities have come from various sources. These include criminal activities (especially tax, loan, and credit frauds), social benefits, and fraudulent fundraising for charity. Individual participants have also used their own income and savings to fund the activities. Furthermore, there are indications that money accumulated through legal business activities has been transferred to jihadist groups or individuals connected to them.<sup>61</sup>

## Incitement and Threats

Online behaviour of individual jihadist activists have included incitement to violent attacks, as well as threats about carrying an attack. There are several notable examples of incitement and threats, both by Finnish foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, and domestic activists. For example, a foreign fighter using the name Abu Hurairah al-Finlandi, who had travelled to the conflict zone from Finland in 2014 (and became the country's first-ever jihadist suicide attacker in 2015<sup>62</sup>), threatened several Finnish politicians and controversial political figures. These threats became public when the politicians who had received the threats spoke about the messages in their blogs and on social media.<sup>63</sup> Around the same time, Umm Shu'ayb as-Somali (a member of Finland's Somali diaspora who left for Syria with her husband, reportedly invited by the husband's cousin) posted a threat against Shia Muslims living in Finland on Facebook.<sup>64</sup>

Locally, a Finnish convert, who is a known IS sympathiser and a key contributor in the aforementioned jihadist-minded discussion forum, received a suspended sentence in the Helsinki District Court in October 2017 for agitation of hatred against Shias and for distributing depictions of violence.<sup>65</sup>

In recent years, the Finnish National Bureau of Investigation has investigated several cases in which threats of jihadism-related violence have been posted online. The most well-known case is the threat directed at the Temppeliaukio Church in Helsinki in June 2017. The police carried out an operation and maintained elevated preparedness near the church for several days. The operation was said to have been prompted by suspected preparation of a terror attack against the church and triggered by a tip received by the police. Upon further investigation, the threat was ruled out, which indicates that there was no concrete threat of an attack behind the tip.<sup>66</sup>

60 On terrorist micro-financing, see Magnus Ranstorp, "Microfinancing the Caliphate: How the Islamic State is Unlocking the Assets of European Recruits," *CTC Sentinel* 9, No. 5 (May 2016). Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/microfinancing-the-caliphate-how-the-islamic-state-is-unlocking-the-assets-of-european-recruits/>.

61 Ibid., Malkki and Saarinen, *Jihadism in Finland*, p. 92.

62 Yle, "Isis claims suicide attack by Finnish national," 14 September, 2015. Available at: [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/isis\\_claims\\_suicide\\_attack\\_by\\_finnish\\_national/8303213](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/isis_claims_suicide_attack_by_finnish_national/8303213).

63 Sara Rigatelli, "Perussuomalaisen nettiuhkaaja on todennäköisesti porilainen Isis-taistelija [Person posing posing threats against the Finns Party is likely an Isis fighter from Pori]," Yle, 9 January, 2015. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-7728515>. Turun Sanomat, "Porilaismiestä epäillään poliitikkojen uhkaamisesta terrorilla [Man from Pori suspected of threatening politicians with terror]," 17 March, 2015; Demokraatti, "KRP tutkii: Poliitikkoja on uhkailtu väkivallalla [National Bureau of Investigation investigates: Politicians threatened with violence]," 15 March, 2015.

64 Yle, "Suomalainen mahdollinen naisjihadisti uhkailee shiiamuslimeja Facebookissa [Potential female jihadist from Finland threatens Shia Muslims on Facebook]," 19 June, 2014. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-7309306>.

65 Ossi Mansikka, "Isisiä tukenut suomalainen 45 päivän ehdolliseen vankeuteen - houkutteli terroritekoihin ja solvasi shioja [Isis supporting Finn gets a 45-day probation order – incited to terrorist attacks and insulted Shias]," Helsingin Sanomat, 6 October, 2017. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/paivanlehti/07102017/art-2000005397919.html>. For more about this forum, see Malkki and Pohjonen, *Jihadist Online Communication and Finland*, p. 75.

66 Kaisu Jansson and Johanna Mattinen, "Jouni palasi Syyriasta hengissä, naisten epäiltiin värvänneen lapsensa – Ylen selvitys paljastaa, millaisia ovat terrorismitutkinnat Suomessa [Jouni returned from Syria alive, women were suspected of recruiting their children – Yle's report reveals what terrorism investigations in Finland are like]," Yle, 3 April, 2019. Available at: <https://yle.fi/>

## Plots and Attacks

To date, there has been only incident in Finland that can be considered a jihadist terror attack – a knife attack that took place in Turku on 18 August 2017. It was carried out by a Moroccan citizen and asylum-seeker, Abderrahman Bouanane. He used a kitchen knife to stab people indiscriminately in the market square and its vicinity. He was immediately chased by passers-by and was quickly stopped and detained by the police. Before that, he managed to kill two people and injure several others.<sup>67</sup> It is also the only known case of an individual staying in Finland or a long-time Finnish resident carrying out a violent jihadist attack in a Western country. To the best of our knowledge, there have not been any serious attack plots discovered by the police in Finland, at least not to the extent that there would have been grounds for pressing charges.

It appears Bouanane, who had registered as an asylum-seeker in Finland two years earlier, had limited contact with local jihadist activists or networks. However, in spring and summer 2017, Bouanane discussed religious matters with his Moroccan friends on several occasions, expressing views sympathetic with IS. His radicalisation seems to have intensified during Ramadan (around June 2017). During this time, he met an Uzbek individual sympathetic towards IS in a mosque in Turku. His impact on Bouanane's thoughts and plans remains unclear as he left Finland prior to the attack, and the police has been unable to detain and interrogate him. Bouanane carried out the attack after short consideration and without careful planning. Just before the attack, Bouanane recorded two video messages and uploaded them to at least three Telegram discussion groups.<sup>68</sup> To our knowledge, IS has never claimed responsibility for the attack in any of its official publications.

## Foreign Fighting

Foreign fighting has been by far the most significant form of violent jihadist activism in Finland in the 2010s. This is due to the unprecedented mobilisation of Finnish residents to the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq. While motivations for travelling have varied, especially during the early months of the mobilisation, most have sought to join jihadist groups, predominantly IS.<sup>69</sup> To date, Finnish authorities have identified more than eighty individuals and thirty under-aged minors who have travelled to the conflict zone. The actual number is likely higher, as not all the cases may have come to the attention of the authorities.<sup>70</sup> A small number of the minors have reached adulthood in the conflict zone. While information about minors and their activities in the conflict zone is scarce, it is likely at least some of them have been exposed to indoctrination, forced marriage, or taking part in armed training or combat as has been reported in the Finnish press.<sup>71</sup> On top

uutiset/3-10719565. Anu-Elina Ervasti, Ossi Mansikka and Mikko Paakkanen, "Krp: Temppeliaukion kirkon suuroperaatio johtui terrori-iskuun varautumisesta - poliisin mukaan välitöntä uhkaa ei ole [NBI: Big operation at Temppeliaukio church was due to preparing for a terrorist attack – according to the police, there is no immediate threat]," Helsingin Sanomat, 19 June, 2017. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000005261315.html>. Kimmo Oksanen, "Temppeliaukion kirkolle rakennetaan pysyvät esteet terrori-iskun varalle - Kirkkoherra: 'Ovesta voi ajaa suoraan sisään ja raamit kaulassa alttarille asti' [Permanent barriers will be built at Temppeliaukio church in case of terrorist attack – Minister: 'it is possible to drive through the door all the way to the altar']," Helsingin Sanomat, 17 August, 2017. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000005328869.html>.

67 For details of this incident, see Safety Investigation Authority, Turku Stabbings.

68 Ibid.; Yle, "Suspected Turku stabbing accomplice contacted authorities, NBI says," 6 September, 2018. Available at: [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/suspected\\_turku\\_stabbing\\_accomplice\\_contacted\\_authorities\\_nbi\\_says/10390075](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/suspected_turku_stabbing_accomplice_contacted_authorities_nbi_says/10390075).

69 In 2015, Supo disclosed that approximately 75 percent of the individuals identified by them (more than 50 persons) had attempted to join jihadist groups. Supo, Suojelupoliisin toimintaympäristö vuosina 2015-2016; Ministry of the Interior, Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 1/2017, p. 19.

70 Ministry of the Interior, Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 1/2018, p. 24.

71 Antti Kuronen, "Äiti vei Sumeyan Suomesta Isisin alueelle tokaluokkalaisena – tyttö päätyi naimisiin 13-vuotiaana ja kertoo nyt tarinansa Ylälle [Mother took Sumeya from Finland to the region controlled by Isis when she was on the second grade – she ended up getting married at the age of 13 and now tells her story to Yle]," Yle, 23 September, 2019. Available at: <https://yle.fi/>

**Table 1:** Number of counter-terrorism (CT) target individuals and foreign fighters<sup>72</sup>

	2012	2013	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
CT target individuals*	~200	N/A	almost 300	~310	~340	~370	~390	~390	~390
Foreign fighters**		~20	over 50	~70	~80	~80	~80	~80	~80

\*Not all counter-terrorism target individuals are involved in jihadism, but a large majority of them are.

\*\* Includes all adults who travelled to the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq.

of that, at least a couple of dozen children have been born to women from Finland during their stay in Syria and Iraq.<sup>73</sup>

As is the case with other European countries, travel from Finland to Syria and Iraq was at its height between 2012 and 2016. Besides those who made it to the destination, there are several people whose travel plans were interrupted as the Finnish authorities (or border and police officials from other countries) intervened either while they were preparing to the trip or already en route. If any subsequent travel to the conflict zone has taken place after 2016, it has mostly taken place without the authorities noticing it, as the official estimates of the number of people leaving for the area have remained largely unchanged since early 2017.<sup>74</sup>

There is still too little information about the Finnish foreign fighter contingent to allow for a similar and detailed analysis as has been conducted with for example Swedish or Italian foreign fighter contingents.<sup>75</sup> During our research, we identified approximately half of them. However, in many cases, detailed biographical data remained particularly elusive, especially in those cases where we were unable to locate individual foreign fighters' social media accounts or any online footprint. What makes identification and data collection difficult is that the contingent appears to be very diverse. Social networks have clearly played a role in mobilisation in Finland too, as several of those who left for Syria and Iraq knew each other, and in some cases also travelled together or in succession, directly or indirectly impacting subsequent decisions to travel and participate in the conflict. It seems, however, that there are several foreign fighters who appear not to have any visible contacts with any known jihadist networks in the country, at least preceding their travel to Syria and Iraq.

Reports published by the authorities give an idea about the composition of the contingent. In terms age and gender, the situation appears to be largely similar to other countries. According to Supo, the people leaving for the area are aged between 18 and 50 years old, and individuals in the age category 21–25 years old are the largest group. Women comprise more than 20

uutiset/3-10984963. Antti Kuronen and Päivi Kerola, "Suomalaisesta Mikaelista tuli kalifaatin lapsi: 'En tiennyt, että mulle tulee käymään elämässä näin' [Finnish Mikael became a child of the caliphate: 'I did not know that this would happen to me']," Yle, 25 August, 2019. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10936349>.

72 The information is based on annual reports and statements by Supo, as well as situation reports of violent extremism published by the Ministry of the Interior.

73 Sami Sillanpää, "11 naista ja heidän lapsensa [11 women and their children]," Helsingin Sanomat, 13 December, 2019. Available at <https://www.hs.fi/sunnuntai/art-2000006341623.html>.

74 For example, according to the situation overview on violent extremism in Finland (1/2017) published by the Ministry of the Interior, nearly 80 people have left for the area (p. 19).

75 Linus Gustafsson and Magnus Ranstorp, "Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq. An Analysis of Open-source Intelligence and Statistical Data," (Swedish Defence University/Center for Asymmetric Threat Studies, 2017). Available at <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1110355/FULLTEXT01.pdf>; Francesco Marone and Lorenzo Vidino, "Destination Jihad: Italy's Foreign Fighters," *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* (2019). Available at <http://icct.nl/app/uploads/2019/03/Marone-Vidino-Italys-Foreign-Fighters-March2019.pdf>.

percent of the people known by the authorities to have left for the area.<sup>76</sup> Even though the caliphate created by IS has been particularly appealing to Western female foreign fighters, a small number of Finnish women already had travelled before its declaration in summer 2014. First cases known to the authors occurred in between mid- and late 2012, and in early 2013. Most of the approximately twenty Finland-originated women were of Finnish citizens of Somali background or Finnish converts. A large proportion of the women travelled with their husbands, although some have also made the trip alone, and married after arrival. In one case, women in two close families played a key role in their adult sons deciding to travel and join IS.

In terms of ethnic background, the Finnish contingent appears very heterogeneous, reflecting the multi-ethnic character of Finland's Muslim population. According to a report published by the Ministry of the Interior, there were people from nineteen different ethnic groups among the seventy individuals that had left Finland for the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq by the year 2015. Arabs, Somalis, Kurds, and Finnish converts were some of the groups most strongly represented.<sup>77</sup> Most of them had, however, been born or lived for a longer time in Finland, as a total of 62 percent of all foreign fighters were Finnish citizens.<sup>78</sup>

## Mobilisation and Networks

Research has already shown that social contacts and networks have played a key role in the foreign fighter mobilisation in various European countries.<sup>79</sup> This has been the case also with those individuals who left from Finland to Syria and Iraq. Many of those who travelled had friends or family members who had made the journey earlier. It is this kind of informal peer-to-peer recruitment, facilitation, and radicalisation that has undoubtedly played the most important role in the case of Finland. One reason for friendships and family relationship having been particularly important in Finland seems to be that the country has had a relative lack of charismatic and skilful entrepreneurs, radicalisation hubs or enabling environments open to jihadist activism.

Jihadist networks predating the conflict in Syria and Iraq have played a role in the Finnish mobilisation, particularly among converts, but does not account for it in its entirety. Among the foreign fighters are several individuals connected to the Rawti Shax. Many of the publicly known details about them originate from an investigation jointly carried out by a special unit of the Italian police and the intelligence authorities of a number of other European countries in the early 2010s. At least four individuals who have lived in Finland are mentioned in these documents. Three have travelled to Syria and Iraq. It has also been reported in two other cases that individuals close to the network have taken their children to Iraq without the consent of the other parent. It is believed that among the individuals are two former leaders of the Finnish Rawti Shax cell – one of whom was the leader before embarking to Syria. He travelled to Syria and Iraq in March 2014 and was killed in the conflict zone while fighting for IS in December of the same year. He was one of the Finns whose forms were among the leaked documents completed as part of the IS arrival interviews.<sup>80</sup>

76 Ministry of the Interior, Violent extremism in Finland - situation overview 1/2018, p. 27.

77 This is unsurprising in the light of the statistics on mother tongue of inhabitants in Finland. See, for example, Statistics Finland, "Population," [https://www.tilastokeskus.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk\\_vaesto\\_en.html](https://www.tilastokeskus.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto_en.html).

78 Ministry of the Interior, Violent Extremism in Finland – situation overview 2/2015, p. 16.

79 See e.g. Sean C. Reynolds & Mohammed M. Hafez, "Social Network Analysis of German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol. 31, No. 4 (2019).

80 Jukka Huusko, Jussi Niemeläinen, Kalle Silfverberg and Jukka Petäjä, "Neljä suuren jihadistiringin jäsenellä yhteys Suomeen – taustalla Norjassa asuva saarnaaja [Four individuals involved in a large jihadist group has connection to Finland – Preacher living in Norway behind it]," *Helsingin Sanomat*, 12 November, 2015. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/ulkomaat/art-200002865915.html>. Sara Rigatelli, "Isisin vuodetulla jäsenlistalla on ainakin viisi suomalaistaistelijaa [Leaked Isis member list includes at least five Finnish fighters]," *Yle* 23 March 2016. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-8759501>. About the investigation,

Additionally, the earlier networks among converts have also affected the mobilisation. Several had been active in Islamin aika and Helsingin muslimit. The Roihuvuori mosque, ran by Helsingin muslimit, seems to have functioned as a meeting point for several people who travelled to Syria and Iraq. Within the same broader Salafist milieu, a key figure in the women's network established in mid-2000s appears to have encouraged her friends to leave for Syria and Iraq. Several travelled to the conflict zone, and subsequently ended up in the al-Hol camp after the fall of Baghuz in early 2019. The woman herself also visited Syria. She tried to travel back there with her children, but her journey was interrupted in Ukraine.<sup>81</sup>

Based on what is known about the background of those who left for Syria and Iraq, the links to the prior activism around al-Shabaab appear not to be particularly important, but not entirely non-existent. Namely, the main defendant in the aforementioned court case about financing al-Shabaab left for Syria to join IS, together with his family, consisting of Finnish female convert and their children.<sup>82</sup> While several other men and women of Somali descent are among the Finnish contingent, vast majority of them appear to have had no interest in joining al-Shabaab, although at least two individuals – a married couple – were reportedly suspected of trying to join the group when visiting their family members in Somalia in early 2013. Instead, they returned to Finland and left for Syria shortly thereafter.

At least a few foreign fighters living outside the larger population centres appear to have found relevant peer groups and contacts online, which have likely played a key role in their personal trajectories and decisions to travel to the conflict zone. The most well-known example is a young Finnish convert known as Abu Ibrahim al-Finlandi. He attracted publicity in the international press in spring 2015 when complaining about how difficult it was to find a wife in Syria.<sup>83</sup> The convert, who had been socially reserved and was seemingly suffering from psychological and life-management issues, found friends from Norway and Latvia online. According to Norwegian press reports, all three travelled to Syria, and Abu Ibrahim and his Latvian convert friend met in Helsinki before the departure.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, online platforms have offered an alternative for finding social connections to individuals who struggle to form and maintain relationships in their everyday life. Furthermore, their relevance may be particularly pronounced in areas where there are few possibilities for offline interaction with like-minded people, such as Finland which is a geographically big country and has only small jihadist networks which primarily concentrate on the southern and southwestern parts of the country.

Various social media platforms and encrypted instant messaging services have also enabled communications between those already in Syria and Iraq and their contacts still residing in Finland. Many who have travelled to Syria and Iraq as foreign fighters are known to have also encouraged others – both directly and indirectly – to travel to the conflict zone. They have acted as sources of inspiration and role models, and in some cases even as functioned as radicalisers, recruiters and facilitators for their respective armed groups, e.g. Kataib al-Muhajiroun and Jabhat al-Nusra early on in the mobilisation, and IS from spring 2013 onwards. Finnish foreign fighters have also

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see BBC, "Jihadist cell in Europe 'sought recruits for Iraq and Syria'," 12 November, 2015. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34802317>.

81 Marttinen and Kilpamäki, "Sanna eli tavallista elämää."

82 Sara Rigatelli, "Somalimiehen hätkähdyttävä tarina: Vapautui Suomessa terrorismituomiosta, oli jo Isisissä [Astonishing story of Somali man: When acquitted from a terrorism sentence in Finland, had already joined Isis]," Yle, 4 March, 2017. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-9460874>.

83 Abu Hamza as-Somali, another ISIS fighter from Finland, also appears in a picture accompanying a news story in the British Daily Mail newspaper. Tom Wyke, "The ISIS Lonely Hearts Club: British Fighter 'Hungry Hamza' and his undateable friends moan about being unable to find a jihadi bride in Syria," Daily Mail, 10 April, 2015. Available at: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3033566/The-ISIS-Lonely-Hearts-Club-British-fighter-Hungry-Hamza-undateable-friends-moan-unable-jihadi-bride-Syria.html>.

84 Adresseavisen, "Hellig overbevist: De frafalne - Del 1: Hvem er Abu Mohammed al-Norwiji?" 16 June, 2017. Available at: <https://www.adressa.no/pluss/magasin/2017/06/16/Hvem-er-Abu-Mohammed-al-Norwiji-14878800.ece>.

disseminated jihadist material on their social media accounts, and occasionally also explained its content in Finnish while also providing pro-jihadist content based on their experiences in the conflict zone.<sup>85</sup>

## Finnish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq

Determining what roles Finnish foreign fighters have had in their respective armed groups, or what kinds of activism they have participated in the conflict zone is extremely challenging, even for the authorities. Based on publicly available information most of them (though not all) have joined jihadist groups, and especially IS. However, this does not say much about what they have been doing as the groups have likely provided opportunities to participate in its operations in a wide range of manners, from online proselytising and recruitment to fighting and from teaching and nursing to moral policing. Those that have undertaken the Finnish military service may have also been valuable instructors or trainers for fresh recruits in various skillsets they had acquired while in the Finnish Defence Forces.<sup>86</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests that several foreign fighters had completed their military service before travelling to the conflict zone. As is the case with foreign fighters more broadly, not all Finnish individuals who joined armed groups in Syria and Iraq have taken part in fighting. Instead, their roles and responsibilities likely reflect whatever skills they brought to their respective groups, and the groups' needs. Very few have openly described their combat experience or other activities in the region in media interviews, on their social media accounts or other online fora, but this may reveal less about their roles in IS than the possible implications that sharing such information might have.

According to official reports, a large proportion of those travelling from Finland to the region have sought to take part in violent activities in the ranks of the jihadist groups. Many are also known to have done so, although the examples below are by no means exhaustive. Abu Salamah al-Finlandi, who was among the first Finnish foreign fighters to arrive in the conflict zone, was killed – reportedly by Lebanese Hezbollah – in an operation of the Jaish al-Muhajirin wal-Ansar group in Aleppo in summer 2013.<sup>87</sup> Among other fatalities (estimated between fifteen and twenty-five in total<sup>88</sup>), there are at least Abu Mansour al-Somali and his cousin Abu Shu'ayb al-Somali as well as Finnish convert Abu Anas al-Finlandi. All three died while serving IS in various roles. According to media reports, Abu Mansour was killed while on guard duty in June 2014. According to his father, Abu Shu'ayb may have been killed in an air strike carried out by the anti-IS coalition in 2018.<sup>89</sup> Abu Anas was reportedly killed in the fighting against the troops of the Free Syrian Army in early 2014. Two individuals from Finland with connections to the Rawti Shax's Finnish cell and two Finnish residents of Bangladeshi origin are also reported to have been killed while fighting for IS.<sup>90</sup> And Abu Hurairah al-Finlandi, a Finnish-Pakistani foreign fighter, was reportedly killed while undertaking a suicide mission in Iraq in September 2015.<sup>91</sup> According to the reports disseminated

85 Malkki and Pohjonen, "Jihadist Online Communication and Finland."

86 Finland has a mandatory armed service (or alternatively unarmed civil service) for men. For more about the Finnish conscription system, see The Finnish Defence Forces, "Conscription – a Finnish choice," <https://puolustusvoimat.fi/en/finnish-conscription-system>.

87 Heikki Kauhanen, "Suomalainen kaatui Syyriassa – uusia lähtijöitä kymmenittäin [Finn deceased in Syria – dozens of new travellers]," *Turun Sanomat*, 1 August, 2013.

88 Ministry of the Interior, *Violent Extremism in Finland – Situational Overview 1/2018*, p. 24.

89 Anu Nousiainen, "Espoosta pyhään sotaan - islamistinuoret kertovat [From Espoo to holy war – islamist youths tell their story]," *Helsingin Sanomat* Kuukausiliite, October 20, 2014. Available at: <https://www.hs.fi/kuukausiliite/art-2000002766439.html>. Harun Maruf Hassan and Barkhad Kariye, "Somali Jihadist Killed in Syria," *VOA*, 14 January, 2018. Available at <https://www.voanews.com/amp/somali-jihadist-killed-in-syria/4207419.html>.

90 For example, see Dhaka Tribune, "Latest Bangladeshi Is fighter killed in Iraq is Taz Rahman," 12 May, 2017. Available at: <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2017/05/12/latest-bangladeshi-fighter-killed-iraq-taz-rahman>.

91 Yle, "Isis claims suicide attack by Finnish national".

in social media in summer 2018, an individual of Somali background who had left Finland and fought with Hayat Tahrir al-Sham group, was assassinated by IS in Syria. At least one woman, a Finnish convert widow of Abu Salamah al-Finland and Abu Mansour al-Somali – also an ex-wife of notorious Portuguese IS foreign fighter Nero Saraiva – has died in the conflict zone, although the circumstances around her death remain unknown.

Some of those that have left for the conflict areas have probably used the vocational skills acquired in Finland to the benefit of armed groups. Finland-originated individuals have reportedly worked at least as physiotherapists and ambulance drivers, although they have likely also had other roles.<sup>92</sup> Some have also worked as recruiters and facilitators. Abu Mansour, who has already been referred to above and who travelled to Syria in December 2012, invited his cousin Abu Shu'ayb and his wife (Umm Shu'ayb) to Syria, and the couple travelled to the country in early 2013.<sup>93</sup> According to Finnish criminal investigation records, previously mentioned Abu Salamah al-Finlandi served as a facilitator – possibly also a recruiter – for the group of friends frequenting the Roihuvuori mosque that then left for Syria. In fact, his role in the groups was head of the group's recruitment in Europe. However, he died before all members of the group had reached Syria, which probably prompted them to change their plans. Except for Abu Anas, who died in Syria in early 2014, it is unclear whether this group has been involved in violent activism in the region. It is likely that Abu Salamah also served as a role model and inspiration for his younger brother Abu Muusa al-Finlandi and his wife, who travelled to Syria and Iraq with their children in 2015. Abu Muusa is reported to have died after joining IS.

Women leaving for the area are known to have been quite active online on the behalf of IS. The widow of Abu Salamah al-Finlandi (and later also the widow of Abu Mansour al-Somali), a young Finnish female convert, disseminated material produced by IS on a Finnish discussion forum intended for Muslims. At the same time, the former wife of a person who had travelled to the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq from Roihuvuori, actively disseminated pro-IS material and views on the (now closed) UmmIrhah Twitter account, praising the atrocities of the group, including the James Foley execution. She had travelled to the conflict zone on two separate occasions, in 2013 and in 2014. She was one of the Finnish women who were detained in al-Hol camp.

Two other Finnish women, Umm Khaled (the convert wife of the main defendant in the Al-Shabaab trial) and Umm Musa (convert wife of a Bangladeshi fighter that had travelled to the conflict zone from Finland) have also appeared in official English-language IS publications, Dabiq and Rumiya. As already mentioned Umm Shu'ayb also achieved notoriety in Finland by threatening Shia Muslims living in Finland via her Facebook account.

## Current Status of the Finnish Contingent

What has happened to those over eighty adults who left from Finland to Syria and Iraq? At least fifteen to twenty-five individuals have died in the conflict zone. More than twenty foreign fighters had returned before October 2014.<sup>94</sup> While not much is publicly known about these initial returnees, their activities appear not to have caused too much concern for the authorities. However, a small minority of returnees have continued their involvement in jihadist activities since returning to Finland. These activities do not appear concerning enough or authorities do

92 Yaroslav Trofimov, "In Islamic State Stronghold of Raqqa, Foreign Fighters Dominate," Wall Street Journal, 4 February, 2015. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-islamic-state-stronghold-of-raqqa-foreign-fighters-dominate-1423087426>. Dhaka Tribune, "Latest Bangladeshi Is fighter killed in Iraq is Taz Rahman."

93 Nousiainen, "Espoosta pyhään sotaan - islamistinuoret kertovat."

94 Yrjö Kokkonen, "Supo: Syyriasta palannut noin 20 ihmistä Suomeen [Supo: About 20 individuals have returned from Syria to Finland]," Yle, 13 October, 2014. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-7526501>.

not have enough evidence for criminal prosecution, since very few charges have been brought to date. Only three people have prosecuted for terrorist crimes for their actions while in the conflict zone, and these charges were rejected by the court. While the individuals were found guilty of financial crimes they committed while funding their travel arrangements to the conflict zone and activities there, they were not charged with financing terrorism.<sup>95</sup>

From the remaining approximately forty individuals, eleven women ended up in the al-Hol camp after Baghuz in Syria was liberated from IS in early 2019. At least two, reportedly orphaned children born to a Finnish mother were repatriated to Finland in December 2019. At least four women and eleven children have managed to escape from the camp and return to Finland on their own accord between June and August 2020<sup>96</sup>, possibly logistically aided by officials of the Foreign Ministry of Finland. In December 2020, the Finnish government assisted in repatriating two women and their six children who had earlier been moved from al-Hol camp to al-Roj camp.<sup>97</sup> At least two male individuals are rumoured to be imprisoned in Syrian Defence Forces institutions elsewhere. There is no publicly available confirmed information regarding the others. It is very likely that the number of deaths is higher than official estimates, and it also cannot be discounted that some foreign fighters have moved on to other conflict zones or to other countries. For instance, at least one Finnish citizen has been arrested in Turkey in anti-IS raids in October 2020.<sup>98</sup>

The question surrounding the potential repatriation of Finnish women and children in the al-Hol camp has been a major issue of public debate and policy-making from March 2019 onwards when a Finnish convert who had lived under IS was interviewed by CNN.<sup>99</sup> According to the political guidelines adopted by the government in December 2019, Finland should seek to safeguard the best interests of the children in the camp and get them evacuated as quickly as possible. Adults may be considered for repatriation on case-by-case basis if it is deemed to be in the best interest of the child. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has communicated that it is still seeking to repatriate also those children (and if necessary, their mothers) who remain in the camps in Syria.<sup>100</sup>

So far, there has been very little information about their situation and authorities' plans in terms of possible prosecutions. As of late December 2020, the Finnish National Bureau of Investigation is still conducting their investigations on the female returnees, and there have been little information made available to the public about their progress.

95 District Court of Helsinki Judgment R17/8720, 24 January, 2018; Kaisu Jansson, "Käräjäoikeus hylkäsi kaikki syytteet suomalaismiesten terrorismirikoksista – tuomio tuli talousrikoksista [District Court dismissed all charges on terrorist crimes against Finnish men – sentenced for financial crimes]," Yle, 24 January, 2018. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10037043>.

96 Sara Rigatelli, "Al-Holista palasi jälleen äiti lapsineen Suomeen – UM myönsi matkustusasiakirjat mutta ei auttanut perhettä paossa [Another mother with children returned from Al-Hol to Finland – Ministry of Foreign Affairs granted the travel documents but did not help the family escape]," Yle, 1 August, 2020. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11475665>.

97 Sara Rigatelli, "Suomen viranomaiset hakivat kaksi al-Holin leirin naista ja kuusi lasta – UM kotiutti ensimmäistä kertaa äitejä [Finnish authorities repatriated to women and six children from al-Hol]," Yle, 20 December, 2020. Available at: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11707651>.

98 Yle, "Finnish citizen arrested in Turkey, suspected of involvement in terror group Isis," 7 October, 2020. Available at: [https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/finnish\\_citizen\\_arrested\\_in\\_turkey\\_suspected\\_of\\_involvement\\_in\\_terror\\_group\\_isis/11582603](https://yle.fi/uutiset/osasto/news/finnish_citizen_arrested_in_turkey_suspected_of_involvement_in_terror_group_isis/11582603).

99 MTV Uutiset, "Suomalainen Sanna avaa lisää CNN:n haastattelussa raakaa elämänsä Isis-vaimona [Finnish Sanna tells more about her brutal life as Isis wife in CNN interview]," 6 March, 2019. Available at: <https://www.mtvuutiset.fi/video/prog1060214#gs.yz1o4y>.

100 See, for example, Ilta-Sanomat, "Al-Hol-erityisedustaja Tanner leirillä vielä oleville lapsille: Emme ole teitäkään unohtaneet – näin hän kertoi suomalaisten tilanteesta [Special al-Hol envoy Tanner to children still in the camp: We have not forgotten about you either – this is what he told about the situation of the Finns]," 20 December, 2020. Available at: <https://www.is.fi/kotimaa/art-2000007694547.html>.

## Conclusion — Future of Jihadism in Finland

The conflict in Syria and Iraq has had a transformative effect on the broader European jihadi milieu. Throughout the paper, the authors have highlighted that this effect has not been limited to its traditional key nexuses – e.g. Germany, United Kingdom, Belgium and France. Instead, dual impact of the conflict in Syria and Iraq, and that of the IS have extended their ripples to more peripheral areas, where jihadism had long remained underdeveloped and manifested itself rarely. In the case of Finland, they have acted as an evolutionary catalyst, also putting Finland on the radar of various jihadist actors abroad in a heretofore unseen manner.

A decade ago, the Finnish jihadi milieu was small, underdeveloped, and isolated – but already showing signs of growth. Since then, the number of individuals involved in jihadism has doubled, the level of organisation has increased as multi-ethnic extremist networks emerged, and contacts between Finnish extremists and their counterparts abroad have become more direct and serious. Finland has experienced the largest mobilisation to Syria and Iraq in western countries relative to the size of Muslim population. This mobilisation has created a new generation of jihadi activists in Finland, one that is more experienced and locally and transnationally connected than before. While Finland will in no uncertain terms remain a peripheral country in the broader European jihadist milieu, this change has been very significant when compared to situation before the conflict.

Several open questions remain about what exactly has happened during the 2010s, as well as how and why these developments occurred. Understanding these dynamics would require conducting an analysis that extends well beyond the national context. Jihadist online material in Finnish is so scarce and many of those who left speak several other languages. Before their departure, they have undoubtedly interacted online with individuals from other countries and jihadi milieus. Which sites have they frequented, with whom have they talked? In the early days of the conflict, joining a jihadist group required having a reference or point of contact within the group. It is not clear how some of those who left from Finland came to acquire such access in order to join. Who were their facilitators and recommenders? How did they establish these contacts? Are there Finnish jihadi activists – either in Finland or abroad – who can function in the roles of recruiters or facilitators in the future? Overall, we do not know enough about the relationship between the centres and peripheries in jihadist networks in Europe.

It is clear that the developments described above have left a permanent mark to jihadism in Finland. What remains to be seen is how the milieu continues to evolve now that the mobilising force of the Syrian civil war and IS have largely diminished. The most active growth phase in Finland was already over by 2017, and since the situation has stabilised. In the 2019 Year Book, Supo estimated that “[n]o factors that would significantly affect the number of CT targets in the longer term are currently visible, though qualitative changes in conditions may occur.”<sup>101</sup>

There are several reasons to expect that the Finnish jihadist milieu will not devolve or revert to its pre-2011 state. Currently, there are more people active in the Finnish jihadi milieu than heretofore, they are more organised – albeit still relatively loosely – and they have reportedly become more directly and seriously connected to jihadist actors abroad. An increasing number of them have also experience in terrorist training or foreign fighting. This will likely mean that broader European developments and trends will be felt more strongly in Finland. The changes in size and networks may also make it easier to channel more extensive support from Finland to conflicts under way in other parts of the world.

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<sup>101</sup> Supo, Year Book 2019, p. 13. Available at: <https://supo.fi/en/year-book>.

The conflict in Syria and Iraq, the Finnish mobilisation to the conflict zone, and the country's participation in the anti-IS campaign has also made jihadist actors more aware of the existence of Finland, and the country is more visible than before in the content they produce. Finnish foreign fighters have taken information about their own societies with them, and possibly functioned as bridge builders between domestic activists, and networks and jihadist actors in the conflict zones to which they travelled. It has made it easier to put together more targeted communication for audiences in their home countries and to establish new connections between foreign jihadist actors and activists living in Finland. Many of the same factors and conditions prevail in Finland that motivated Petter Nesser and Thomas Hegghammer to present their pessimistic views on the future of jihadism in Europe.<sup>102</sup> This has the potential to have a strong impact on the phenomenon in Finland in the future.

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<sup>102</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, "The Future of Jihadism in Europe: A Pessimistic View," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol. 10, no. 6 (2016). Available at: <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/566>. Petter Nesser, "Military Interventions, Jihadi Networks, and Terrorist Entrepreneurs".

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