

South Africa

Introduction

This page provides a country-specific quantitative overview of the foreign terrorist fighter (FTF) phenomenon. This includes, where available, a breakdown of how many individuals departed from or have returned to the country as well as certain demographics within those groups. The data is laid out below in infographics, you can hover over a data point to see its exact figures. Where not enough data is available the table is grayed out. If you can assist in completing this data, please click fill out the questionnaire on our [contact page](#).

Below this information, the page also sets out in detail a qualitative review of the policy measures utilized by or available to the country in response to the FTF phenomenon and provides a list of additional reading material relevant to the FTF situation in the country.

Last updated: 14 April 2025.

South Africa		
Totals	Total (Departed)	60-120 ¹²
	Total (Non-Returned)	22 ³
	Total (Returned)	11-100 ⁴
Nationality (At Departure)	SA National	-
	Dual Citizen	-
	Resident	-
Gender	Males (Departed)	80-100 ⁵

¹ Schoeman, A. and Cachalia, R.C., 'Are ISIS returnees a risk for South Africa?', Institute for Security Studies (ISS), 23 May 2017, [Are ISIS returnees a risk for South Africa? - ISS Africa](#).

² 'What to do with SA's Isis brides? Plus 5 highlights from 'Vrye Weekblad'', Times Live, 7 February 2020, <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2020-02-07-what-to-do-with-sas-isis-brides-plus-5-highlights-from-vrye-weekblad/>.

³ Naidoo, M., 'Cape grandmom among 22 South Africans stuck in Syria's al-Hol camp', IOL, 3 March 2019, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/cape-grandmom-among-22-south-africans-stuck-in-syrias-al-hol-camp-19607257>.

⁴ Patel, K. and Essa, A., 'South Africans return home from ISIL-held territory', Al Jazeera, 12 September 2015, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/9/12/south-africans-return-home-from-isil-held-territory>; 'A total of 100 South Africans return home from Isis camps, terror threat in SA debated', SA News, 4 December 2018, <https://sa-news.com/a-total-of-100-south-africans-return-home-from-isis-camps-terror-threat-in-sa-debated/>.

⁵ Afrika, M.W. and Ngoepe, K., 'Government mulls repatriating Isis 'black widows' and children', IOL, 2 February 2020, <https://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/news/government-mulls-repatriating-isis-black-widows-and-children-41952239>.

	Females (Departed)	At least 1 ⁶
	Males (Returned)	-
	Females (Returned)	-
Parent Status	Female Parent (Non-Returned)	-
	Female Non-Parent (Non-Returned)	-
	Female Parent (Returned)	-
	Female Non-Parent (Returned)	-
Current Location (Non-Returned)	Died	20-50 ⁷
	In Camps	22 ⁸
	In Prison	-
	Operational (in region)	-
	Operational (other regions)	-
	Prosecuted (awaiting trial or convicted and in prison)	-
	Other (Unknown location)	-
Current Legal Status (Non-Returned)	Prosecuted	-
	Held Without Charges	-
	Citizenship Revoked	-
	Trials in Absentia	-
Current Status (Returned)	Citizenship Revoked	-
	Extradited to Third Country	-
	Prosecuted	-
	Post-release	-
	In Rehabilitation/Reintegration Program	-

⁶ Tayler, L., 'South Africa Should Bring Home Grandmother and Other Nationals from Northeast Syria', Human Rights Watch, 21 December 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/21/south-africa-should-bring-home-grandmother-and-other-nationals-northeast-syria>.

⁷ Afrika, M.W. and Ngoepe, K., 'Government mulls repatriating Isis 'black widows' and children', IOL, 2 February 2020, <https://www.iol.co.za/sundayindependent/news/government-mulls-repatriating-isis-black-widows-and-children-41952239>.

⁸ Naidoo, M., 'Cape grandmom among 22 South Africans stuck in Syria's al-Hol camp', IOL, 3 March 2019, <https://www.iol.co.za/news/cape-grandmom-among-22-south-africans-stuck-in-syrias-al-hol-camp-19607257>.

	Not prosecuted	-
Method of Return	Own Initiative	-
	Expelled	-
	Repatriated	-
Returnee Attacks	n/a	-

Preventive measures

The 2013 National Counter-terrorism Strategy in South Africa, which continues to be implemented, is classified confidential because it is operational in nature. The Strategy is based on five pillars: 1) Understanding and Prediction; 2) Prevent; 3) Mitigation; 4) Combating; and 5) Response – Dealing with the Consequences. It is supported by an Implementation Plan – as well as time frames for implementation, assessment, and reassessment – and is updated annually.

Administrative measures

The [Protection of Constitutional Democracy against Terrorist and Related Activities Act \(No 33 of 2004\)](#) as amended by [Act 23 of 2022](#) does not contain any provision for detention without trial of terrorist suspects. Detention only occurs in conformity with the principles and procedures of the criminal law. There is a general provision in the South African Constitution prohibiting detention without trial in section 12(1)(b).

However, there is some provision for limited detention without trial following the declaration of a 'state of emergency' in s 37 of the South African Constitution. According to the [State of Emergency Act \(No 64 of 1997\)](#) and the [Constitution of South Africa, s 37\(1\)\(a\)-\(b\)](#) a state of emergency can be declared by an Act of Parliament only when two conditions are satisfied: 'the life of the nation is threatened by war, invasion, general insurrection, disorder, natural disaster or other public emergency; and...the declaration is necessary to restore peace and order.'

[Section 37\(6\)\(e\) of the Constitution](#) requires judicial review no later than ten days after the commencement of detention. Thereafter, the detainee may commence proceedings for a further judicial review pursuant to s 37(6)(f). The right to review includes the right of the detained person to appear before the court in person and to make representations against continued detention. The detainee must be furnished with written reasons for detention two days prior to any hearing. Once a person has been detained without trial in a state of emergency, and their release is ordered by a court, they cannot be re-detained. States of emergency are temporally finite, lasting for 21 days in the first instance, and can only be extended by the National Assembly for a maximum period of three months at a time.

The Minister may **revoke citizenship/deprive an individual of nationality** if the citizen has been sentenced in any country to a period of imprisonment of no less than 12

months for an offense that would also constitute an offense in South Africa. Alternatively, it may be revoked/deprived if the Minister is satisfied that it is in the public interest that such citizen shall cease to be a South African citizen. These regulations are contained in the [South African Citizen Act 88 of 1995](#).

Criminal and surveillance measures

In South Africa, the [Act No 23 of 2022](#) amending the [Protection of Constitutional Democracy against Terrorist and Related Activities Act 2004](#) repealed and updated previous laws dealing with terrorism. **Incitement** is addressed by [Section 14 of Act No 33 of 2004](#), which criminalizes threatening, attempting, conspiring and inducing another person to commit an offense under the Act. This includes, pursuant to subsection (d), inciting or inducing another person to commit an offense.

Recruitment for a terrorist organization is criminalized under amended [Section 3 of Act No 33 of 2004](#), which addresses 'offences associated or connected with terrorist activities'. More specifically, subsection (2)(c) makes it an offense to recruit any entity to receive training or instruction, while [amended](#) section (2)(d) makes it an offense to recruit any entity or compel, intimidate, force, coerce, induce or cause any person, including a vulnerable person, to join an entity connected to the engagement in a terrorist activity. An entity is defined in amended [Section 1 of Act No 33 of 2004](#) as 'a natural person, or a group of two or more natural persons [...] or any incorporated association or organisation or other legal person, and includes, where appropriate, a cell, unit, section, subgroup or branch thereof or any combination thereof.'

Various forms of support or participation, are criminalized under [Section 3 of Act No 33 of 2004](#). Subsection (1) makes it an offense to do 'anything which will, or is likely to, enhance the ability of any entity to engage in a terrorist activity'. Amended subsection (2) criminalizes any person who 'solicits support for or gives support to an entity [...] connected with the engagement in a terrorist activity', including the proliferation of weapons or providing software or hardware tools. In addition, [Section 14 of Act No 33 of 2004](#) provide for applicable modes of liability by criminalizing acts which constitute aiding and abetting, attempting, and conspiring with another person to commit a terrorist act. Finally, amended [Section 11 of Act No 33 of 2004](#) makes it an offense to harbor or conceal those who have committed or are likely to commit an act of terrorism.

Travel for terrorist purposes is criminalized by amended Section 3 subsection (1b). Following the 2022 amendment, **attempted travel** is also criminalized by [newly inserted Section 4A](#).

Receiving and providing training are criminalized [by Section 3 of Act No 33 of 2004](#) subsection (2)(c), according to which it is an offense to provide, receive or participate in training connected with engagement in a terrorist activity.

Following the 2022 amendment, [newly inserted Section 3A](#) of the Act No 33 of 2004 now also criminalizes the **sharing of terrorism related material** which is encouraging

others to commit a terrorist crime or providing assistance on how to commit such crimes.

Terrorism financing is criminalized by [Section 4 of the Act No 33 of 2004](#) which, following the 2022 amendment, prohibits to provide economic support or making 'property' available to entities or individuals designated as terrorist by the United Nations. 'Property' thereby also includes cryptocurrency, as provided for by amended Section 1 subsection (1xx)

Finally, engaging in a terrorist activity is defined under [Section 1 Act of No 33 of 2004](#) as including '**the performance of an act in preparation for or planning of**' a terrorist activity, which is criminalized by [Section 2 of Act No 33 of 2004](#).

Rehabilitation and reintegration measures

Section 41(1) of the South African [Correctional Services Act \(Act 111 of 1998\)](#) stipulates that all offender rehabilitation centers that work under the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) must provide programs and activities that meet the rehabilitation needs of offenders. This Act and the [2005 White Paper on Corrections](#) put a substantial responsibility on the DCS since they see rehabilitation as a right of offenders and not as a conditional luxury that is subject to accessible resources. Therefore, rehabilitation programs must guarantee that sentenced offenders do not again depend on criminal activities upon their release.

The DCS is responsible for offering and implementing rehabilitative needs-based programs aimed at offenders imprisoned by the court of law. These programs include psychological services, social work services, health services, skills development, and spiritual care. However, a major challenge is to ensure that all offenders are positively developed and supported whilst they are incarcerated, while also taking into account that participation in these programs is voluntary.

During the first stage, offenders are evaluated by psychologists from the Directorate of Psychological Services by means of interviewing, psychometric tests and observations within a group situation, feedback from functional personnel and consultation with any person who knows the offender. Programs are then being designed based on the information obtained from these interviews and tests. Individual therapy, group therapy and family therapy are used by psychologists to ensure the effective treatment of offenders, which will in turn strengthen their rehabilitation. The Directorate of Social Work Services offers professional services to offenders by means of professional social workers. These services include therapeutic, informative, supportive, crisis intervention, development, administrative, assessment and evaluation services. Social work services empower offenders with social functioning skills and help them solve their own problems. Offenders are also helped to reintegrate successfully into society via different activities involving casework, group work and community work. Health care services offered by the Directorate of Health Care Services are aimed at promoting the health of the offender population in general. In this process, offenders with health problems are identified so that their needs can be assessed for them to be given the necessary treatment. A skills

development program is also part of the rehabilitation services offered by the DCS. The Directorate of Skills Development in correctional centers offers programs that are in line with the South African Constitution, which states that every citizen is entitled to education (Section 29). Via the skills development program, offenders take part in activities that improve their knowledge, skills and attributes, thus enhancing their social functioning. Furthermore, religious workers play an important role in the spiritual and moral development of inmates, as well as in providing ongoing guidance and support. In South African correctional centers, a variety of religious and spiritual care workers assist offenders with personal, spiritual care, familial support and/or counseling services representative of all denominations.

Outside of the government program, there are also South African NGOs involved in rehabilitation, in partnership with the DCS. Examples include Khulisa Social Solutions and the National Institute for Crime Prevention and Re-integration of Offenders (NICRO). These NGOs have contributed to the fight against and eradication of crime from the early stages through offender rehabilitation and reintegration programs which attempt to break the cycle of crime and violence in South African society.

Khulisa Social Solutions (KSS) (formerly Khulisa Crime Prevention Initiative) was established in 1997. It aimed at addressing crime holistically and its different programs were intended to intervene at the various stages in the cycle of crime. The types of programs run by Khulisa include corrections programs, skills development, restorative justice programs, community participation programs, as well as pre- and post-release programs. One of its key initiatives, the 'My Path Programme' was a year-long program designed for individuals who need corrective behavior therapy and personal development. The program aimed to promote the exploration of participants themselves as 'emotional, social, physical and psychological' beings in addition to 'the discovery of creative abilities'. The 'My Path Programme' was offered for offenders who have a minimum of two years (remaining) to serve in prison. Furthermore, Khulisa builds partnerships with potential employers to make jobs available for offenders upon release and tries to employ ex-offenders whenever possible. A follow-up on this is the 'I'm Coming Out Programme' that prepares offenders for successful reintegration into the community by reviewing their strengths and weaknesses and anticipating challenges that they will face. Each participant develops a personal action plan on how to prevent relapse, meet the community's expectations, manage money and search for employment.

The **National Institute for Crime Prevention and Re-integration of Offenders (NICRO)**'s 'Diversion Programme' is aimed at child, adolescent or adult offenders accused of less serious, non-violent crimes. Diversion is based on the principles of restorative justice, which requires that offenders 1) accept responsibility for the crime committed and make amends for their misdeeds and 2) initiate a healing process for themselves, their families, the victim(s) and the community. The goal of the program is to give offenders accused of less serious, non-violent crimes a second chance to address the root causes of the criminal behavior through an appropriate diversion program or intervention. Another one of its programs, the 'Tough Enough Program' starts in prison and targets prisoners remaining with six or less months to serve of their sentence. The program is conducted over a period of between nine to twelve

months. This program assists offenders and their families to explore the opportunities and possibilities in reintegrating into their community.

Additional Resources

Cachalia, R.C. et al., 'Violent Extremism in South Africa: Assessing the Current Threat', Institute for Security Studies, 17 May 2017, <https://issafrica.org/research/southern-africa-report/violent-extremism-in-south-africa-assessing-the-current-threat>

Githing'u, B., 'The Counterterrorism Conundrum: Exploring the Evolution of South Africa's Extremist Networks', Hudson Institute, 23 October 2021, <https://www.hudson.org/research/17128-the-counterterrorism-conundrum-exploring-the-evolution-of-south-africa-s-extremist-networks>

Government of South Africa, Department of Correctional Services, Annual Report 2020/21, <http://www.dcs.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/DCS-AR-202021-FINAL-SIGNED.pdf>

Khulisa's website

Murhula, P.B.B. and Singh, S.B., 'A Critical Analysis on Offenders Rehabilitation Approach in South Africa: A Review of the Literature', African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies: AJCJS, 12:1, February 2019, https://www.umes.edu/uploadedFiles/_WEBSITES/AJCJS/Content/VOL12.1.%20MURHULA%20FINAL.pdf

NICRO's website

Singh, S.B., 'Offender Rehabilitation and Reintegration: A South African Perspective', Journal of Social Sciences, January 2016, 46:1, p. 1–10, DOI: 10.1080/09718923.2016.11893506.