Assessing Gender Perspectives in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Practices

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Abstract

Despite the fact that research indicates that it is important to integrate a gender based approach for effective risk assessment and implementation of counter-terrorism (CT) and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) practices, such as rehabilitation and reintegration, our assessment of academic and grey literature on gender perspectives in CT and P/CVE practices shows that most of these practices remain gender-blind and tend to reproduce gender norms and stereotypes, while ignoring the complexity of women's and men's involvement in extremism. In this report, the authors did a thorough literature review of academic and grey literature published between 2014 and 2024, and conducted ten interviews to reflect on gender perspectives in CT and P/CVE practices. After a reflection on persisting gender construction, biases, and other problematic perspectives, the report focuses on the gender perspectives in analytical frameworks and toolkits used, for instance, for risk assessments. Next, the report elaborates on the gender perspectives in the implementation of the intervention phases, namely from law enforcement interventions, to exit processes. In the general conclusion, the authors argue that gender constructs, roles, and norms, and the way these are taken into consideration in the various P/CVE interventions, heavily impact the effectiveness of these efforts. They also conclude that there is a potential of an aggravating sequence of gender (mis)conceptions, since the gender constructs used in the risk assessments inform following interventions, such as disengagement, deradicalisation, and rehabilitation processes. The report ends with a set of recommendations tailored to different target groups.

Keywords: gender, radicalisation, violent extremism, risk assessment, rehabilitation, reintegration, terrorism, counter-terrorism, countering and preventing violent extremism

Introduction

Gender constructs and expectations heavily impact the different stages involved in radicalisation to violent extremism, and deradicalisation and disengagement. As such, they too shape prevention and rehabilitation programmes, as well as the policies that guide these. While gender is broadly recognised as a crucial factor in determining all aspects of extremism and counter-extremism, existing research highlights that most of our practices are, in fact, gender-blind, and largely reproduce the gender norms and stereotypes that define targeting and grooming tactics by harmful groups and individuals. It is furthermore problematic when gender as a category is being equated with women and girls and/or the roles of women and girls are viewed through a lens of stereotype, dismissing other gender minorities that might experience extremism or terrorism. This causes challenges, such as neglecting non-traditional ways in which women and girls shape extremist and terrorist landscapes, as well as a lack of literature and practice focusing on gender minorities. By pursuing this perspective, current studies and programmes, which claim to offer a gendered perspective, describe the place of women and girls as one associated with victimhood, removing them from a sense of agency in ways that also affect their capacity to access rehabilitation programmes. Such approaches reproduce gendered stereotypes, harm our understanding of the radicalisation experience, and prevent us from designing a more nuanced and effective practice against extremism and terrorism.

This report aims to contribute to discussions on the need to incorporate a nuanced gender lens into the safety and security field, and the study of radicalisation processes and preventing and countering violent extremism in particular. It does so with a view to inform future resources and research that give frontline workers the ability to engage with vulnerable or radicalised individuals through a gender-conscious intervention. The authors considered these concepts without any limitation to the ideological motivation behind the radicalisation process to violent extremism, meaning that we equally considered these concepts for religious extremism, left-wing or right-wing extremism, or any other form of extremism. As the data has been collected from sources across different sectors and countries, this report offers a multidisciplinary perspective that, in identifying existing limitations and needs of experts in the field, can serve both local as well as transnational cooperation efforts in the prevention and tackling of extremism and terrorism.

This report has been written in conjunction with a report[1] and an analysis[2] based on a literature review into the gender aspects of mobilisation and radicalisation processes. These publications complement each other. A key finding from the other research report on the topic is that the "literature in the field has largely focused on the experiences of women, especially those associated with Islamist forms of extremism, and that such a narrow focus has resulted in several gaps in the literature, which in turn has translated into gaps in practice. In addition, two developments were identified. First, despite women and girls being involved in extremist groups for decades, their involvement became only particularly visible alongside the rise of Islamic State as it garnered a lot of attention in media, policy and research. Second, socio-political discussions on gender, gender norms, and gender equality policies have had a unique mobilisation and politicisation power. Extremist groups exploit these debates by, for instance, propagating violence or conspiracy narratives related to (anti-)feminism and gender-specific hatred and violence, highlighting the mobilisation potential of sociopolitical discussions on gender."[3] Based on the research highlighted in the ICCT analysis on the role of gender in mobilisation dynamics,[4] and

1 Joana Cook, Eva Herschinger, Seran de Leede, and Anna-Maria Andreeva, "Radicalisation and Gender - what do we know?" *International Centre for Counter Terrorism Report,* 2024. https://doi.org/10.19165/2024.5678.
2 Bàrbara Molas, "Assessing mobilisation dynamics of violent extremist organisations through a gender lens", *International Centre for Counter Terrorism Analysis*, 20 November 2024,
https://www.icct.nl/publication/assessing-mobilisation-dynamics-violent-extremist-organisations-through-gender-lens.
3 Cook et al., "Radicalisation and Gender", p. 2.
4 Molas, "Assessing mobilisation dynamics".

the role of gender in deradicalisation and disengagement and P/CVE, three more insights are worth mentioning. Firstly, gender is to be understood as a social construct, and extremist groups make use of these constructs in their radicalisation, mobilisation and recruitment strategies,[5] as well as in framing and demonising the enemy.[6] Secondly, the literature shows that recruitment variables/narratives/pull factors do not differ thematically, yet they differ in form and content when targeting men and women respectively.[7] Thirdly, there are analytical gaps, such as the role of different generational identities (e.g. comparing first, second, and third-generation immigrants) in radicalisation processes, and how gender affects involvement in terrorism, that need to be addressed to develop and implement effective interventions.[8]

Taking such findings into consideration, this report is divided into three main sections. After the introduction and methodology, it addresses biases in current P/CVE practices. The next section focuses on analytical frameworks and toolkits used in this field to assess, inter alia, the extent to which gender is taken into consideration in P/CVE work. The last section discusses the role of gender in the different phases of intervention, namely criminal investigation, prosecution, detention, and ultimately the phase of deradicalisation and/or disengagement. This report concludes with final remarks and recommendations for pragmatic and feasible next steps to address the identified issues.

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5 Kiriloi M. Ingram and Kristy Campion. "Of Heroes and Mothers: Locating gender in ideological narratives of Salafi-Jihadist and extreme right propaganda," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism,* 2024, 1–27, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610x.2024.2322758.
6 Elizabeth Pearson. "Beyond Women: Rethinking Gender and Radicalisation," in *Radicalisation: A Global and Comparative Perspective*, ed. Akil Awan and James R. Lewis (London: C. Hurst & Co.; New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).
7 Megan Kelly, Ann-Kathrin Rothermel, and Lisa Sugiura. "Victim, Violent, Vulnerable: A Feminist Response to the Incel Radicalisation Scale," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 18 (2024), https://doi.org/10.19165/2024.7194; Interview with EXP09, 6 June 2024; Interview with EXP01, 27 June 2024; Sophie Scheuble and Fehime Oezmen, *Extremists' Targeting of Young Women on Social Media and Lessons for P/CVE*. Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/ran; Sophia Sykes, "Tradwives: The Housewives Commodifying Right-Wing Ideology," *GNET*, July 7, 2023, https://gnet-research.org/2023/07/07/tradwives-the-housewives-commodifying-right-wing-ideology/.
8 Interview with EXP05, 27 June 2024.

Methodology

This report is largely based on an extensive review of existing research in the field of practical counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism. In particular, the research team assessed a total of 107 expert pieces and policy documents published in English, Dutch, German, and Spanish, made publicly available between 2014 and 2024. Selecting the material involved open-source methodology, with keywords including both scholarly and culturally sensitive vocabulary addressing gender-related topics in relation to the prevention and countering of radicalisation and violence.

For example, "gender" AND "radicalisation" or "gender" AND "extremism" or "gender" AND "terrorism" retrieved relevant sources for English-language articles, as well as for Dutch- and German-language articles using a literal translation. The same words in Spanish failed to generate desired results. Illustratively, "genero" AND "violencia" would limit the data to domestic abuse for Spanish literature. To overcome such issues, we used alternative vocabulary sensitive to the cultural context and country-based scholarly discussions around the topic, including words such as *"mujeres" O "hombres" O "genero" Y "radicalizacion" O "extremismo" O "terrorismo"*, which produced useful results. The literature was organised according to the research questions that compose this report, namely gender in radicalisation processes, analytical frameworks and toolkits, deradicalisation and disengagement processes, and gender constructions and biases that exist in P/CVE current practices and policies.

In addition, we conducted ten expert interviews in English, Dutch, and German with practitioners in the field, including from law enforcement, social work, the tech sector, and civil society organisations from Europe and North America. The interviews were conducted in the summer of 2024 and took place over one to two-hour video calls using the cloud-based video conferencing platforms Zoom and Teams. These conversations were either automatically transcribed or recorded for note-taking purposes. The interviewees agreed to contribute based on their position and expert knowledge and are to remain anonymous. The data resulting from the interviews was combined with the literature review to offer a more comprehensive and nuanced, but also practical and less theoretical approach to our research questions.

Persisting Gender Constructions, Biases, and Other Problematic Perspectives

Reflecting on the literature on P/CVE programming, as well as on P/CVE practices and policies, it seems that the terms "gender" and "women" are frequently used interchangeably. Yet, this kind of thinking is quite paradoxical as pointed out by Madriaza et al.[9] The authors explain the lack of gender considerations in P/CVE due to their assessment that the apparent majority of radicalised individuals are male, which unmistakably illustrates the misconception that gender is a purely female issue. The following section highlights that although efforts to include a nuanced gendered lens in P/CVE programming are made, biases and failures remain. For example, Schmidt notes that individuals working within P/CVE have significant gaps in understanding the roles of women and hold strong normative biases about men.[10] The author notes that a focus on racial profiles continues to dominate, leading to "problematic gaps in countering violent extremism (CVE) programming and persistent blind spots in counterterrorism (CT) efforts".[11] Similarly, Degefa notes that highly patriarchal societies, such as in Ethiopia, often reflect the strategies and approaches adopted in P/CVE efforts.[12] Such top-down efforts portray a reductive, biased, and stereotypical depiction of womanhood, emitting gendered experiences and denying the realities of women who experienced violent extremism. Patel and Westermann's assessment of CT and P/CVE practices in Australia similarly notes that the inadequate integration of a holistic and broad understanding of gender hampers programming.[13] It reinforces stereotypes and overlooks the role of women in radicalisation. Similarly, White's comments on bias in P/CVE project implementation and the presupposition that women are more peaceful than men.[14] Winterbotham takes this further and notes that this disregard for the complex and varied nature of people, and women specifically, leads to ineffective policies.[15] Meanwhile, Schmidt also notes that ignorance of women's participation and involvement with extremism leads to the reinforcement of stereotypes, which in turn affects and frames the disengagement and deradicalisation responses.[16] White notes that this simplification leads to gender essentialism – the imposed categorisation of rigid identity traits, based on assumed differences of gender. Training and tools on implicit bias and gender essentialism awareness must be reevaluated to provide a better overview of intersectional[17] issues including race, gender, economic disparity, religious preference, and so forth. This was further reiterated by interviewees for this research.[18] The implicit equation of gender with women must be addressed to include nuance about the various socially constructed identities of gender. Ignoring this risks ineffective and unequal treatment of women.[19] Schmidt's article examines gendered stereotypes used in armed conflict groups and CT/CVE actors by employing gender-based analysis.[20] She argues that as women are rather seen as assets and not as perpetrators of

9 Pablo Madriaza, Anne-Sophie Ponsot and Liam Stock-Rabbat, *Prévention de la radicalisation menant à la violence: Une étude internationale sur les enjeux de l'intervention et des intervenants* (Centre international pour la prévention de la criminalité, 2017).

10 Rachel Schmidt, "Investigating Implicit Biases around Race and Gender in Canadian Counterterrorism," *International Journal* 75, no. 4 (2020): 594–613, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702020976615.

11 Ibid.

12 Hilina Berhanu Degefa. "Gender and Extremism in Ethiopia." European Institute of Peace, 2021.

13 Sofia Patel and Jacqueline Westermann. "Women and Islamic-State terrorism: An assessment of how gender perspectives are integrated in countering violent extremism policy and practices." *Security Challenges* 14,2 (2018) 53-83.

14 Jessica White, "Gender in Countering Violent Extremism Program Design, Implementation and Evaluation: Beyond Instrumentalism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 46, no. 7 (September 18, 2020): 1192–1215, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610x.2020.1818435.

15 Emily Winterbotham, "What Can Work (and What Has Not Worked) in Women-Centric P/CVE Initiatives: Assessing the Evidence Base for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism", RUSI, 2020.

16 Rachel Schmidt. "Duped: Examining gender stereotypes in disengagement and deradicalization practices." *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 45, no. 11 (2022): 953-976.

17 Intersectionality, in this context, is understood to mean the interaction and cumulative effects of multiple forms of discrimination affecting the daily lives of individuals, particularly women of color. The term also refers more broadly to an intellectual framework for understanding how various aspects of individual identity—including race, gender, social class, and sexuality—interact to create unique experiences of privilege or oppression.

18 Interview with EXP06, 10 July, 2024.

19 Eike Bösing, Yannick von Lautz, Mehmet Kart, and Margit Stein. "Gender Constructions in the Prevention of and Deradicalization from Islamism in Germany." J*ournal for Deradicalization* 37 (2023): 140-173.

20 Rachel Schmidt. "Investigating implicit biases".

VE, they are ignored when disengaging, deradicalising, or reintegrating, and are subsequently enabled to actively exploit gender stereotypes to avoid detection and prosecution.[21] At the same time, this means that their needs are not met in P/CVE efforts due to stereotyped intervention.[22] For example, women are either exploited or judged based on a role bias.[23] Seeing women involved in violence as "monsters" causes them to be seen as abnormalities that do not need to be addressed, while also overlooking other roles women take in extremist groups.[24] On the other hand, they are used for intelligence on their husbands and first warning indicators if someone is radicalising.

Bösing et al. note that women are overwhelmingly seen in relation to another individual – husband, children, other family, etc., – while men in the same context are considered for their individual motivations and never in relation to the presence of women.[25] This implicit bias in P/CVE work can have significant implications for the programming, interventions, tools, and methodology used. The aforementioned study by Degefa on P/CVE efforts in Ethiopia supports the finding that practitioners perceive violent extremism as built on concepts associated with men, including "power, competition, oppression, and aggression". While P/CVE efforts are often built on stereotypes and biases regarding the roles of women and men, and often neglect the complexity of women's involvement in extremism, the same and even more can also be said concerning men. Masculinities and masculine identities, as Dier and Baldwin describe, are not considered in CT and P/CVE efforts. These traits are further not considered in their interaction with other social and cultural factors (such as racism or socioeconomic marginalisation), or in the ways they interact with and are subject to manipulation by violent extremist actors.[26] Similar to literature on the importance of including a gendered lens in all stages of P/CVE work, it is vital to include considerations of masculinities in the same way, as well as to consider how masculine traits intersect with other internal and external factors.[27] Exploring different forms of masculinity available for appropriation can contribute to narrowing down the elements sometimes referred to as 'toxic masculinity' that are harmful both to individuals and society.[28]

Winterbotham conducted a review of studies looking at P/CVE interventions involving women and found that although there is increasing recognition of the role and importance of including women and women's perspectives, there is no effective translation of this into actual programming. The author further highlights that in order to be more effective, programmes need to consider a variety of intersecting factors, and include women and considerations of the different ways they may be impacted through various approaches. Multiple studies indicate that a gendered and intersectional lens is significantly lacking in P/CVE processes and programming, and highlight that this needs to be far better integrated into all stages, including in design, implementation, and evaluation.[29] Further, not only is an intersectional gender lens imperative when conducting work in P/CVE, but so too is the inclusion of women from all relevant backgrounds and expertise, including, but not limited to "mentors, community organisers, intervention officers, policy advisers, educators and healthcare professionals," as well as local (women-led) organisations, CSOs, and

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21 Ibid., p.5.
22 Ibid., p.7.
23 Ibid., p.9.
24 Ibid., p.11.
25 Bösing et al. "Gender Constructions". See also: Katherine E. Brown, "Gender and Countering Islamic State Radicalisation", E-International Relations, 18 February 2016, www .e-ir.info/2016/02/18/gender-and-countering-islamic-stateradicalisation/.
26 Aleksandra Dier and Gretchen Baldwin. *Masculinities and violent extremism.* International Peace Institute and UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, 2022.
27 Dier and Baldwin, *Masculinities and Violent Extremism.*
28 Alexandra Korn and Maarten van de Donk, "Rehabilitation for Female VETOs and the Role of Masculinity in DDR," Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), European Commission, April 17, 2024,
https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2024-01/ran_missing_gender_dimension_in_risk_assessment_14112023_en.pdf.
29 Patel and Westermann, "Women and Islamic-State Terrorism," 53–83; Anna-Maria Andreeva, "Conclusions Paper: Gender Mainstreaming in P/CVE Programming" RAN Policy Support, 2023. https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/33b6337e-9b70-4bb1-bf8c-a43ce1e7c37f_en?filename=RAN%20PS_TRM%20Gender%20Mainstreaming_Conclusions%20Paper_en.pdf.

NGOs.[30] An important point made by Wdzieczak regarding the inclusion of women in P/CVE programming is that there should be sensitivity in the ways women participate – the key is not to instrumentalise women to do the work for practitioners (such as detecting signs of radicalisation in their children), thus shifting the responsibility to women.[31]

This lack of structural consideration of gender-based analysis is not only true for disengagement, deradicalisation or rehabilitation practices, policing and CT measures, but also in relation to policy making in this setting. In the past decade, a large emphasis has been placed on the fact that women remain underrepresented in policy-making roles within CT, and the notion that this might contribute to a lack of gender-sensitive analysis and policies. For instance, Ortbals expresses that women's involvement in policy-making could bring attention to crucial aspects such as equality and relationship dynamics that are often overlooked in male-dominated security spaces.[32] Such an increased participation of women might also be able to contribute to further sensitisation regarding gender-based violence in the context of violent extremism and terrorism, as interviewees highlight that to date it does not yet seem to be taken seriously as a security issue by security actors.[33] And yet, the mere inclusion of more women in the CT and P/CVE policy-making spheres can only be a necessary first step towards a real, strategic, and structural consideration of gender in CT policymaking and beyond. After all, the crux is not only in the representation, but rather in ensuring that both men and women in the CT and P/CVE fields are adequately trained to identify gender biases. Such efforts remain crucial for practice to actually become more nuanced.[34]

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30 Winterbotham, "What Can Work," p.29; Katherine Brown and F. N. Mohammed, "Gender-Sensitive Approaches to FTF Child Returnee Management" *International Centre for Counter Terrorism*, 2021.
https://www.icct.nl/sites/default/files/2022-12/Gender-Sensitive-Approaches-to-FTF-Child-Returnee-Manageme.pdf
31 Hanna Wdzieczak. "Gender mainstreaming in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism." *Journal for Deradicalization* 33 (2022): 70-107.
32 Candice Ortbals and Lori Poloni-Staudinger, "Women Policymakers Framing Their Leadership and Lives in Relation to Terrorism: The Basque Case," *Journal of Women Politics & Policy* 37, no. 2 (2016): 134, https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477x.2016.1153348.
33 Interview with EXP01, 27 June 2024
34 Interview with EXP05, 27 June 2024.

The Role of Gender in Existing CT and P/CVE Analytical Frameworks and Toolkits

In general, P/CVE interventions, performed by civil society organisations (CSO) and security agencies alike, are shaped and implemented based on analytical frameworks and toolkits. Analytical frameworks can, for instance, be used to make risk and needs assessments of individuals suspected of radicalisation, as well as for risk management and/or judicial decisions on detention conditions, conditions for earlier release, or probation. Additionally, analytical frameworks, if employed by pedagogical professionals, inform interventions and help planning. In order to make adequate decisions on the aforementioned issues, one needs to have a clear understanding of why and how an individual radicalised, which, corroborates with findings of *"Radicalisation and Gender - what do we know?",*[35] requires a gendered lens for these issues as well.

Our literature review demonstrates that existing research mainly deals with gender in P/CVE frameworks in relation to women returning from the so-called Islamic State (IS), and thus seems to focus strongly on one ideological phenomenon, and a very specific threat coming from a specific terrorist organisation. Though, it has to be mentioned that there is literature on gendered involvement in extremism regarding other phenomena, such as research on the so-called manosphere and incels, this does not feature prominently in research relating to P/CVE and CT frameworks. This may be due to: a) gender being equated with women in a lot of practice-oriented research and grey literature; b) literature on other gendered phenomenon in extremism not necessarily linking to the key word "GENDER", revealing a flaw in our methodology; and c) sub-optimal search engine optimisation of the articles. With singularly focused data informing the risk assessment tools and implementation toolkits, it can be expected that the analytical tools are not sufficiently ideologically neutral and, due to specific roles women played in IS, not fully acknowledging the different roles women can play. In the context of IS, experts correctly highlight that female target groups face additional challenges as compared to men, such as stigma and shame, yet rehabilitation programmes that systematically account for these issues are still limited and not sufficiently gender-responsive.[36] While these topics may be accounted for in select approaches, it again appears to come down to the awareness and approach of individual practitioners, rather than a systematic inclusion of these topics in the overarching strategies. Right-wing extremism-focused (RWE) P/CVE programmes, on the other hand, frequently fail to consider non-traditional female roles and/or fail to reach this target group, which reinforces the gender bias within P/CVE frameworks,[37] while the literature barely mentions gender considerations in left-wing and anarchist extremism (LWAE) or other extremist phenomena for our search period.

Beyond Europe, some countries have adopted culture- and religion-oriented approaches to gender-sensitive P/CVE programming. For instance, Morocco's state-run programme employs female preachers to disseminate messages of tolerance among rural women, demonstrating how women can be both agents and targets of prevention programmes. This model is also applied in prisons with non-radicalised detainees, potentially offering a template for other Muslim-majority countries. However, as discussed previously, the mere inclusion of women as practitioners of prevention and rehabilitation efforts, while potentially beneficial to creating access to female target groups, is not sufficient to establish a comprehensive gender-sensitive and -responsive P/CVE strategy. In addition, previous attempts to build alliances between the state and religious

35 Cook, et al., "Radicalisation and Gender".
36 Rositsa Dzhekova and Ariane Wolf, "Gender-Specificity in Practical P/CVE: Reviewing RAN Practitioners' Activities in 2021", European Commission, 2022, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-08/ran_ad-hoc_gender_in_pcve_15082022_en.pdf; Erika Brady and Sarah Marsden, "Women and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Interventions," CREST, 2021, https://connect.unoct-connectandlearn.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/21-038-01_women_and_preventing_and_countering_violent_extremism_interventions.pdf
37 Glaser, "Disengagement and Deradicalization Work," p.341.

communities for P/CVE purposes have been rejected by the target populations due to a perceived lack of religious authority and credibility of those religious leaders binding themselves to the government.[38] In Cameroon, the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and the Family has launched initiatives to support women and girls victimised by or complicit with Islamist jihadist organisation Boko Haram, although challenges in reaching the target population persist due to fears of reprisals and mistrust towards state services.[39]

While research and practice are clear about the significance of gender-based analysis to fully comprehend a person's radicalisation pathways, and disengagement and deradicalisation potential,[40] to date, gender is usually a secondary consideration in existing CT, policing, and P/CVE frameworks and toolkits. Interviews further highlight that most approaches and practices, both in the context of pedagogical and social interventions and policing or CT measures, have been created a) based on evidence regarding men, and b) with a male target group in mind, therefore structurally overlooking the distinct needs and challenges of women and gender-diverse people, while at the same time largely failing to address the concept of masculinity as a factor in radicalisation and distancing processes.[41] Paradoxically, this current state of P/CVE work does not mean P/CVE practitioners (CSOs and security agencies alike) do not acknowledge the importance of gendered perspectives. In theory, P/CVE practitioners do so, but often lack the knowledge and terminology necessary to implement them effectively, highlighting a gap between the formal understanding and the practical addressing of gender and extremism.[42]

Concerning the law enforcement perspective on P/CVE, a law enforcement practitioner highlighted that this can be attributed to some extent to an overall lack of gender awareness in law enforcement, which might be tackled through awareness-raising measures and training in the future.[43] In addition, prevention and rehabilitation practitioners further criticise that existing risk assessment tools remain generally non-transparent with regard to factoring in gender.[44] At the same time, and considering the aforementioned argument that P/CVE efforts might not be gendered due to the mainly male target group, it is rather contradictory that the concept of masculinity and considerations of what it means to be a man are also missing in risk assessment tooling.[45] In light of existing tools such as VERA-2R, RADAR or IR46 that currently don't include a nuanced gender dimension,[46] many practitioners attempt to overcome this by adopting a person-responsive approach, focusing on gender-related aspects and their intersection with other factors.[47] Furthermore, as outlined above, in the implementation, the sector overall is still dealing with a lot of biases. Because women are often viewed through the lens of victimhood, and considered as less ideologically motivated or less prone to violence than men, this can lead to gaps in addressing their agency and extremist views.[48] At the same time, being viewed

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38 Maximilian Ruf and Annelies Jansen, "RAN Study Visit: Returned Women and Children – Studying an Ongoing Experience on the Ground", Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), European Commission, December 20, 2019, p.8, https://ec.europa.eu/ran.
39 Adib Bencherif, Lydie C. Belporo, and David Morin, "Étude Internationale Sur Les Dispositifs De Prévention De La Radicalisation Et De L'extrémisme Violents Dans L'espace Francophone," Chaire UNESCO en Prévention de la Radicalisation et de l'Extrémisme Violents, 2022, https://chaireunesco-prev.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/UNESCO-PREV_EspaceFranco_RapportFinal.pdf.
40 Molas, "Assessing mobilisation dynamics".
41 Malaz Shahhoud and Elena Dal Santo, "The Missing Gender-Dimension in Risk Assessment," Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), European Commission, December 5, 2023, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-08/ran_ad-hoc_gender_in_pcve_15082022_en.pdf; Laure Anelli and Cecil Marcel, "Prise en charge de la radicalisation en prison", *Observatoire International des Prisons*, 28 October 2020, https://oip.org/analyse/prise-en-charge-de-la-radicalisation-en-prison-la-grande-illusion/.
42 Ibid.
43 Interview with EXP08, 27 June 2024.
44 Interview with EXP09, 06 June 2024.
45 Shahhoud and Dal Santo, "The Missing Gender-Dimension in Risk Assessment".
46 Daniela Pisoiu, "Improving Risk Assessment: Accounting for Gender | Counter Extremism Hub," May 27, 2024, https://www.counterextremismhub.org/archives/resource_document/improving-risk-assessment-accounting-for-gender.
47 Shahhoud and Dal Santo, "The Missing Gender-Dimension in Risk Assessment".
48 Glaser, "Disengagement and Deradicalization".

through the lens of male-centred risk-assessment tools can also lead to their risk level being overestimated and their placements in higher security settings than appropriate to the level of risk they represent.[49]

In addition, to consider the gender sensitivity of government responses, it is also worthwhile to consider responses from the NGO sector. Generally, grassroots organisations and CSOs have emerged as crucial partners regarding gender-sensitive P/CVE strategies, especially in secondary and tertiary interventions.[50] These organisations are already successful in building trust with local communities and families, acting as brokers between clients, their social environment, and authorities. It is widely accepted that participatory approaches that engage local actors and consider specific community needs are seen as the most promising.[51] Many CSO intervention providers aim at adopting individually tailored approaches for prevention and distancing/rehabilitation to fully account for the complexity, non-linearity and individuality of radicalisation processes and related needs and dynamics. However, while those approaches might be able to reflect and respond to some gender-related experiences, they are not gender-responsive *per se*, unless the respective practitioner possesses a certain level of gender awareness, and gender-based analysis is structurally integrated into the case assessment and intervention planning processes. However, as highlighted above, widespread implementation of relevant training to create such gender awareness and support gender-based analysis is still lacking.

In summary, gender-based analysis and gender-sensitive toolkits for P/CVE and CT are recognised as necessary by research and large parts of practitioner communities alike but are not yet sufficiently realised in practice. The continued marginalisation of women and the lack of tailored interventions for female extremists, combined with the absence of policies and practices related to gender-diverse persons beyond the male-female binary, suggest that more comprehensive efforts are needed. This includes better collaboration between P/CVE actors, researchers, and security agencies to create frameworks that are not only gender-sensitive but also gender-responsive. Programmes must move beyond viewing gender as synonymous with women and address the broader gender norms within extremist ideologies while integrating diverse identities, including LGBTQI+, into P/CVE frameworks.

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49 UNODC, "Handbook on Gender Dimensions of Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism", 2019 https://www.unodc.org/documents/terrorism/Publications/17-08887_HB_Gender_Criminal_Justice_E_ebook.pdf.

50 Susanna Papp et al., "The role of civil society organisations in exit work", Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), 2022.

51 Brady and Marsden. "Women and Preventing", p.18.

The Role of Gender in the Different Stages of CT and P/CVE Interventions

Building on the findings of the previous paragraphs, in this section we focus on the role of gender in the specific stages of CT and P/CVE interventions, namely investigation and law enforcement, prosecution, detention, and rehabilitation and reintegration.

Law Enforcement and Investigation

In our research, we did not come across any dedicated national policy guidelines on how to conduct criminal investigations into crimes related to violent extremism in a gender-sensitive manner. There are, however, ample international handbooks and guidelines on the matter. Most notably the UNODC Handbook on Gender Dimensions of Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism,[52] the Global Counterterrorism Forum's Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism,[53] (and their Policy Toolkit tied to this),[54] the DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR and UN Women Policy Brief on Understanding Gender and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: Good Practices for Law Enforcement.[55]

Gender-based approaches in these international handbooks and toolkits are focused on criminal justice approaches and investigations guided by a rights-based approach.[56] This means that the gender-based approaches recommended are tailored to abide by, for instance, the prohibition of discrimination and the right to equal treatment (fitting the circumstances). These approaches also include the right to access justice and, in general, the respect for women's rights. Particularly when addressing the issues with access to justice, the underlying assumptions are that women may face barriers in accessing justice because of lower socioeconomic and education status, that women may be less aware of their legal rights, and that legal aid is less available to women because, for example, women may not have equal access to the family income.[57] Key recommendations are therefore focused on ways to abide by those rights. In addition, the most commonly made recommendations for interventions in the realm of criminal justice and investigations revolve around the need to include underrepresented groups, including women, in national law enforcement and security agencies, including as part of counter-terrorism prevention and response frameworks.[58] The assumption is that this would overcome harmful gender stereotypes among criminal justice personnel.

Other recommendations revolve around gender dimensions in search powers, special investigation techniques and profiling practices, and gender-sensitive interviewing techniques.[59] With regard to the former, the lack of gender dimensions is largely related to the stereotyped view of gender roles in radicalisation and violent extremism in the first place. However, the recommendation is also to be cognisant of the need to exercise search powers in a gender-sensitive manner. For instance, by being sensitive about using house search powers and the risk of intimidation,[60] or

52 UNODC, "Handbook".

53 GCTF, "Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism", 2016, https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20 Documents/GCTF%20Good%20Practices%20on%20Women%20and%20CVE.pdf?ver=2016-03-29-134644-853.

54 GCTF, "Gender and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Policy Toolkit", 2022, https://www.thegctf.org/Resources/Framework-Documents/Policy-Toolkits/Gender-and-Preventing-and-Countering-Violent-Extremism.

55 DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR and UN Women "Gender, Preventing Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism", 2019, in *Gender and Security Toolkit*, Geneva: DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN Women, https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/7/447094.pdf.

56 UNODC, "Handbook" at 5.

57 Ibid., at 16.

58 Ibid., at 6 and 83; GCTF, "Gender and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism" at 22.

59 UNODC, "Handbook" at 83.

60 Ibid., at 64.

by ensuring stop and search powers used against women are carried out with respect for gender sensitivities.[61] Our research into existing policies and practices, however, did not reflect that these policies were mainstreamed.

Prosecution

The criminal justice system was largely created by and based on the experiences of men.[62] Women may, therefore, face prejudice and discrimination at several moments of interaction with the system. There is little to no contemporary research conducted on the prosecution of female members of violent extremist and terrorist groups beyond the context of jihadism and IS. In this context, however, it is evident that women typically receive lower prosecution levels and shorter sentences, allowing them to reintegrate into communities sooner than men.[63] This trend varies across countries, depending on their prosecution regimes, which drastically affects how exit work is conducted with female returnees from Syria and Iraq.[64] Initially, female extremists were mostly perceived as victims with functions barely extending beyond the boundaries of their households, yet this perception evolved from 2015 onwards to recognise their role as perpetrators of violence, propagandists, recruiters, and many more.[65] Despite this evolution in various European countries, one major challenge remains as legal verdicts are still heavily influenced by gender stereotypes and biases.[66] Practitioners attest that judges have been more likely to understand difficult family situations and factors contributing to radicalisation with regard to women.[67] Male defendants on the other hand, often try to create positive gender role perceptions for themselves, picturing themselves as "family men" to avoid harsher sentences.[68] Another comparable example, albeit from the United States, shows that women charged with terrorism-related crimes generally receive shorter prison sentences than men, with a defence often based on gendered narratives, such as women being victims, passive and guided by their emotions.[69] Finally, prosecution efforts suffer from additional biases, including a tendency to judge women's distancing from jihadist radicalisation based on their appearance, e.g. by removing the hijab or (re-)adopting supposedly Western styles of dressing.[70]

Imprisonment

Prisons are generally gender-segregated places. While men convicted of violent extremism or terrorism offences or monitored for radicalisation are often isolated from the general prison population, women tend to receive lighter sentences and remain in less restrictive environments with more contact with other prisoners. In some European countries, such as France and the Netherlands, efforts have been made to address these challenges by placing female violent extremist offenders (VEOs) in separate units, where gender-sensitive assessments consider factors like maternity, sexual violence, and trauma. However, in much of Europe, female VEOs are housed

61 Ibid. at 63.

62 Ulrich Garms, Lara Wilkinson, and Amrita Kapur, *Handbook on Gender Dimensions of Criminal Justice Response to Terrorism* (Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2019), UNOV Library Catalogue, https://unov.tind.io/record/69267.

63 Annika Johanna Scharnagl, *Where Are the Women? Gender Sensitivity in Deradicalisation Strategies for Female Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Germany* (master's thesis, Charles University, Faculty of Social Sciences, 2023), https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/187338.

64 Erinda Bllaca Ndroqi, *Dealing with returned women in the Western Balkans: challenges and opportunities from a practitioner's perspective*. Brussels: RAN, 2021

65 Tanya Mehra, Thomas Renard, and Merlina Herbach, *Female Jihadis Facing Justice: Comparing Approaches in Europe* (International Centre for Counterterrorism, 2024), https://doi.org/10.19165/ftxz9791.

66 Zeynep Sütalan, "Gender specific counterterrorism policies: developing good practices in response to the foreign terrorist fighters," in *Good practices in counter terrorism*, 1st ed., vol. 2 (Centre of Excellence Defence Against Terrorism, 2021).

67 Interview with EXP05, 31 May 2024.

68 Interview with EXP05, 31 May 2024.

69 Audrey Alexander and Rebecca Turkington, "Treatment of Terrorists: How Does Gender Affect Justice?," *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point* (2018) : 24–27, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/treatment-terrorists-gender-affect-justice/.

70 Christiane Besnier, Sharon Weill, Antoine Mégie, and Denis Salas, *Les Filières Djihadistes en Procès: Approche Ethnographique des Audiences Criminelles et Correctionnelles* (2017-2019) (Research Report, Université Paris 8, Université de Rouen, Sciences Po Paris, 2019), https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-03200596.

with the general prison population, where they face restricted access to activities, including disengagement and deradicalisation programmes.[71] To ensure that rehabilitation measures in prison can reach their full potential, a healthy prison environment needs to be ensured for women, including addressing discriminatory practices affecting female prisoners. Currently, some countries still enact control measures in prisons, such as prohibiting long skirts or hijabs in certain women's quarters, which contributes to feelings of humiliation and alienation, to the detriment of any potential rehabilitation and reintegration prospects.[72] Beyond these space and context-oriented factors, the following section on rehabilitation and deradicalisation outlines our findings that are relevant for this work both within and outside of prison settings.

Rehabilitation and Deradicalisation

While primary prevention efforts constitute the majority of gender-sensitive approaches, including raising awareness indirectly through sports or educational programmes for youth focusing on gender equality,[73] secondary and tertiary disengagement and deradicalisation programmes fail to incorporate gender-sensitive approaches. Particularly security actors continue to perceive gender as a 'soft' issue as opposed to a factor relevant to security policy. One interviewee observed resistance within the prison system to integrate gender-sensitive rehabilitation practices.[74] Additionally, many P/CVE practitioners lack a comprehensive understanding of gender roles and dynamics, often failing to incorporate a gender perspective into their interventions.[75] Online P/CVE initiatives also play a role[76] and would, therefore, benefit from a more strategic application of gender-based analysis in practice.

Interviews with practitioners show that women often remain invisible to rehabilitation practice, not being deemed to be in need of exit, disengagement and deradicalisation, or rehabilitation measures.[77] This is partially attributed to the lingering misconception that women are less ideologically motivated than men. Practitioners also highlight that, especially in the context of right-wing extremism, due to the lack of active and systemic engagement in women in P/CVE efforts over the last decades, female-specific guidance remains auspiciously absent from quality standards in practice.[78] One interviewee assesses that, while roles and norms around masculinity often form part of rehabilitation work with male clients, male practitioners, in turn, often neglect to actively question their own biases, leaving them suspicious of calls to better self-reflection of their own roles in reproducing gender stereotypes.[79] The same occurs with female practitioners, according to a former police officer who admits that she and her colleagues reproduced stereotypes around radicalised women, assuming they tend to take non-violent roles within the threat landscape.[80]

This reproduction of stereotypes is further visible in expectations concerning familial ties. The strong focus on motherhood in rehabilitation efforts demonstrates a specific gender bias that reduces women to their roles as caregivers, while similar attention is not given to men's roles as fathers.[81] This is particularly evident when dealing with female returnees from IS, whose potential

71 Anelli and Marcel, "Prise en charge"; Dzhekova and Korn, "The Role of Multi-Agency Cooperation".

72 CGLPL, "Prise En Charge Pénitentiaire Des Personnes "Radicalisées » Et Respect Des Droits Fondamentaux," 2020, https://www.cglpl.fr/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/CGLPL-Prise-en-charge-p%C3%A9nitentiaire-des-personnes-radicalis%C3%A9es-et-respect-des-droits-fondamentaux.pdf

73 Bencherif et al., "Étude Internationale"; Bénédicte Dupont-Pineri, "*L'inscription De La Pjj Dans Le Dispositif National De Lutte Contre La Radicalisation Violente Et Les Filières Djihadistes," L'École Des Parents Sup.* au N° 619, no. 5 (July 9, 2016): 145–65, https://doi.org/10.3917/epar.s619.0145.

74 Interview with EXP01, 27 June 2024.

75 Madriaza et al., "Prévention de la radicalisation"; Shadoud and Del Santo "The missing gender-dimension".

76 Sophie Scheuble and Fehime Oezmen, Extremists' *Targeting of Young Women,* RAN, 2022.

77 Interview with EXP04, 19 June 2024.

78 Interview with EXP04, 19 June 2024.

79 Ibid.

80 Interview with EXP08, 27 June 2024.

81 Alexandra Korn and Maarten van de Donk, *Rehabilitation for Female VETOs and the Role of Masculinity in DDR,* Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), European Commission, April 17, 2024, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2024-01/ran_missing_gender-dimension_in_risk_assessment_14112023_en.pdf.

success regarding disengagement or deradicalisation is considered to be closely tied to their ability to maintain or rebuild their relationships with their children.[82] Special attention is given to preserving the mother-children bond, using tools including the NIKA method or facilitating regular phone or video contact while in prison.[83] Unlike women, men are not expected to maintain strong familial ties, and support programmes do not prioritise reconnecting them with their families unless the beneficiary initiates the process.[84] Besides the danger of reproducing gender bias in disengagement or deradicalisation efforts, other biases should be considered that might intersect identities.[85]

Evaluating the effectiveness of the deradicalisation of returnee women from Syria and Iraq, Brown describes the ignorance of the different gendered needs and experiences of women in Daesh.[86] She calls for an intersectional approach including considerations for every individual's religion, race, and culture. These can be short-, medium- and long-term, and can include: trauma, sexual and gender-based violence, social and family networks, economic position, stigmatisation, stereotypes, and so forth.[87] Furthermore, disengagement or deradicalisation work with women in different contexts, such as work done with Boko Haram returnees, reveals that sustainable disengagement requires addressing both their social and economic marginalisation.[88] Practitioners should aim to build trust with the women they work with, including through the participation of women-led community organisations. Further, they can rely on the networks of the individuals they work with in establishing support outside of the intervention. Apart from that, one interviewee highlighted the importance of addressing gender at the appropriate time during the distancing process, when trust between the counsellor and the client has already been established, so as to avoid possibly reinforcing gender roles.[89]

Ultimately, disengagement or deradicalisation processes must move toward more inclusive and gender-sensitive frameworks, acknowledging the needs of gender-diverse individuals, including addressing the emotions that a distancing process can evoke, in a manner free from gender bias. This requires a shift from viewing women primarily as victims and at-risk populations to recognising their potential roles as agents of change, with tailored support that addresses their unique challenges within the extremist and post-extremist landscape and overcoming practices, which reproduce gendered stereotypes.[90] However, in some contexts, counsellors are increasingly trained on gender issues, emphasising the management of biases and emotional responses, especially when dealing with clients with whom they might share gender-based experiences.[91] It thus seems that practitioners acknowledge gender-specific needs in the context of rehabilitation, such as the importance for women to become financially independent from their partners, and help dealing with trauma as a result of domestic violence, forced marriage, or sexual abuse. On the other hand, men are mainly seen as perpetrators and do not always benefit from the same support regarding their traumatic experiences.[92] The reality of a non-linear and dynamic involvement in violent extremism, which might result in all gender groups being both perpetrators and victims at different stages of their engagement,[93] sometimes even simultaneously, is not reflected. This lack of complexity becomes evident when looking at different components of engagement with violent extremists and terrorists, especially in the contexts of law enforcement and investigation, prosecution and imprisonment, as well as disengagement, deradicalisation and rehabilitation.

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82 Scharnagl, *Where Are the Women?*, 2023; Interview with EXP02, 12 July 2024.
83 Dzhekova and Korn, *The Role of Multi-Agency Cooperation*.
84 Interview with EXP05, 31 May 2024.
85 Korn and van de Donk, "Rehabilitation for Female VETOs".
86 Brown, *Gender-sensitive responses.*
87 Brown, *Gender-sensitive responses.*
88 Sütalan, "Gender specific counterterrorism policies", 95.
89 Interview with EXP09, 06 June 2024.
90 Bencherif et al., "Étude Internationale".
91 Interview with EXP05, 31 May 2024.
92 Brown, *Gender-Sensitive Responses*; Interview with EXP04, 19 June 2024.
93 Interview with EXP04, 19 June 2024.

Conclusions

In this report, we reflected on persisting gender constructions and how they impact P/CVE practices and policies. Gender constructs, roles, and norms, and the way these are taken into consideration in the various P/CVE interventions, heavily impact the effectiveness of these efforts. There is furthermore a potential of an aggravating sequence of gender (mis)conceptions, since the gender constructs used in the risk assessments inform following interventions, such as disengagement, deradicalisation, and rehabilitation processes. These processes, similar to radicalisation, are inextricably linked to the gendered experiences and perceptions of affected individuals.

Indeed, research shows that most P/CVE practices tend to reproduce gender norms and stereotypes, while ignoring the complexity of women's involvement in extremism. In practice, gender is often still equated with women, and women, in turn, are often equated with victimhood. Men on the other hand are usually only viewed through a lens of aggression and perpetration. Both of these implicit understandings fall short of the complexities of radicalisation and disengagement or deradicalisation and the changing roles and positions individuals may appropriate throughout their journey of engagement in violent extremism and disengagement or deradicalisation. While desk-based research and interviews for this report clearly show that women can indeed be victimised during their time in violent extremist groups, practice and research also show that they have played important roles regarding recruitment, propaganda, and violence - either as perpetrators themselves, or by enabling male members to commit violence. This complexity of roles is equally true for men. While societal gender biases would suggest that they are primarily the perpetrators of violence, they may simultaneously also be the victims of violence, including sexual violence, by their own peer-groups.

This gender blindness might be a result of P/CVE efforts being mainly tailored to a male target-audience, with the specific needs and risks of women and other gender minorities being neglected. Additionally, as shown in this report, research and practice mainly focus on those females who return from ISIS and participate in P/CVE efforts such as rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. This severely limits research results regarding female contingencies in these programmes to one ideological perspective and group. These insights might not be transferable to other ideologies. In fact, our research also shows that P/CVE efforts targeting right-wing extremism often fail to consider non-traditional female roles of involvement in extremism. Finally, the literature barely mentions gender considerations in left-wing and anarchist extremism or contemporary hybrid ideologies and the related P/CVE intervention.

In addition to the above, our research shows that public institutions and relevant stakeholders involved in PCVE practices tend to reproduce gender-based biases. Furthermore, perceptions regarding masculinity might affect particularly the male counsellors' willingness to self-reflect on their own role.

All of the factors mentioned above have a profound impact on a person's journey to exit violent extremism. In addition, their gender and societal gender perceptions and norms will shape their treatment while they are leaving and reintegrating. And yet, none of this is adequately reflected in existing rehabilitative measures accompanying disengagement or deradicalisation processes. At best, our research showed that these interventions are labelled as gender-neutral, while in fact that oftentimes means that a gender-sensitive lens is not used, and that a gender-based approach is not built into the existing intervention tools. As a result, and despite growing recognition on the importance of gender-sensitive approaches, most P/CVE programmes remain gender-blind, leading to the possible conclusion that, when a tool is considered to be gender-neutral, there

is a high likelihood for it to reflect male priorities. In these approaches, women tend to remain invisible, and/or are often not deemed as in need of exit or deradicalisation support, especially regarding their ideological motivation.

Tailored interventions by practitioners who have received gender bias and awareness training seem to be the most promising way forward. This could lead into approaches that are able to analyse, assess and respond to the individual needs of any given client, while relying on dedicated tools to analyse the impact of gender on their radicalisation and rehabilitation pathways, ensuring a structured, yet tailored gender-based analysis for each case.[94]

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94 Interview with EXP09, 6 June 2024.

Recommendations

This section, finally, outlines some general recommendations based on the analysis resulting from desk-based literature review and interviews with professionals. Building on these, targeted recommendations to the different stakeholders in policy making, law enforcement agencies, and deradicalisation and rehabilitation practice are presented. The results of the analysis presented in this report should urge all stakeholders to:

Develop a differentiated understanding of gender and gender-based-analysis:
- Gender-based analysis (GBA) goes beyond 'studying women'. Instead, GBA should contribute to our understanding of the gendered experiences, radicalisation, deradicalisation, and disengagement pathways of persons of all genders, including men, women, and gender minorities.
- Do not reproduce false gender stereotypes in programming. Too often, misconceptions about gender still inform policy and practice programming, thereby reproducing and reinforcing gender biases instead of breaking with them.
- False binaries make for bad decision making. While women may often be victims of and men the perpetrators of extremist violence, those roles are not exclusive. The roles and involvement of all genders in VE change dynamically over time, spanning victimhood, as well as perpetration, recruitment, grooming, and many others. The key to gender-sensitive and -responsive policing and rehabilitation work lies in properly accounting for these dynamics, while a narrow understanding such as the continued reduction of female agency and the overemphasis of victimhood reduces our capabilities to adequately respond to VE and terrorism.

Support the development of gender-sensitive and -responsive policy and practice:
- A systematic integration of gender-based-analysis into analysis and planning tools is necessary.
- Gender-related awareness raising and anti-bias trainings need to be developed and scaled to reach the majority of rehabilitation and law enforcement practitioners engaged in direct contact with (former) violent extremists and terrorists.
- Similar trainings should be developed for and targeted at policy makers in this sphere as well as the judiciary, to reduce gender stereotypes and biases in policy and prosecution.

Do not instrumentalise women:
- The responsibility to prevent radicalisation and rehabilitate extremists lies with society as a whole and not only with the mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters of male extremists – or women in general. Women confronted with extremism in their personal lives need support structures aiming to empower them with the purpose of helping them overcome related challenges to their own lives. They are not mere instruments to deradicalise others.

To Policy Makers

- Employ gender-based analysis as a targeted tool to investigate existing strategies and policies around the treatment of violent extremists and policies. Existing research and the interviews done for this report clearly show that strong gender biases persist in policy and practice alike, creating an urgent demand to re-evaluate.

To Researchers

- Develop innovative research that creates new routes for collecting primary data based on direct contact with former or current female and gender diverse members of violent extremist and terrorist groups, as well as female and gender diverse first-line practitioners. To date, too much of the literature on non-male members of VE and terrorist groups still relies on self-perpetuating secondary data, and or relies mainly on data connecting to a singular group of women, namely those returning from the Caliphate.
- Improve the understanding and knowledge related to the multi-faceted roles of women in VE.
- Aim for gender-disaggregated data.
- Improve transferal mechanisms from research to practice and vice-versa. Important research results are often only incorporated into practice to a minor degree, not because practice is unwilling, but because the formats in which results are presented are largely not compatible with practical needs and schedules. Therefore, researchers should consult with and include practitioners in developing transferal formats from the beginning of any research project in this field.

To Law Enforcement Agencies

- Review and adjust existing risk assessment and threat management procedures to incorporate gender-based analysis and gender-responsive intervention planning. Existing tools and frameworks still rely too heavily on older evidence found in relation to male offenders and extremists and do not adequately take female and diverse gender experiences into account.
- Awareness and sensitivity around gender-based violence in the context of violent extremism needs to be better addressed in policing: Extremist violence often has a strong component of gender-based violence that seems to be largely overlooked in current law enforcement approaches.

To Rehabilitation Practitioners

- Review and adjust case analysis and management frameworks to systematically incorporate gender-based analysis and the latest evidence on gendered experiences of radicalisation and rehabilitation. Individualised approaches are valid and necessary, but fail to fully account for diverse gender experiences as they do not analyse gender in a structured manner. In addition, most existing approaches are based on methods and evidence related to male clients, resulting in a need to incorporate additional research results and develop adjusted methods and approaches.
- Implement sensitisation and awareness-raising trainings around gender-based analysis for your own staff as well as other professionals who may act as multipliers within their institutions. To date, too many professionals in the field of P/CVE still contribute to misconceived gender biases rather than working to extinguish them.
- Carefully address the fears that might stem from new gender expectations in contemporary societies. More complex societal expectations around womanhood and roles of women may result in a sense of pressure to fulfil a variety of sometimes contradictory roles dictated by family, cultures, society, peers. This might include notions of being an extraordinary mother and wife while building and maintaining a

demanding professional career. Such a sense of pressure might lead to a sense of overwhelm that could in turn contribute to radicalisation in a sense of identity and role reduction, and create barriers for disengagement or deradicalisation if they are not taken seriously.

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