



## **Addendum to the GCTF Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism, with a Focus on Mainstreaming Gender**

### **Introduction**

This Addendum updates the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)<sup>1</sup> to include a focus on mainstreaming gender, inter alia, based on new insights on gender-specific motivations and pathways of radicalization to violence and CVE responses that aim to counter women and girls' recruitment specifically, while also addressing men and boys' recruitment. It provides practical guidance to inform effective CVE policy and programming in light of the evolving roles of women in violent extremist and terrorist organizations, the diverse involvement of women and women's organizations in preventing and responding to these challenges, and the impact of counterterrorism strategies on women's human rights and women's organizations. The Addendum draws from discussions with civil society organizations (CSOs), academics and governments at two consultative meetings, co-hosted by Australia and Indonesia as chairs of the GCTF CVE Working Group. These were a Workshop on Gender and Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE): the role of CSOs, 18-19 December 2018, Melbourne, Australia and a Workshop on the CVE Challenges of Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) and their Families, 7-8 March, 2019 in The Hague, the Netherlands. The Addendum also complements and builds on the GCTF *Good Practices on Addressing the Challenge of Returning Families of FTFs* and *The Hague-Marrakech Memorandum on Good Practices for a More Effective Response to the FTF Phenomenon* and its Addendum with a focus on returning FTFs.

### *CVE and Women, Peace and Security (WPS) policy advancements*

Significant policy advancements addressing the gender dynamics of violent extremism have occurred since the GCTF *Good Practices on Women and CVE* were endorsed at the Sixth GCTF Ministerial Plenary Meeting in September 2015. Building on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2178 (2014) which addresses the threat posed by FTFs and encourages states to empower women as a prevention response and mitigating factor to the spread of violent extremism, which can be conducive to terrorism, and radicalization to violence, in 2015, the Security Council adopted UNSCR 2242 (2015) explicitly recognizing the connection between the WPS agenda and the agenda to counter and prevent violent extremism. UNSCR 2242 emphasized the importance of integrating a gender perspective on CVE efforts and the need "to conduct and gather gender-sensitive research and data collection on the drivers of radicalization for women." Both UNSCR 2242 (2015) and the 2016 UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism call for the participation and leadership of women's organizations to devise and implement strategies to counter violent extremism. The UN Secretary-General's Plan of Action identifies the importance of effective "gender and human rights compliant reintegration strategies", while UNSCR 2242 (2015) on WPS and UNSCR 2250 (2015) on youth, peace and security call for targeted evidence-based policy and programming responses to violent extremism and tailored approaches to promoting inclusion and societal cohesion. Additionally, UNSCR 2395 (2017) reaffirmed the need to increase attention to women in all work on threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts, while UNSCR 2396 (2017) emphasized the need to take into account gender and age sensitivities with respect to FTFs, and those associated with them who

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<sup>1</sup> CVE in this Addendum is taken to include both the countering and the prevention of violent extremism. While there is no agreed upon definition of the distinction between CVE and PVE, the intention is to cover both policies and programs intended to counter violent extremism, as well as policies and programs to prevent the spread of violent extremism within and across societies over the longer term.

may also be victims of terrorism. UNSCR 2395 (2017) also notes the importance of incorporating, as appropriate, the participation of women in developing strategies to counter violent extremism. Finally, the Sixth Review Resolution of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2018) urges integration of gender analysis on the drivers of radicalization of women to violent extremism and terrorism in relevant programs as well as greater consultation with women and women's organizations when developing CVE strategies.

#### *Women's evolving roles in terrorism including as FTFs*

Despite the evolving and diverse roles of women in violent extremism and terrorism, unconscious bias and gender stereotypes often continue to depict female terrorists as not 'actual' and 'active' terrorists, enabling women and girls to evade detection and prosecution, including in the return from war zones and in reintegration where there may be no 'battlefield evidence' of their involvement in violent extremism or terrorism. Like men, women too are engaged in recruitment, logistics and financing, intelligence collection, reconnaissance, financial and other support, enforcement of morality laws, fighting and suicide bombing. Even within strictly family roles, some women may encourage or indoctrinate others to violent extremism including in their families and/or be radicalized to violence through marriage and family status (as in the case of family suicide). They have unique roles in inculcating ideology through education and socialization of children and some have facilitated atrocities against local communities.

There are indications that implicit gender stereotypes and biases in responding to violent extremism and terrorism are shifting. In this regard Good Practices 5 and 6 of the GCTF *Good Practices on Addressing the Challenge of Returning Families of FTFs*, emphasize the need for comprehensive, structured and individually tailored risk and needs assessment for each FTF family member. Accordingly, there is now increasing recognition of women as perpetrators of violent extremist and terrorist actions, and their recruitment into a range of active roles. Women are increasingly being treated as possible perpetrators, for instance, in recent trials in a number of countries, and are subject to individualized risk assessment and prosecution.

#### *Gender-specific motivations and/or recruitment and implications for CVE*

A deeper, gender-sensitive understanding of ideological and material motivations is crucial to be able to effectively combat violent extremism and terrorism. Motivations for women and men to join violent extremist groups may be similar but are often experienced differently with distinct pathways to radicalization to violence. Terrorist organizations demonstrate a nuanced understanding of gender norms and stereotypes and exploit social constructions of masculinity and femininity to tap into different vulnerabilities among diverse groups of men and women in different local contexts, as a means to attract, recruit and maintain adherents.

For example, a growing body of research reveals that some violent extremist organizations target young men for recruitment by promising them wives and/or sex slaves. Similarly, for example, unmarried, divorced or widowed women are offered the promise of a husband or the chance to build a better place to raise a family. Terrorist organizations have also used explicit recruitment messaging that promotes women's empowerment and the prospect of active roles to attract women. Conversely, women and girl terrorists can be used to lure, recruit and radicalize men and boys to violence. Showcasing women and girls' active participation in combat, for example, may imply that women are braver than the men, thus compelling men to join violent extremist and terrorist organizations and to commit acts of violence to prove their 'masculinity.' Such examples reveal the distinct recruitment language and narratives used by terrorist organizations.

With respect to violent extremism, there is some evidence that empathy for victims of violence and resentment toward states perceived to have a role in conflict are push factors that resonate particularly amongst women. The positive vision of a society in which everyone is protected is the related, ideological pull factor. With respect to material factors, poverty, unemployment and lack of opportunity are motivations found to drive radicalization to violence in some cases, but in ways specific to men and women. In some countries, far more young women than young men are unemployed. However, due to gender norms and in their interplay with local contexts, young women are often more likely to be expected to stay home rather than participate in public life. In some cases, they may be more likely to be radicalized to violence online via social media or family members whereas men's public exposure to peers increases the likelihood of in-person radicalization to violence.

Misogyny, injustice and the lack of dignity that some women may experience in their own societies in addition have been found to be unique factors in their radicalization to violence. Young women who become members of violent extremist or terrorist groups may be seeking to escape from the gender norms of their family, community, and/or society. In such cases, women have sought out liberation from constrained environments as well as sought to enter into terror groups' social structures that have rigid norms around women's roles, which may be perceived as clear, empowering and a strong statement of the rejection of alternate societal norms.

#### *Gender-specific return, disengagement and rehabilitation*

If pathways to radicalization to violence are distinct for women and men (even given the diversity within these groups), then the pathways to disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration will also need to be tailored, and dependent on the broader social and cultural context. Women are known to experience more difficulties and greater isolation and stigma often from their own communities, when they return from conflict zones. The experience of acute trauma from having been in an active conflict zone, whether as witness and/or perpetrator, is experienced by women and men, boys and girls differently, especially if they have been subject to reproductive coercion or sexual or gender-based violence.

#### *Women's participation in CVE and reintegration*

While some women may orchestrate and perpetrate violence, it is important to understand that women's roles are not confined to the binary of victim or perpetrator. Women and girls can be simultaneously victims of sexual or gender-based violence, as well as fans, recruiters, fundraisers and perpetrators of violent extremism. Importantly, as emphasised by the recent WPS and CVE policy frameworks outlined above, women are also key actors in countering and preventing violent extremism by women and men in their families, communities and nations. Women religious and faith leaders have a role to play in CVE by espousing moderate interpretations of religious teachings in communities, empowering parents to relay these messages in households, and providing role models to counter women's radicalization to violence in particular.

Research on gender and preventing violent extremism also underscores the important role of communities and families in CVE. Innovations in some countries emphasize women's participation in community consultation and leadership processes towards fostering tolerance and women's empowerment and participation at the local level. Research has found that focused programming on empowering women results in improved capacity and leadership that supports the development of more peaceful communities. It was also found that in these contexts, people, particularly men, were less likely to use violence as a tool to address poverty and inequality, and both women and men were

more likely to report concerns about violent extremism and to join government or community-led initiatives to prevent or counter violent extremism.

### *Overview of good practices and implementation challenges*

The Good Practices in this document address mainstreaming gender in CVE policies and programs, promoting policy alignment with the WPS framework, building a stronger evidence base on the gender dynamics of violent extremism, ensuring that diverse groups of women and girls, including women's organizations are critical stakeholders in CVE, implementing gender-sensitive risk assessment tools, and developing tailored reintegration policies and programs, especially with regard to prosecuting and rehabilitating returning FTFs and their families.

There are notable challenges to the implementation of the Good Practices in this Addendum, not least of all the limited albeit nascent evidence base on gender, violent extremism and CVE, the structural and cultural barriers to women's involvement in the security sector and decision-making, and the significant risks to women's safety and their enjoyment of human rights when participating in CVE. Understandably, these implementation challenges will differ by country and local context and the Good Practices that follow are intended to address them in gender-sensitive and responsive ways.

### **Good Practices**

#### ***Good Practice 1: Mainstream gender in CVE, including promoting policy coherence with WPS frameworks.***

Given the research evidence on the gender-differentiated and often unique pathways of radicalization to violence, targeted and tailored policy and programming responses to counter and prevent violent extremism are necessary. Gender mainstreaming in CVE also involves recognizing the complementary nature of CVE and WPS frameworks and subsequently promoting greater mutual understanding across discrete CVE and WPS policy and practitioner communities. The four pillars of the WPS framework emphasize 1) the role of women in conflict prevention, 2) their participation in peacebuilding, 3) the protection of their rights, and 4) their specific needs during repatriation, resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction.

The UN Security Council call for governments to develop National Action Plans on WPS as well as National Action Plans on CVE serves as a concrete opportunity to ensure both policy frameworks are complementary. Countries should aim to promote the alignment of their policies and programs on CVE with their policies and frameworks on WPS, while ensuring that women's rights are not undermined by security sector agencies that improperly prioritize CVE/security outcomes at the expense of the protection of women's human rights. Both policy frameworks are concerned with preventing women and girl's involvement in violent extremism, the use of sexual violence as a terrorist tactic, and highlight the importance of women's roles and participation in CVE policies and programs. Gender-sensitive CVE policies and practices, together with WPS frameworks, can facilitate gender-responsive approaches to disengagement, reintegration and rehabilitation of members of violent extremist and terrorist organizations.

#### ***Good Practice 2: Build a stronger evidence base on gender and violent extremism, including gendered aspects of men's, women's, boys' and girls' radicalization to violent extremism and terrorism.***

This Good Practice updates the 2015 Good Practice 8 by including the need for a gender-sensitive evidence base on returnees and re-locators and gender-sensitive evaluation and monitoring of CVE

interventions. It supports Good Practice 1 of the GCTF *Good Practices on Addressing the Challenge of Returning Families of FTFs*, by working to build the gender-sensitivity of information sources and processing capabilities for identifying FTFs and their families. Building a stronger evidence base, and understanding the gendered differences in relation to the involvement of women and girls compared with men and boys in violent extremist groups and activities, is necessary for devising gender informed responses and interventions that are tailored, more effective and sustainable. Identifying the gender-specific factors leading to violent extremist radicalization and recruitment requires systematic collection of sex-disaggregated data. At present, there is no consistent sex-disaggregated data on returnees and re-locators for instance. The availability of such data would permit a fuller understanding of the scope of the phenomenon across violent extremist organizations, countries and regions, and inform more accurate risk assessments.

Gender-sensitive design, monitoring and evaluation of CVE policies and programs, including reintegration and rehabilitation programs for former FTFs and their families, is essential for supporting their effectiveness. UNSCR 2396 (2017) encourages the participation and leadership of women in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of strategies for returning and relocating FTFs and their families. CVE interventions should devise a monitoring and evaluation framework to measure their effectiveness with gender-sensitive indicators to ascertain outcomes for women and men, and their communities. Recent studies have evaluated and compared CVE programs with and without a women's empowerment dimension and found that an increase in women's empowerment and gender equality has a positive effect on countering violent extremism.

In some countries, there are national and sub-national strategies on countering radicalization to violence that connect researchers and practitioners, using knowledge and evidence on risk and protective factors to inform – and measure the success of – CVE programs. The risk and protective factors taken into account are gender and age-specific.

***Good Practice 3: Ensure that CVE policies and programs recognize and involve women and girls as critical stakeholders.***

This Good Practice updates the 2015 Good Practices 3, 9, 15, 16, and 17 by focusing more on women's and women-led organizations' involvement in early-warning and alternative or counter narratives to violent extremism. Women and girls have diverse roles to play in countering and preventing violent extremism in their families, communities, religious and civic associations, workplaces, and local and national governments. They should be integrally involved in developing more localized, inclusive and effective CVE approaches. Governments can enable women and girls to participate in CVE by mandating efforts to consult and engage with women participants in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of CVE policies and programs; by facilitating dialogues among women and women leaders at the community and national level; by coordinating networks of women-led organizations involved in CVE; and by supporting women's and girls' leadership on CVE. Economic empowerment initiatives may also provide an entry point for engaging both women and men in community efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism; as may supporting girls' engagement in and access to education, including on tolerance, human rights and gender equality.

Involving women and women-led civil society organizations supports efforts to counter radicalization to violence in general, and particularly among women. For example, women-led organizations should be consulted and engaged in the development of gender sensitive counter-narratives that recognize women's agency and are therefore more likely to reach women and girls.

Women, as a result of their roles and responsibilities in family and community, are often the first to notice early warning signs of violent extremism and radicalization to violence and violent extremism.

However, their often-limited participation and leadership in the public sphere prevents them from having the legitimacy or opportunity to express concerns and proactively respond. Efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism need to take account of women's voices. They frequently have the knowledge, trust, access and long-term commitment to initiate and sustain social cohesion, prevention and reintegration efforts, and support social resilience against radicalization to violence.

Women and women-led organizations should have access to safe and confidential mechanisms to report or refer warning signs for radicalization to violence and violent extremism and to receive information from security agencies on particular risks in their community. This is an urgent matter in many jurisdictions but it should be noted that CSOs including women's organizations already collect and share this information among themselves. Safe and autonomous spaces for girls and young women should be available at religious and secular educational institutions to join countering and preventing violent extremism initiatives and report concerns about violent extremism. Educational institutions can have a particular role to play in promoting non-discriminatory teaching and learning, including on gender equality and women's empowerment within a broader curriculum on civic values, law and society.

***Good Practice 4: Risk assessment tools for violent extremism including FTFs and returning FTFs should routinely consider gender norms and avoid stereotyping women as victims.***

States should develop and implement gender-sensitive risk assessment tools to identify individuals demonstrating signs of radicalization to violence and evaluate the impact of rehabilitation programs on FTFs and their families. This Good Practice is consistent with UNSCR 2396 (2017), which encourages the employment of evidence-based risk assessments, screening procedures and travel data collection and analysis without resorting to profiling based on any discriminatory grounds prohibited by international law. It also supports Good Practices 4 and 5 of the *GCTF Good Practices on Addressing the Challenge of Returning Families of FTFs*, with regard to intake interviews and individually-tailored risk and needs assessment protocols for returning FTFs and family members. Risk assessments should not be based on any prohibited discriminatory grounds, and should be sensitive to the complexity of individual profiles that may involve victimisation as well as perpetration of violence. Case by case analysis of individuals thought to be at risk of committing an act of violent extremism needs to be supplemented by gender-sensitive assessment to combat unconscious bias. Such an approach will enhance prevention of violent extremism and the chances that women violent extremists are identified before they commit such a crime or an act of violent extremism and that women who have committed crimes as FTFs are prosecuted on return.

States should ensure that their professional staff involved in risk assessments have the relevant gender-sensitive expertise. This would involve providing access to training, development and re-evaluation both on the evidence on gender dynamics of violent extremism, and on how to identify and reduce unconscious bias in assessments. Effective oversight mechanisms need to be in place to ensure the accountability of professional staff involved in risk and needs assessments to attend to cases of individuals, both women and men, boys and girls; and to incorporate specific factors into risk assessments to better identify likely perpetrators of violent extremism. A whole of family approach must attend to the gender dynamics within the family and their impacts.

***Good Practice 5: Ensure that CVE, including reintegration policies, are based on gender-sensitive analysis of the conditions conducive to women and girls' involvement in violent extremism.***

This Good Practice updates the 2015 Good Practices 2 and 4 by elaborating on the need for gender-sensitive analysis of women and men FTFs, their radicalization to violence and return pathways, to inform reintegration policies. The Good Practice supports the gender-sensitivity of Good Practices 5

and 6 of the GCTF *Good Practices on Addressing the Challenge of Returning Families of FTFs*, which emphasize the need for individual tailored risk and needs assessments of each individual FTF family member to inform targeted state actions in response to the circumstances of individuals.

It is essential that responses to the threats and challenges posed by violent extremism are based on gender-sensitive, context-specific evidence on the varying roles of women and men, boys and girls in violent extremist organizations, rather than on gender stereotypes. CVE policies and programs should be consistent with applicable law regarding equality of treatment and non-discrimination. The specific needs and risk factors of women and girls and their often distinct radicalization to violence pathways need to be taken into account in tailored CVE policies and programs. This is the case also with respect to FTFs and their families and policies on return and reintegration.

Women's return from conflict zones and reintegration pathways are as distinct as their violent extremist radicalization pathways, including because of different societal responses. This should be taken into account, for instance by analyzing whether women are returning from conflict zones at the same rate as men and considering how their situation may be distinct from men. Compared with men, they may have had less access to funds to enable travel, in some circumstances they have been required to travel with the permission of a male family member and/or in their company, and have had greater challenges in negotiating with smugglers. Approaches to facilitating return and reintegration of female violent extremists should also recognize some common conditions affecting women and girls: their care of children, their relative marginalization and lack of resources, and their possible experience of sexual and gender-based violence within the violent extremist or terrorist group. Both women and men may have acted as perpetrators of FTF-related acts, as well as may be victims/survivors with related needs and interests, and so they should receive tailored support and treatment. Governments should regularly review and evaluate the application of response measures for returning FTFs and their families and address any differential gendered impact they may have (refer back to Good Practice 2).

***Good Practice 6: Develop a gender-sensitive approach to the handling of former FTFs (and their families).***

This Good Practice supports the gender-responsiveness of Good Practices 8 to 10 of the *GCTF Good Practices on Addressing the Challenge of Returning Families of FTFs*. While women and men may be equally likely to have committed violence, their recruitment, roles, treatment and experiences are frequently different within violent extremist and terrorist groups. Prosecution and remedial measures should take into account gender differences and gender dynamics where appropriate and within the context of equal treatment under international law and national systems of justice. Gender-differentiated imprisonment and detention of FTFs should be provided so that specific needs and rights are addressed where appropriate. For instance, there should be provisions made for women who are pregnant, nursing or have dependent children. Female FTFs should be screened for possible sexual or gender-based victimization and receive appropriate protection, support, assistance and treatment as well as accountability and justice for crimes suffered when possible. Authorities should exercise necessary care and due diligence, paying attention to the potential for the abuse of detained women as well as their children during the judicial and reintegration process.

Officials should ensure the unique needs of children detained with their mothers are assessed and addressed. Some, if not all, female FTFs that have travelled from conflict zones with children and have lived under ISIL/Da'esh will be trauma-impacted from witnessing and/or participating in acts of violence, as well as other experiences such as hunger and bombings. States may have different approaches to incarceration preferring either concentration or dispersal of FTF prisoners. Regardless of which approach is taken, and there are good practices with respect to both types of incarceration,

states should take into account the best interests of the child as a primary consideration, consistent with the UN Security Council's recommendation in the Addendum to the Madrid Guiding Principles on foreign terrorist fighters (2018).

States should be mindful of any potential overreach of the security sector in charge of returning FTFs, and ensure that women are not subject to sexual abuse and violence during deportation, transit, return and reintegration. Strong social service provision involving psychosocial assessments and referral pathways should be incorporated into all processes of deportation, transit and return of women and children.

***Good Practice 7: Design and Support Gender-Responsive Reintegration and Rehabilitation Processes and Measures.***

This Good Practice updates the 2015 Good Practice 7. It supports Good Practices 16 and 17 of the *GCTF Good Practices on Addressing the Challenge of Returning Families of FTFs*, that underscore the importance of including women in all reintegration and rehabilitation programs, attending to the gender dynamics of return and reintegration in those programs, and recognizing the roles of women as key community resources and leaders in local programming. UNSCR 2396 (2017) emphasizes that women and children returnees may “require special focus when developing tailored prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies.” Such a tailored, gender-differentiated approach to reintegration and rehabilitation is essential to minimize the risk of re-recruitment and deeper radicalization to violence. Above all, states and civil societies should be guided by respect for human rights and non-discrimination in all individual cases.

Effective, gender-responsive disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration measures need to be in place for women, men and children who associated with violent extremism. This means incorporating gender and age-sensitive considerations into all aspects of rehabilitation and reintegration. Dedicated programs and a tailored approach for the rehabilitation and reintegration of women and girls are important because women are still not always recognized as (former) terrorists, due to prevailing gender norms. As a result, they may be excluded from reintegration programs from which men benefit due to expectations around gender roles. Responses need to acknowledge the complex roles women play in a terrorist group and the impact of possible trauma, as well as recognize their agency. These different return pathways of women and girls need to be recognized and gender-based trauma and stigma addressed; they render women distinctly vulnerable and potentially less responsive to rehabilitation programs.

Rehabilitation programs are in the process of being established for FTFs and their families. To ensure that they are gender-inclusive and responsive such programs should be led by professional staff who are aware of the effects of trauma and draw on gender-sensitive understanding of pathways of violent extremist radicalization and return, including gendered trauma, stigma and shame. As recommended in Good Practice 2, this programming and training should be regularly monitored and evaluated. Gender-sensitivity suggests that female officials should be considered for direct involvement in the treatment of women suspected of violent extremism and FTF acts: that includes law enforcement, medical officials, psychologists, religious counsellors and social workers. In addition, governments could provide trauma-informed gender-sensitivity training for relevant professional groups, including judges, prosecutors, and border control, law enforcement, prison and probation services, as well as social services and medical professionals interacting with FTFs and their families.

A multidisciplinary team-based approach to FTFs' and their families' return and rehabilitation is crucial for effective disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration. A referral pathway between and across law enforcement/security agencies and health and social services is important, but it should not be

overly securitized. Collaboration between governments, civil society organizations and the community is necessary for the successful delivery of reintegration programs. A whole of community approach that ensures the safety and protection of the community and of the returnee, and promotes resilience in the community is needed.

CSOs therefore play an important role in such disengagement, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs, strengthening community resilience while building trust with returning FTFs and their families. They support both those being reintegrated and the community that has to accept them. Everyone should strive to keep a community safe and CSOs can assist in addressing the causes of violent extremism. For example, some CSOs have persuaded fathers not to reject daughters based on a framework of shared humanity. Women-led CSOs are often an entry point working with women, wives and families, enabling their social and economic inclusion to address gender-specific grievances and motivations. States should appropriately engage and empower women's organizations to respond to FTF-related challenges and dynamics without instrumentalizing and securitizing their engagement.