

1. The Policy Gaps and Challenges

Efforts to counter violent extremism should rest within a larger international framework of human rights, protecting basic rights to security and safety. Through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, UN Member States resolved to address the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism, including lack of rule of law and violations of human rights, and ensure that any measures taken to counter terrorism comply with their obligations under international law, including refugee, human rights and international humanitarian law.⁶⁷ The 2015 Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (A/70/674, 2015) emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to countering terrorism, and includes attention to the human rights and gendered dimensions of the issues.⁶⁸ In biennial resolutions reviewing the strategy Member States have reaffirmed their commitments and added the importance of gender to this work.

Gendered perspectives remain absent despite past experience to draw from

Yet few countries have comprehensive national policies for rehabilitation and reintegration of returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTF), their families, or other returnees associated with violent extremism. Gendered perspectives remain largely absent from mainstream PVE discussions or policy arenas. Moreover, despite the extensive policies and guidance pertaining to gendered disarmament, including the UN's Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration Standard (IDDRS),⁶⁹ there has been limited attention or practice of integrating gender into rehabilitation practices (see Annex 1 for a summary of relevant policies). There are differences between traditional conflict DDR and the PVE context as elaborated in the 2015 United Nations University report on the topic.⁷⁰ Nonetheless, past experiences and guidance could offer some lessons for contemporary programming in the PVE context.

The most recent UN Security Council Resolution in the WPS portfolio, UNSCR 2242, while specifically addressing women and violent extremism, is also missing attention to rehabilitation and reintegration.⁷¹ Furthermore, even though the resolution and the WPS agenda more broadly mandate attention to women as perpetrators and prevention actors in violent extremism, despite the attention to families of FTF, and concern about returnees in general, the data and literature on women returning from violent extremist groups remains limited.

Civil society-government collaboration across all sectors is vital

The paucity of attention to the specific conditions of women associated with VE groups is matched by the lack of systematic inclusion of civil society as a critical partner in national PVE efforts. This again impacts women more profoundly as those who are active in PVE and related rehabilitation efforts, are often doing so through civil society organizations.

Good collaborative practices, however, are emerging. For example, the Government of Indonesia is partnering with civil society to develop standard operating procedures (SOPs) for stakeholders involved in rehabilitation and reintegration (see Part II, Case 1: C-SAVE, Indonesia). They have incorporated gendered provisions,

⁶⁷ A/RES/60/288 (2006), The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (available at: <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy>)

⁶⁸ A/70/674 (2015), Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General

⁶⁹ UN Inter-agency Working Group on Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (2014), Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS).

⁷⁰ See also Cockayne, J. & O'Neil, S.(2015), UN-DDR in an era of violent extremism. Is it fit for purpose? United Nations University.

⁷¹ S/RES/2242 (2015) (available at: https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2242.pdf).

because of the numbers of women, men, boys and girls returning.⁷² In addition, in 2018 the Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) collaborative also published practical guidance for policymakers pertaining to disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration issues,⁷³ with specific attention to the need for:

- Policy coherence within and across countries, given the transnational aspects of VE;
- Alignment of national policies with laws, security and judicial practices;
- Integration of a gendered lens across all sectors to address and mitigate the different experiences of women and men; and
- Attention to the specific needs and circumstances of boys and girls who are affected or implicated in violent extremism and are among the populations entering into disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration; and ensuring alignment with existing international and national policies and laws related to children.

Managing the return of the many individuals who have travelled to conflict zones and the growing number defecting from terrorist groups is a priority for many countries. Effective and sustainable disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes are essential to addressing this challenge and preventing violent extremism.



Women and youth community groups called Tolanas demonstrating for peace in Pakistan

But such programmes require attention and action at the state, community, public discourse, family, and individual levels. These are individual, psychosocial processes that require the sustained engagement and involvement of local communities, families, and other supportive social networks. As such, CSOs have a unique contribution to make, because they often have the trust of and access to the affected individuals and communities in ways that government officials do not. Moreover, because they are of the community they have a vested interest for providing long term support, which is often a challenge for international or even state entities.⁷⁴

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⁷² Interview with Mira Kusumarini, GSX workshop April 26-27, 2018 in Oslo, Norway.

⁷³ GSX (2017), "Improving PVE Practice: 10 Steps to Strengthening Rehabilitation and Reintegration Efforts for Terrorism Offenders, Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters, and Victims of Violent Extremism."

⁷⁴ Excerpt from GSX (2017) "Improving PVE Practice: 10 Steps to Strengthening Rehabilitation and Reintegration Efforts for Terrorism Offenders, Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters, and Victims of Violent Extremism."