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CASE SUMMARY

INSTITUTIONALIZING EQUALITY: SHIFTING GENDER ROLES IN JORDANIAN COUNTERTERRORISM RESPONSES

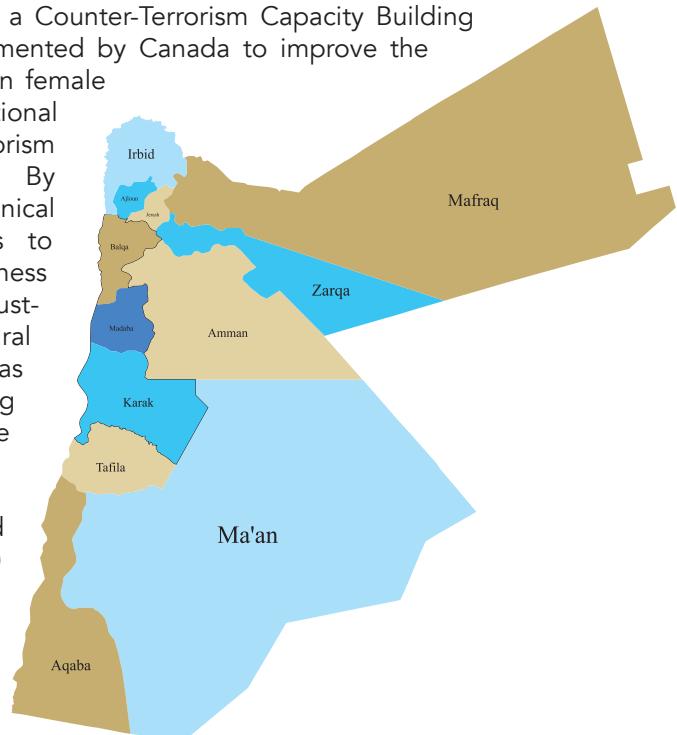
A Case Study on the Role of Gender and Identity in Shaping Positive Alternatives to Extremisms¹

SUMMARY

The HASBANI project is a Counter-Terrorism Capacity Building Program (CTCBP) implemented by Canada to improve the participation of Jordanian female police officers in operational roles in counterterrorism (CT) crisis response. By complementing technical training with strategies to promote gender awareness and taking a personal, trust-based approach to cultural change, the project has made inroads in shifting rigid gender roles in the Jordanian security sector.

Taking a Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) approach,² this case study discusses facilitating factors, barriers, and challenges to expanding the roles of women in CT responses. Drawing on good practices from women-led civil society organizations in other contexts, it considers how combining women's participation with a community policing approach strengthens the ability of the security sector to provide a positive alternative to participation in violent extremist groups.

Despite Jordan's relative stability, the country is one of the highest per-capita contributors of foreign fighters in the world and has suffered several violent extremist attacks on its soil. Islamist extremist groups in the region have taken a dynamic and strategic approach to including women in combat, operations, and propaganda. They skillfully manipulate gender roles to avoid detection, bolster recruitment, and generate attention for their cause.



1. The International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) was commissioned by Global Affairs Canada to produce this set of case studies on the role of gender and intersectional identities in countering violent extremism and counterterrorism. For more information or to contact the authors please email info@icanpeacework.org.

2. Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) is an analytical process that provides a rigorous method for the assessment of systemic inequalities, as well as to assess how diverse groups of women, men, and gender diverse people may experience policies, programs and initiatives. More info on the GBA+ approach is accessible [here](#).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ **Violent extremist groups dynamically adjust their approach to gender roles according to what best suits their tactical interests.** They manipulate perceptions of women's roles in society to avoid detection and strengthen their operations. Extremist recruitment propaganda plays into the economic and social restrictions women face by offering them purpose, opportunity, and belonging.
- ▶ **Training and upskilling women in CT roles is most effective when paired with awareness training to reform the dominant patriarchal culture of the police and security sector.** Organizational change around gender is slow and incremental, and awareness training should take a long-term approach that prioritizes trust- and relationship building with local security actors.
- ▶ **Positive incentives for shifting gender roles need to be clearly communicated to intervention partners and participants, including to female participants.** Traditional gender roles offer familiarity and comfort and shifting them needs to carry tangible benefits.
- ▶ **Community engagement approaches can support trust-building, holistic prevention of violent extremism, and leverage the capacity of female officers to create more open, trusted, and inclusive relationships with their communities.** To provide an effective, positive counterweight to violent extremist groups, policing and CT culture needs to prioritize community needs and human security. Purely militarized and securitized approaches risk increasing the vulnerability of communities to recruitment and radicalization. Integrating a community engagement approach
- ▶ **The experiences of women-led civil society organizations offer critical lessons in building and repairing community-police relationships.** Their interventions center gender equality and enable a joint community-police response to the threat of violent extremism.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS

Playing with Perception: Manipulation of Gender Roles by Islamist Extremist Groups

Although Jordanian women are highly literate and educated, traditional attitudes that view women as homemakers limit female participation in public life, politics, and in the labor force.³ In Jordan, inviting women into the security sector carries tangible benefits: women can, for instance, handcuff and carry out searches of both women and men (whereas men can only search other men) and can provide emergency medical aid to both genders without explicit permission. Despite these benefits, Jordan's deep-seated gender roles continue to inhibit Jordanian women's participation in counterterrorism (CT), countering and preventing violent extremism (C/PVE) and peacebuilding.

While attempts at integrating women in CT and C/PVE responses in Jordan are stifled by rigid gender norms, violent extremist groups in the region are taking increasingly flexible approach towards using women in their combat operations. In the face of strategic necessity, such as loss of territory, some Islamist extremist groups have been quick to renegotiate traditional gender roles: after the Islamic State lost Mosul to the Iraqi government in 2017, the group released an article explicitly outlining women's obligation to engage in Jihad on behalf of the Caliphate.⁴



During the 2016 Kerak castle attack, suspects escaped police by taking advantage of conservative cultural norms.

3. Smith, J. (2019). Jordanian Feminism and Countering Violent Extremism. Brown Political Review. ([access here](#)).

4. Winter, C. and Margolin, D. (2017). The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and the Islamic State. ETH Zurich Center for Security Studies. ([access here](#)).



The HASBANI project trains female police officers to prepare them for operational roles within the Jordanian Public Security Directorate (PSD).

Islamist extremist groups have proven adept at manipulating gender roles and cultural norms to strengthen their operations. During the Jordan's 2016 Kerak castle attacks, all-male Jordanian security forces attempted to enter a suspicious home. The suspects prevented police from entering by crying that there were women present in the home who were uncovered. The delay gave the attackers enough time to escape, mobilize weapons and eventually take the lives of 15 people.⁵ The attackers co-opted traditional gender roles to create the perception of female presence. Similar tactics by Islamist extremist groups include the use female operatives to smuggle weapons and goods under their clothes, knowing that women are less likely to be searched. Groups also leverage restrictive gender roles to encourage recruitment. Disaffected young women who

face limited social, economic, and political opportunities may view joining violent extremist groups as an escape from the gendered norms of their family and community.⁶

The HASBANI Project: Building Technical and Cultural Capacity for Women's Participation in the Jordanian Security Sector

To improve the presence of women in counterterrorism and security responses, Canada, under its Counter-Terrorism Capacity Building Program (CTCBP), began implementation of a project to train female officers in firearms, search techniques, and English language skills to prepare them for operational roles within the Jordanian gendarmerie and Public Security Directorate (PSD).^{7 8} To complement and strengthen the technical training, the project contains gender awareness training aimed at shifting the organizational culture of the PSD to be more accepting of the presence and leadership of female officers in operational roles, and to institutionalize gender as a component of PSD's strategies, policies, and operations. The content of the training touches on gendered concepts and their relevance to security and counterterrorism and discusses international policy commitments around gender equality and women, peace, and security.

In the face of strategic necessity, such as loss of territory, some Islamist extremist groups have been quick to renegotiate traditional gender roles.



5. Momani, B. (2019). Our feminist foreign policy is not perfect, but in Jordan, it's doing a lot of good. The Globe and Mail. ([access here](#)).
 6. International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2019). Invisible Women: The Gendered Dimensions of Return, Rehabilitation and Reintegration from Violent Extremism. ([access here](#)).
 7. Government of Canada (2021). Security Capacity-Building Programs. ([access here](#)).
 8. In 2019, the Gendarmerie and PSD merged and are now jointly referred to as the PSD. The HASBANI project was originally training the Gendarmerie but as a result of the merger has been able to reach a broader range of participants across the PSD.

The experiences from the HASBANI project highlights that creating cultural change in traditionally patriarchal spaces like the security sector requires more than just imparting knowledge on why women's participation is important, it necessitates time, relationship-building, continuous presence, and constant negotiation with project participants and partners. Being able to connect the project objectives back to the Kerak castle incident emphasized that the project is not just externally imposed but has a clear CT purpose. Trust-building strategies have led to successes in the project, like the acceptance of mixed gender trainings by the PSD – a practice unheard of prior to the project. Canada has also been invited to implement the project for the Jordanian military.

Despite these successes, meaningful change around shifting gender norms in the PSD remains slow and incremental. Jordan has not experienced a critical terrorist incident in recent years that would provide insight into whether the PSD is able to put the training into practice and deploy female officers in its response. While there is rhetorical support by PSD leadership, they maintain a fear of public perception and shame. Resistance to change has also come from the female officers themselves, who in assuming operational roles will have to work farther away from home and from their families, face more risk and work longer hours for the same salary.⁹

Beyond Shifting Gender Roles, Towards an Ethos of Community Engagement¹⁰

While the focus of the HASBANI project is on strengthening the technical skills of female officers and building an organizational culture that welcomes their participation in operational roles, gender-responsive security sector initiatives and efforts to integrate women in policing in other contexts have taken a community engagement approach. In Sri Lanka, the Association for War Affected Women (AWAW) has provided training to personnel in over 400 police stations, using UNSCR 1325 to encourage police to identify community security concerns and create space for dialogue between police and communities.¹¹ AWAW also advocated for the deployment of female officers because they instilled less fear than male officers when entering the homes of female civilians.¹²

Such community engagement approaches create valuable space for trust-building between women-led civil society, police, and communities, and enable a



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broader focus on prevention of violent extremism rather than the narrower strategy of incident response. Given the mistrust fostered by the repressive tactics Jordanian police have used against protestors and their role in encouraging further radicalization to violent extremism, trust-building and prevention are relevant and necessary in the Jordanian context.¹³ ¹⁴ ¹⁵ Community engagement that includes female officers has been shown to be a more effective long-term solution, successfully leveraging the capacity of female police to create more open, trusted, and inclusive relationships with their communities.¹⁶

9. Interview with HASBANI implementing partner, January 2022.

10. The analysis in this section is informed by the experiences and perspectives of the Women's Alliance for Security Leadership (WASL), a network of over 80 women rights and peace practitioners engaged in preventing extremism and promoting peace, and based on ICAN's research on CVE and policing as captured in ICAN (2017). Preventing Violent Extremism, Protecting Rights and Community Policing Why Civil Society and Security Sector Partnerships Matter ([access here](#)) and ICAN (2016). Uncomfortable Truths, Unconventional Wisdoms – WASL Security Brief ([access here](#)).

11. International Civil Society Action Network (ICAN) (2017). Preventing Violent Extremism, Protecting Rights and Community Policing Why Civil Society and Security Sector Partnerships Matter ([access here](#)).

12. Schamber, S. and Holmes, M. (2021). Agents of Change: Transforming Gender Roles and Extremism in Somalia, International Civil Society Action Network. ([access here](#)).

13. Evidence from other contexts has pointed to the role of state violence and abuses of power as a "tipping point" for people to join violent extremist groups. See: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2017). Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment. ([access here](#)).

14. Nusairat, T. (2020). Jordan protests met with repression as government changes tactics. Atlantic Council. ([access here](#)).

15. Al-Khalidi, S. (2021). Jordan Police Detain Scores of Activists, Break up Protests. Reuters. ([access here](#)).

16. Klingensmith, A. (2019). The Role of Local Communities in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) in Jordan. ([access here](#)).