POLICY FRAMEWORK

UN WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT IN SUPPORT OF COUNTER TERRORISM AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

UN WOMEN

UN WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT IN SUPPORT OF COUNTER TERRORISM AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM (CT AND PVE)

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UN WOMEN

1. SUMMARY

This brief addresses the importance of having a proactive gender-responsive[1] framework to counterterrorism (CT) and preventing violent extremism (PVE). UN Women's gender-responsive framework is grounded in human rights frameworks and applies the principles of conflict sensitivity. UN Women's support focuses on capacity building, inclusive processes, people-centric approaches to CT and prevention of violent extremism, and seeks a whole-of-government and whole-of-society engagement. However, there are normative, policy-related and programmatic challenges and risks attached to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism engagement. UN Women's agenda in upholding and promoting women's rights within this complex and dynamic thematic area can only be advanced by responding to these challenges and risks.

This brief offer guidance to UN Women community of practice to carry out due diligence, measures that respond to challenges identified and, most importantly, to support risk-aware decision-making at all levels.

As such, and drawing on the discussions from the community of practice virtual workshop, and analysis undertaken of UN Women engagement in counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism at all levels, the policy brief review makes recommendations for UN Women's community of practice to consider in future relevant programming and policy support.

Note on Terminology as used in this brief:

As discussed later in this brief, there is no agreed-upon terminology in this thematic area.

Nevertheless, for the purposes of this brief we consider the following to be appropriate:

Counter-terrorism	This is used to refer to military operations as well as the adoption of legislative and policing frameworks to control, repress and track terrorist activities; training, equipping and reorganizing national security forces and intelligence services; and enhancing border surveillance and checkpoints.[2]
Counter Violent Extremism	CVE is focused on countering the activities and narratives of existing violent extremists.
Terrorism	There is no universally accepted definition of terrorism. For the purposes of this document the term refers to the definition of the United Nations describing terrorism as: "Criminal acts intended or calculated to provoke a state of terror in the general public."[3] Also referred to as acts of terrorism.
Violent Extremism	There is no universally accepted definition of Violent Extremism. This brief follows the reference to acts perpetrated by terrorist organizations in the 2015 United Nations Plan for of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism: "[...]Violent extremism is a diverse phenomenon, without clear definition. It is neither new nor exclusive to any region, nationality or system of belief. Nevertheless, in recent years, terrorist groups such as ISIL, Al-Qaida and Boko Haram have shaped our image of violent extremism and the debate on how to address this threat. These groups' message of intolerance – religious, cultural, social – has had drastic consequences for many regions of the world."[4]
Prevention of Violent Extremism	prevention of violent extremism is focused on preventing the further spread of violent extremism. It primarily refers to advocacy, policy and programmatic support at all levels to address different areas of engagement as outlined in the UN Plan of Action.[5]

1   https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/genderterm
2   Mahmoud (2016)
3   United Nations General Assembly Resolution 49/60 (1994). "Measures to Eliminate International Terrorism".
4   UN Plan of Action (2015)
5   UN Plan of Action (2015)

2. RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE BRIEF

This brief presents UN Women's contribution to supporting counterterrorism (CT)[6] and the prevention of violent extremism (PVE)[7] worldwide. UN Women is committed to supporting and enhancing gender-responsive approaches and works against potential gender-based harms in the existing counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism policies at all levels. The contribution UN Women offers leverages its triple mandate[8] to ensure a proactive gender-responsive framework for engagement in counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism.[9] This means UN Women is well-positioned to support counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism agendas to protect women and girls from the harms of violent extremism; to respond to the gendered drivers and vulnerabilities of violent extremism; and to promote women's rights in the context of counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism towards gender-equal (in line with SDG5), justice, peaceful and inclusive societies (in line with SDG16).

UN Women's approach to counter-terrorism/prevention of violent extremism needs to be understood, shared and enriched by all relevant parts of the organisation, ensuring that programming and policy work is human rights-orientated, genderresponsive, conflict-sensitive, consistent, and effective in promoting sustainable outcomes in affected contexts **while managing inherent risks linked to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism engagement.**

This brief highlights key areas of UN Women's support to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism; discusses challenges related to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism engagement; outlines the added value of UN Women's mandate within the broader UN counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism agenda;[10] provides advice on risks identified; and lists principles for decision-making in support of gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive approaches to prevention of violent extremism.

3. INTRODUCTION

In line with Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2242 (2015), UN Women provides support to ensure gender-responsive approaches to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism worldwide. In 2021, the General Assembly passed its 7th review resolution of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (UNGCTS), for the first time recalling relevant Security Council

resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, and noting the important contribution of women in the implementation of the UNGCTS. Furthermore, the 7th review includes text recognizing the role of women and the role of civil society, recognizes the risk of instrumentalizing women's rights, and calls for the need of gender analysis. UN Women is also recognized as an integral

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6   Support to counter terrorism as defined in this policy brief, refers to UN Women advocacy, normative and policy related assistance that could be led at the global, regional and/or country levels.

7   Support to prevention of violent extremism as defined in this policy brief refers to UN Women advocacy, policy related and/or programmatic support that could be led at the global, regional and/or country levels.

8   UN Women triple mandate encompasses normative support, UN system coordination, and operational activities. For more information see https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/09/un-women-strategic-plan-2022-2025

9   For more information see: https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/preventing-violent-extremism

10 The main UN frameworks are the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy and the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism available at: https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/75/291 and https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/plan-of-action-to-prevent-violent-extremism

actor of the UN global compact on counter-terrorism.[11] Consequently it is within the remit of the Strategic Plan (2022-2025) impact area of peace and security, that UN Women's engagement in support of counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism is clearly identified. The Strategic Plan also highlights the organization's support to the mandate holders on counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism, namely the Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and the UN Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (UN CTED).

The UN Place of Action for the Prevention of Violent Extremism (POA) establishes gender equality and women's empowerment as part of the seven core areas underlying the UN's prevention strategy including:

- mainstreaming gender perspectives across efforts to prevent violent extremism;
- investing in gender-sensitive research and data collection on women's roles in violent extremism, including identifying the drivers that lead women to join violent extremist organisations (VEOs) as well as the impact of counter-terrorism strategies on their lives, in order to develop targeted and evidence-based policy and programming responses;
- including women and other under-represented groups in national law enforcement and security agencies, including as part of counter-terrorism prevention and response frameworks;
- building the capacity of women and their civil society groups to engage in prevention and response efforts related to violent extremism; and
- ensuring that a portion of all funds dedicated to addressing violent extremism are committed to projects that address women's specific needs or empower women.

As such, UN Women has actively worked to support national actors, UN mandate-holder and partner non-governmental organizations to implement inclusive gender-responsive approaches to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism.[12]

In addition, UN Women through its different interventions under peace and security have exerted efforts to promote the rights of youth and their participation in prevention of violent extremism discussions and policies. In particular, UN Women has supported a gender perspective to youth -ed and youth-driven initiatives through producing diverse capacity-building packages on the human rights of girls.[13]

However, the UN counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism agenda has faced criticism, especially after the establishment of the Office of Counter-Terrorism as a dedicated entity mandated with the implementation of the UNGCTS.[14] UN Women as part of the UN system has received similar critique—especially on risks related to the instrumentalization of women and their rights, including for example the support to increase women's leadership and participation in security-related processes. Other risks related to the agenda more broadly include: inconsistent terminology; diverse and complex national legal and policy frameworks; lack of attention to women's agency and gender equality in counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism; lack of accountability frameworks including monitoring and evaluation, lack of gender-sensitive data across counter-terrorism/prevention of violent extremism programming; and impacts on the development agenda including the diversion of funds from supporting the SDGs to supporting security-oriented programmes.

Meanwhile, UN Women, aware of the risks related to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism engagement, has carried out research to support objective policy-making, and produced a guidance note on gender-mainstreaming and prevention of violent extremism in support of implementing a proactive inclusive gender-responsive human rights centred approach,[15] and to address related risks and challenges in this thematic area.

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11 UNGA (2021) The Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy Review §10. 11. 19, and 20

12 For more information on UN Women support to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism, see UN Women Cross-Regional Workshop: report and analysis, Appendix 1 on prevention of violent extremism activities.

13 For example see https://www.unwomen-metrony.org/news-intro/2021/12/2/uncovering-the-forms-and-root-causes-of-gender-basedviolence

14 The fourth pillar of the United Nations: the rise of counter-terrorism, Safer World (2020) available at: https://www.saferworld.org.uk/resources/publications/1256-a-fourth-pillar-for-the-united-nations-the-rise-of-counter-terrorism

15 Gender Mainstreaming, Principles, Dimensions and Priorities for prevention of violent extremism. UN Women. https://www.unwomen.org/en/digitallibrary/ publications/2019/09/gender-mainstreaming-principles-dimensions-and-priorities-for-pve

4. UN WOMEN ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF COUNTER-TERRORISM AND PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Output Indicator 5.13.4

(Counter-terrorism/prevention of violent extremism) policies and programmes that have integrated women peace and security priorities, developed and/or implemented with UN-Women's support

89%
Progress
against 2020
Millestone

44%
Achievement rate
against 2021
Target

UN Women plays an important role is supporting the UN system in counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism. It is a key participant in the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact (UNGCTC) as the chair of the Gender Working Group (GWG) of the UNGCTC. In 2018, UN Women supported 27 prevention of violent extremism related projects worldwide (most recent figures).[16] In 2020, the total expenditure by UN Women on peace and security programming and humanitarian interventions rose to USD 106 million, up from USD 89.44 million in 2018, increasing the reach of programming from 55 to 65 countries and territories.[17] This represents nearly 1/5th of UN women's total budget in 2019, which was just over USD 500 million. Funds for prevention of violent extremism-specific interventions are not clear.

UN Women has developed a proactive gender-responsive framework for its engagement in counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism that seeks to:

- Protect women from the harms of violent extremism
- Respond to the gendered drivers and vulnerabilities of violent extremism
- Support national relevant institutions in providing gender-responsive services in contexts impacted by terrorism and violent extremism
- Promote women's leadership and meaningful participation in counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism processes
- Strengthen the goals of prevention of violent extremism to yield increasingly gender-equal, justice, peaceful and inclusive societies

16 UN. 2018. Report of the United Nations High-Level Conference on Counter-Terrorism. New York. June 28th and 29th.
https://www.un.org/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/report_unhlc_final_web.pdf pg 16
17 United Nations Security Council (2020). Report of the Secretary-General on women peace and security (S/2020/946), para. 97. See also
https://www.unwomen.org/en/executive-board/strategic-plan/outcome-area-5

UN Women, at all levels, offers five areas of activity in support of gender-responsive counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism:

- Research and Advocacy
- Gender-mainstreaming in counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism strategies via policy and technical assistance
- Institutional capacity-building to increase gender-responsive approaches to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism
- Community-based initiatives to strengthen social cohesion, social reintegration, and promote the rights of women and girls
- Resilience support in border areas, host communities, and emergency setting in contexts impacted by terrorism and violent extremism
- Strengthened partnerships with national authorities, civil society, academia and regional organizations to strengthen gender-mainstreaming and gender-responsive approaches to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism.

UN Women, at all levels, is a strategic partner for national actors, including governments and civil society organizations, UN entities, and donor partners, to support gender-sensitive[18] and genderresponsive approaches to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism. UN Women's comparative advantage in prevention of violent extremism programmatic support includes (some of, or all, depending on context):

1. **Strengthening gender-responsive approaches that address known drivers of violent extremism that could be conducive to terrorism.** Drivers and underlying conditions of terrorism and VEOs are patriarchal in nature and affect men and women in gendered ways; addressing these with a gender-transformative and -responsive manner creates more inclusive and successful strategies to prevent violent extremism.

2. **Promoting women's leadership and active participation in prevention of violent extremism processes and mechanisms.** This recognizes women as rights holders and political agents in their communities, families, civil society organizations, in state institutions, and in the private sector. Given equal access to decision-making processes, alongside capacity-building for women (when needed) on areas related to violent extremism and terrorism, women's effective participation and engagement can be realized.

3. **Promoting gender equality in societies and communities to minimize vulnerabilities and address root causes.** There are three components which build on this starting point: first, is that gender-equal societies are more inclusive, just, and cohesive, and therefore resilient to the narratives of VEOs; second, that gender-equal societies are less vulnerable to the gendered narratives of VEOs which seek to limit or harm women's rights and equality; third, without gender equality women are not able to lead efforts against violent extremism, they're not able to be heard in prevention of violent extremism spaces, and they are more vulnerable to the harms of violent extremism and prevention of violent extremism.

4. **Security sector development and gender-mainstreaming within the security sector.** It is acknowledged that human rights abuses, including of women's rights, by the state and security sector exacerbate conflict and reduce trust between the state and citizens. The breakdown of the rule of law is conducive to violent extremism and antithetical to gender equality. Linked to the WPS Agenda, women's right to meaningful participation in decisionmaking and implementation of prevention of violent extremism, includes security and counter-terrorism spaces. Second, as the security sector still dominates prevention of violent extremism and counter-terrorism activities, shifting their perspective cascades to other prevention of violent extremism and counter-terrorism actors.

5. **Fostering women's peacebuilding initiatives.** Investing in women's peacebuilding infrastructure and activities provides opportunities for peaceful and inclusive futures that run counter to those envisioned by VEOs and terrorist organizations. Women's peacebuilding activities also serve as protection measures through service provision and response mechanisms to immediate communities.

6. **Supporting gender-responsive and human rights-compliant normative frameworks.** Where overarching normative frameworks recognize State obligations in CEDAW and the commitments of the WPS agenda, this will ensure gender-responsive and human rightscompliant strategies; that women's security needs are accounted for; that any potential gendered harms of counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism approaches are mitigated; and that accountability, the rule of law, and inclusivity are fostered when counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism are implemented.

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18 https://unterm.un.org/unterm/search?urlQuery=gender%20sensitivity

5. MAIN CHALLENGES TO/WITH UN WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT

UN support to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism is a high-risk endeavour, given risks to human rights violations perpetrated by State and non-state actors within this engagement. For UN Women, additional technical and reputational risks emerge: the encroachment of vague terminologies on women's rights including human rights defenders, unclear measures of success, broad counter-terrorism laws and strategies jeopardizing the gender equality and women's rights; and impeding humanitarian assistance; the systematic targeting of women by violent extremist organisations (VEOs); protection issues; threats and reprisals against partners are some of the pressing challenges facing UN Women engagements in this area. The challenges below are the most relevant to UN Women's mandate and stakeholders.

I. Terminology

For years civil society, UN entities, and the Special Rapporteur have reported that the absence of a clear and precise definition for terrorism, and poorly defined terms like "violent extremism", present continuous challenges to human rights, the rule of law, and peace and security. The term "acts of terrorism" is labelled as the source of some of the most egregious violations of human rights and central to the challenges faced by civil society.[19] The lack of widely recognised definitions in the context of counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism has also resulted in perpetuating existing gender inequalities, and pose a significant threat to existing advances towards attaining women's rights and gender equality.[20]

The same goes for the terms "extremism" and "radicalization" when applied to non-violent acts. These terms are ambiguous, prone to being abused politically, and can generate harmful biases against certain communities.[21] In some contexts, these terms are used to describe acts of political dissent, activism against climate change, and to wage attacks on democratic and civic spaces in general. During the Global Digital Consultation (GDC), it was reported that women human rights defenders experienced human rights violations because counter-terrorism laws labelled them as "terrorist" for their work in supporting land rights and indigenous rights, and tackling climate change.

II. Limited attention to women's rights and gender equality in counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism

Several studies[22] commissioned by UN Women found that structural realities such as patriarchy, prevalence of extremist ideologies, political violence, and the lack of economic opportunities, among other things, affect women in a variety of ways. It's imperative that due regard is given to: women's and girls' unique vulnerability to extremist ideas; the impacts extremism has on women and girls; how women can exercise their agency to resist extremism; and what capacities are needed. Often when women are the objective target of terrorist groups, they generally experience limited domestic and public autonomy, have low levels of education, paid employment and decision-making agency, and in conditions of conflict, are unengaged in decision-making mechanisms. These factors influence women' ability to play a role in security-related discussions, processes and mechanisms. counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism policies and relevant assistance mechanisms do not take into account gender-related power dynamics in their primary analysis, and frequently fail to consider the needs and experiences of disadvantaged groups, including of women and girls.

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19 See: Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Context of Counterterrorism report titled "Impact of measures to address terrorism and violent extremism on civic space and the rights of civil society actors and human rights defenders", March 2019

20 See: Outcome report "Civil society voices on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counter-terrorism responses", The issue of definitions, page. 15, available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/11/gendered-dimensions-of-violentextremism-and-counterterrorism-responses

21 Ibid.

22 See studies on gender and violent extremism commissioned as part of UN Women global prevention of violent extremism project carried out in Pakistan, Jordan and Mozambique (2021)

The threat of violent extremism and heavy-handed security measures in counter-terrorism equally contribute to reinforcing gender inequalities and makes it difficult for women to engage in civic and political spaces. Women and young women living in contexts affected by terrorism and violent extremism experience serious human rights violations including rape, sexual harassment, abduction, trafficking, and law enforcement brutality usually without effective recourse mechanisms.[23]

Nevertheless, counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism policies do not adequately recognize and acknowledge women as political actors and/or rights-holders in that sense. This is manifested in the limited or tokenistic roles and representation of women in security sector institutions, processes, and mechanisms and which applies to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism. Where gender is considered oftentimes it's about women, and usually framed within the paradigm of victims or perpetrators.

Furthermore, counter-terrorism/prevention of violent extremism narratives underline the need to engage women and carry out gender analysis to assess the gendered drivers of violent extremism, and to ensure that counter-terrorism/prevention of violent extremism strategies are effective. While this useful, however there must be consideration of women's roles as political agents and equal citizens who must participate in security decision-making platforms and must be present in security sector institutions. In that sense, counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism policies do not consider gender equality aspects. The Global Study on the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2015) stressed the risk of co-opting and instrumentalizing women's rights in the

context of countering violent extremism is high, and emphasized that in contexts where women's advocacy becomes too closely associated with a government's counter-terrorism agenda, the risk of a backlash against women's rights defenders increases.[24]

In some instances, counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism policies may reaffirm gender-discriminatory practices and/or exacerbate gender inequality.[25] Women human rights defenders are particularly targeted by both VEOs and state actors when they are perceived to challenge socio-cultural norms, traditions, perceptions, and stereotypes related to the role and status of women in society.[26]

There is a reported correlation between the proliferation of counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism strategies and laws, and shrinking civic and democratic space.[27] A 2019 report of the Global Alliance for SDG 16 highlighted that 181 restrictions justified though counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism have been imposed on civil society organizations in 82 countries since 2013.[28] Such restrictions include laws related to the establishment, registration and financing of CSOs. In some instances, counter-terrorism law prevented CSOs from effectively providing humanitarian assistance to communities in need.

This situation jeopardizes decades of work led by women and men towards achieving gender equality, addressing women's vulnerabilities. Adverse impact on financing of women's organizations, due to limitations on access to foreign funding and banking procedures imposed by counter-terrorism laws and the donors' prioritization of counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism activities over gender equality

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23 Jayne C., Huckerby, *In Harm's Way: Gender and Human Rights in National Security*

24 UN Women, A Global Study on the Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. 2015, Available: https://wps.unwomen.org

25 Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic and Women's Peacemakers programme, Tightening the Purse Strings: What Countering Terrorism Financing Cost Gender Equality and Security. Available at: https://law.duke.edu/sites/default/files/humanrights/tighteningpursestrings.pdf

26 See notably: Women and Peace and Security, Report of the Secretary General, 2019, S/2019/800; and Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism, "Protection or Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism", 2009, A/64/211

27 Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Context of Counter terrorism Report "Impact of measures to address terrorism and violent extremism on civic space and the rights of civil society actors and human rights defenders", March 2019 available at https://documentsdds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G19/057/59/PDF/G1905759.pdf?OpenElement

28 See: https://www.sdg16hub.org/system/files/2019-07/SDG16%2B_KeyTrends_DIGITAL.pdf . Likewise, a 2019 report by Civicus highlighted that, while 125 countries have adopted laws and policies to guarantee people's right to information, 1,456 journalist and human rights defenders have been killed in 61 countries since 2015. Other key violations contributing to the closing of civic space include detentions and arrests, legal action, intimidation, threats, smear campaigns and verbal abuse, physical attacks, excessive use of force, censorship and the adoption of restrictive legislation (Civicus, People Power Under Attack, available at: https://monitor.civicus.org/PeoplePowerUnderAttack2019/)

programs directly impacted the wider gender equality agenda.[29]

Another aspect reflecting limited recognition of women and girls as rights-holders in the context of counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism response measures is demonstrated in the type of assistance and service provision usually lacking gender-responsive interventions. For example, policies relying on stereotypes of men being dangerous and women being peaceful or less harmful have a direct impact on gender-blind policies and assistance. These kinds of stereotypes often result in women being excluded from rehabilitation and reintegration support measures, leading to recidivism and further gender-based stigmatization and harms.[30] Policies and mechanisms developed without considerations of gender-related needs and experiences can lead to flawed responses—for example, mechanisms in support of victims of terrorism, in some instances have been reported as leading to putting women at a disadvantage, prolonged local disputes and reaffirmed gender discriminatory practices.[31]

Despite the development of PRR policies and knowledge products to support States in carrying out PRR strategies, there remain serious gaps in gender-responsive services. This includes prosecution of serious human rights violations against women, and capacity-building efforts pay little attention to gender-sensitive or -responsive training to law enforcement and security agencies. Service provision within the context of PRR prioritizes men's "case load", with limited funding and support to community-based social reintegration where often women and children make up most of the returnees. Women subjected to acts of terrorism and/ or accused of being party to terrorist organizations face serious challenges to access justice, while State obligations require that criminal proceedings should be conducted within reasonable expedition.

III. Lack of M&E and data

It is universally agreed that conditions conducive to violent extremism are multifaceted and are context-specific. UN-led projects and programmes seek to develop context analysis by which these conditions/ drivers are identified in each context. Delivering on addressing these drivers is usually considered a measurement of success. For UN Women, prevention of violent extremism projects have mostly focused on strengthening women's participation, service provision to targeted groups, advocacy and policy support. Projects and programmes are usually aligned to SDG5, SDG10, SDG16 and SDG17. UN Women developed a guidance note to support different programmes' development measurement; in addition, UNDP developed a useful toolkit to guide prevention of violent extremism measurements that can be used by UN Women.[32]

However, the evidence base and data in counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism are largely 'gender-blind' and rely on unacknowledged assumptions that men's experiences can be universalised. This means that state agencies and civil society organizations typically fail to record the gender of victims or perpetrators.

At the most basic level this means tracking targets of counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism attacks is partial, and hence the understanding of the security needs of communities could be incomplete. This means gender-based harms are often not recorded. For longterm rehabilitation, resilience and recovery from conflict and terrorism, it means that women's sexual health and medical needs are usually not considered. When needs and capacities assessments are gender-blind, resulting programmatic support will not address gender-specific needs in a given context.

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29 See notably: "Human rights impact of policies and practices aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism Report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism", A/HRC/43/46, 2020; and Duke Law International Human Rights Clinic, "Tightening the Purse Strings: What Counterterrorism Financing Costs Gender Equality and Security", (2017) (available at https://law.duke.edu/sites/default/files/humanrights/tighteningpursestrings.pdf)

30 UN Women, Report on SPRR in the Great Lakes Region, June 2021.

31 Resilience, Community Security and Social Cohesion through Effective Women's Leadership, UN Women Pakistan (2021)

32 See: http://www.pvetoolkit.org/me-for-pve-resources/

This is because without gender-sensitive community mapping and situational assessments, immediate programming suffers as well. counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism initiatives fail to respond to gender-specific needs—such as considering how rural women might access prevention of violent extremism-training initiatives if these activities depend on women traveling to regional centres or don't offer child care facilities,[33] or considering how women in internal displacement camps are vulnerable to rape and sexual assault.[34]

Furthermore, because counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism often rely on stereotypes, diverse gender identities and expressions are not recorded either. For example, children/minors are placed a single category even though girls' and boys' experiences of terrorism differ according to gender and age. Gender-based violence targeting boys accused of homosexuality by VEOs is often not recorded, which means supporting their recovery is hampered by lack of information and insight.[35] Not only does gender blindness negatively affect understanding and monitoring of the problem, it also affects design and evaluation of counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism initiatives (see the point above on agency and equality) as indicators are not differentiated according to gender—for example, having meaningful and gainful employment as a measure of success for rehabilitations programmes is relevant for men, but not for women in communities where women have lower rates of formal employment and typically retain caring responsibilities.

IV. Broader negative impact on UN Women across the triple mandate:

The first risk in line with increasing restrictions on civil society is that UN Women has witnessed an increase in coercion, surveillance and threats to partners and colleagues. This means some are no longer willing or able to work alongside UN Women directly and requires some programmes to be relabelled and repackaged to assure their safety.

The second risk is that aligning with counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism activities and strategies might lead to certain perceptions (regardless of reality) that UN Women is fuelling conflict and grievances by supporting militarised or securitised agendas, or is becoming an intelligence provider, securitizing women's rights, instrumentalizing CSOs to "monitor" communities, mothers and care-givers to report on their families, and with that comes reputational harm.

Third, there is the potential of contradictory outcomes—especially the marginalisation of vulnerable / stigmatised communities, harming women's equality and rights initiatives and reducing the space for civil society—where UN Women engages with counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism without necessary safeguards and assurances for human rights, including women's rights. UN Women could also be criticised for focusing its prevention of violent extremism engagement in contexts with Muslim majorities and does not address white supremacists or Buddhist violent extremism. These are all reputational risks that, without rigorous safeguards and implementing a solid communication strategy, might directly harm UN Women across its triple mandate.

This is in addition to the already noted decline in funding for UN Women's other work; as donors prioritise counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism mandates in the UN system and/or related programming, there is the risk that counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism dominates and reorientates UN Women's work to the detriment of other goals.

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33 Katherine E Brown. *Gender mainstreaming principles, dimensions and priorities for prevention of violent extremism*, UN Women, (2019) available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/09/gender-mainstreaming-principles-dimensions-and-priorities-for-pve

34 Elizabeth Pearson and Chitra Nagarajan. "Gendered Security Harms: State Policy and the Counterinsurgency Against Boko Haram." *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2020, pp. 108–140.

35 EU Project Based Collaboration, Project Based Collaboration (PBC) *Improving Member States' Capacity to Prevent the Long-Term Consequences of Islamist Extremism on Child Returnees*. 2021, Author notes.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Agreed upon and mindful use of terminology and concepts within UN Women:

With the lack of a globally agreed-upon definition of the term "terrorism" and "violent extremism," it is critical for UN Women to ensure that the terms used are defined for the purposes of the intended documents. This could be through a note on terminology, a disclaimer and/or a reference outlining the definitions in relevant UN instruments. At the global level, UN Women ensures to emphasize that it refers to "terrorism" as defined in compliance with international law. This is the same reference used by the UN Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights and relies on the principles of legality and General Assembly's resolution 70/148, para. 6(o) stating that "... [t]o ensure that their laws criminalizing acts of terrorism are accessible, formulated with precision, non-discriminatory, nonretroactive and in accordance with international law, including human rights law."[36]

Other terminology must be defined to generate a shared understanding across UN Women but also to ensure that national and international partners understand what is meant by the terms used in UN Women documents. This is to avoid misunderstandings and miscommunication, and safeguard against unintentional misuse of terminology referenced in UN Women documents. A list of the most used terms in counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism are in the appendix with relevant recommendations.

In some instances, the terms used need to be defined at the national levels. A good practice can be found in Tunisia, where the UN country team recognized the need to agree on a shared definition for violent extremism, and drafted the following definition relevant for the Tunisian context: "Violent extremism is the activity of individuals and groups which advocate or justify violence for economic, social or political reasons and reject the universal values of democracy, a State of Law and human rights by disseminating a message of religious, cultural and social intolerance".[37]

II. Establishing women's rights and counter-terrorism/prevention of violent extremism nexus (WPS):

Supporting gender equality and promoting women's rights are state obligations and are to be upheld in all UN policy and programmatic areas, including counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism. While evidence shows that supporting gender equality does contribute to resilience to violent extremism, gender equality and promoting women's rights should be pursued as a right on and of itself.[38]

The WPS agenda and UN Women's support to national partners in meeting their obligations under the four pillars of the Women, Peace and Security resolution provides an inclusive and sustainable contribution to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism programming. That means programmes seeking to meet WPS targets directly or indirectly contribute to prevention of violent extremism and engendering counter-terrorism policies.

In some contexts, UN Women is not able to do explicit programmes in support of the WPS agenda. However, it engages in supporting SDG5 on gender equality, SDG10 on addressing inequalities and SDG16 on just and peaceful societies. Such support to meet development targets is equally relevant and critical to prevention of violent extremism programmes and to ensure durable interventions.

Hence, through its programmatic engagement under WPS or Agenda 2030, UN Women can integrate sustainable goals related to promoting gender equality and women's rights in all of its counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism engagement across all levels. Consequently, and in addition to gender mainstreaming UN Women in each context must insist upon

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36 See: https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/RES/70/148

37 See: UNDP Improving the Impact of Prevention Violent Extremism – Programming Toolkit, p. 16, available at: https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/oslo_governance_centre/improving-the-impact-ofpreventing-violent-extremism-programming.html

38 For more details, see Fionnuala Ní Aoláin. "The 'war on terror' and extremism: assessing the relevance of the Women, Peace and Security agenda," International Affairs, Volume 92, Issue 2, March 2016, Pages 275–291,

a gender-responsive framework to counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism.[39]

III. Establishing measurements for counter-terrorism/prevention of violent extremism programmes and projects:

To address the challenge of measuring prevention of violent extremism efforts, clear frameworks must be developed at all levels as part of the planning processes of programs and informed by gender and context analysis. Specific community-based security challenges emanating from the threat of violent extremism must be identified, and solutions discussed and proposed after thorough consultations directly with the community, civil society, and local authorities. Programs must seek to address specific gaps in service provision, policy and/or state capacities within a given cycle. A thorough gender and women´s needs assessment must be carried out on the onset of programming in targeted communities to establish the baseline, targets, and indicators.

Such a process must be inclusive, participatory, adopting a whole-of-society approach, and indicators and targets must be shared and mutually owned by national partners. The SDG frameworks provide a good starting point as a State-agreed framework, with relevant indicators corresponding to SDG1, SDG5 on gender equality, SDG10 on addressing inequalities, SDG16 on justice and peaceful societies, and SDG17 on partnerships as an example. UNDP also provides some initial gender-sensitive indicators.[40]

In contexts where direct programming is not possible due to accessibility issues or for other reasons, monitoring frameworks to measure advocacy and policy support can use a mix of direct and indirect proxy indicators, for example to measure support to policy development, advocacy and/or awarenessraising and outreach activities. That is why it's important to develop a regional monitoring framework that can inform/support country-level monitoring.

Internally, accountability frameworks must use existing UN guidelines, notably the human rights/ due diligence policy of the UN,[41] when providing support to non-UN security agencies, as well as UN guidance on engagement with civil society, to protect against threats and reprisal. Such a policy will need an implementation tool to assess risks periodically.

IV. Risk-Aware Decision-Making Principles for UN Women's Engagement:

It is critical that UN Women follows a strict protocol when engaging with civil society and community members in prevention of violent extremism programs. There are several UN frameworks on engagement with civil society; for this working paper UN Women practitioners are recommended to read the following references:

- UN Guidance Note on Protection and Promotion of Civic Space (2020), available at: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/CivicSpace/UN_Guidance_Note.pdf
- Guidance Document on Intimidation and Reprisals for Cooperation with the United Nations (December 2019), Annex.
- Internal guidance on supporting women human rights defenders (2019)

Such protocols may include nationally developed protection and reprisals risk management frameworks to ensure that the prevention and response are planned and communicated to partners in advance of engaging in prevention of violent extremism activities, events, projects, and programmes. It is also important that implementing partners are informed of the source of funding, especially when projects are rebranded for risk management at the local level.

Specifically, to prevention of violent extremism, it is essential that duty-bearers and decision-makers ensure that the core principles of UN Women's approach are upheld in order to minimise risks:

- Inclusive Human Rights, including Women's Rights, Foundation
- Engaging Whole-of-Government and Whole-of-Society
- Uphold Conflict Sensitivity and Do No Harm.

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39 See UN Women policy brief on WPS and prevention of violent extremism (not yet published)

40 Improving the Impact of Prevention Violent Extremism – Programming Toolkit, UNDP, (2018) available at: https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/oslo_governance_centre/improving-the-impact-ofpreventing-violent-extremism-programming.html

41 See: https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/Inter-Agency-HRDDP-Guidance-Note-2015.pdf

V. Upholding UN Women's Framework and Principles:

UN Women's approach can be understood as **a proactive gender-responsive framework to prevention of violent extremism, to be adapted** to suit national contexts, contribute to national priorities, while maintaining core principles and purpose.

UN Women's contribution to supporting counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism is visible at all stages of the cycle—immediate responses to violent extremism and terrorism through service provision and capacity-building support, and supporting proactive resilience measures to violent extremism and terrorism through policy and institutional support to ensure sustainable results that are in line with the SDGs. This policy brief is developed in support of such effort when developing counter-terrorism and/or prevention of violent extremism frameworks at all levels.

VI. Ensure continuous exchange of best practices and lessons identified:

Given the dynamic nature of violent extremism and terrorism, UN Women community of practice must engage regularly and proactively to exchange information on best practices and lessons identified. It is beneficial for UN Women at all levels to discuss common challenges, lessons learnt, and strategies used to overcome challenges periodically. The Global prevention of violent extremism project funded by the EU provide synthesizing of the evidence-based knowledge that was produced in the course of 24 months of implementation, the methodologies that were developed, the strategies which were put in place in pilot countries.

It is also important to ensure that studies and research conducted at the local level is thoroughly socialized, and that its substance inform internal policies, strategic approaches and programmatic interventions. UN Women representatives and practitioners saw the benefit in convening regional and global meetings bringing key partners together particularly from Jordan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to discuss gender responsive prevention of violent extremism programming in the regions.

Strengthened information sharing and the generation of regional specific evidence-based research are critical in strengthening gender responsive approaches to prevention of violent extremism. This could also include the commissioning of region-wide research to be undertaken by global south research institutes and engaging more strategically with regional and sub-regional organizations which are developing or implementing their own prevention of violent extremism/counter-terrorism strategies such as the G5 Sahel, and the Alliance Sahel (alliance of key donors financing programs in the Sahel); ECOWAS; ASEAN; and NATO. This outreach should include specific guidance on how to integrate gender perspectives while safeguarding women's rights in regional and national plans on PV[42].

VII. Underpinning the gender-responsive framework are three core principles:

a. **Inclusive Human Rights-based and People-centred Foundation**: Human rights-based approaches are integral to UN Women's overall programming. Regarding the rights of women and girls, there is an additional aspect to consider: the probability that certain rights weren't respected or fulfilled in the first place, before any engagement on prevention of violent extremism, rooted in existing patriarchal systems, legal frameworks, and predominant societal cultures that limit women´s and girls' access to and enjoyment of their human rights and freedoms.

Therefore, a human rights-based foundation is a critical underpinning principle for UN Women's Gender-Responsive prevention of violent extremism programming, to ensure that international human rights standards including CEDAW inform the overall theory of change, that programmatic/project outputs and impact is aligned to SDG5 and SDG10.

This is also important to develop a coherent theory of change aligned to UN Women Strategic Plan (2022 – 2025). It therefore critical to include measures to address gender inequalities and vulnerabilities in contexts impacted by terrorism and violent extremism. In addition, a human rights foundation places UN Women's programmatic contribution as a direct contribution to WPS commitments and focus on both duty-bearers to

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42 See Final Project Review Report: UN Women's prevention of violent extremism Global Project, Dec 2021

meet their obligations, and rights-holders to claim their rights.

b. **Whole-of-Society and Whole-of-Government Engagement**: Given the nature of violent extremism and its interplay with several political, economic, and social factors, the response to this issue is rooted in structural transformations across different levels.

The principle of leaving no one behind is a critical approach to ensure inclusion but also to reach first those who are furthest behind. This is pertinent for communities living in periphery areas, border communities, and IDPs living within host communities as an example. In several contexts it has been established that individuals sympathetic to the cause of violent extremist groups or who have joined these groups possessed high levels of actual/perceived disenfranchisement, discrimination, and marginalization.

prevention of violent extremism programs that single out a specific community risk reinforcing dominant social prejudices and may also fuel perceptions of marginalization. It is therefore critical to design and implement programs that engage all community members, to create community ownership of the solution, and to foster a common understanding centered around shared challenges, and aspirations to a just and peaceful society. Ensuring a whole-of-society approach also supports the existing peace infrastructure of community leaders, civil society organizations, and local governments.

A whole-of-government approach is important to ensure that different State institutions and different levels of governance (national and local authorities) are interlinked and coordinated. In many instances, law enforcement institutions are not well-connected to justice institutions and/or social welfare and human rights institutions, leading them to operate in isolation. National institutions' coordination gaps directly impact the effectiveness of prevention of violent extremism responses and confining interventions to the security sector. Furthermore, there is often a mismatch (or disconnect) between central and local government identification of challenges and how best to address security threats. Often States follow a strictly centralized approach to security. It is therefore essential for UN Women to advocate for and support a coordinated approach. This can be factored into programmes/projects in country to include advocacy and coordination support to national actors that will enable a whole-of-government approach.

c. **Upholding Conflict-Sensitivity and Do No Harm**: UN Women prevention of violent extremism programs in country must apply a conflict-sensitive approach, and take specific actions following a do-no-harm (DNH) principle. It is important to note that supporting gender equality is usually a sensitive area of engagement in certain contexts. Therefore, it is imperative that conflict sensitivity and DNH principles are applied thoroughly so initiatives do not perpetuate structural inequalities, instrumentalization, and stigma.

Conflict-sensitive approaches also include efforts to foster national ownership of the identified challenges and proposed programmatic interventions. UN Women projects in Pakistan and in Jordan provide a good example of conducting local studies to identify challenges and ensuring the endorsement of national actors. As a result, programmatic interventions were owned by national institutions as the best way forward to address identified challenges. This approach also assists governments to include social and community-based support in parallel to security-related interventions.

In addition, institutional capacity-building directly contributes to increasing national ownership. Essentially, longterm commitments and technical accompaniment are linked to increased national ownership. It is therefore important to ensure that international partners and donors understand that predictable funding for longterm engagement is linked to fostering increased national ownership to adopt and implement approaches centered on the promotion and protection of women's rights.

In some contexts, national partners may express reservations on internationally accepted terminology. To ensure the application of conflict sensitivity, prevention of violent extremism programs may revise used terminology and abide by the guidance provided in this policy paper. Such terminology needs to be and do no harm. The use of language determines acceptability—especially while working with national institutions and local communities—but UN Women must remain conceptually correct and use terminology defined in international instruments. It is also critical to ensure transparency when dealing with national partners about the source of funding, which includes implementing partners. (see point 4 on UN Women programmatic engagement).

Existing Additional Guidance and Tools:

- Gender mainstreaming principles, dimensions and priorities for prevention of violent extremism, UN Women, (2019) available at: https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/09/gender-mainstreamingprinciples-dimensions-and-priorities-for-pve
- Improving the Impact of Prevention Violent Extremism – Programming Toolkit, UNDP, (2018) available at: https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democraticgovernance/oslo_governance_centre/improving-the-impact-of-preventing-violent-extremismprogramming.html
- Human Rights due diligence policy on UN support to non-UN security forces (2015) available at: https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/Inter-Agency-HRDDP-Guidance-Note-2015.pdf
- Internal Workshop Report: UN Women's Gender Responsive Approach to prevention of violent extremism (2021).

Conclusion:

This policy brief supports UN Women's counter-terrorism/prevention of violent extremism engagement frameworks at all levels through alignment to its mandate, to promote women's rights in contexts impacted by terrorism and violent extremism; enable gender-responsive support to identified drivers and vulnerabilities of violent extremism; to advocate and build capacity for women's meaningful participation in security-related processes and mechanisms; to strengthen the goals of prevention of violent extremism towards gender-equal, just, peaceful and inclusive societies. By attending to the recommendations above the risks and challenges identified can be mitigated.

APPENDIX 1: RECOMMENDATIONS ON TERMINOLOGY FOR UN WOMEN PRACTITIONERS AND PROGRAMMES

Term	Recommendation for UN Women practitioners and programmes
Terrorism (terrorists/ acts of terrorism)	It is important to include a reference/disclaimer when mentioning/using the term terrorism in documents emphasizing that the term refers to "terrorism as defined in compliance with international law"[43] (references provided in the footnotes above). Acts of terrorism are defined in relevant UN instruments and include intentional murder, torture, kidnapping, bombing by alleged perpetrators[44].
Terrorist groups/ terrorist organizations (Designation)	UN Women practitioners shall be aware of the different types of designations of armed groups, individuals or entities, as "terrorist": • Listing as a terrorist organization by the United Nations Security Council; at the time of drafting, the Security Council only designated as terrorist individuals and groups affiliated with ISIL (Daesh) and Al- Qaida;i • Listing as a terrorist organization by a regional organization or a State, the host State and/or a third-party State (but not by the UN Security Council). When the term is used, it should be qualified as terrorist groups designated by the UN Security Council as a terrorist organization or individual. A reference/footnote should be added in relevant documents.[45]
Violent extremism	UN Women should advocate, and jointly with UNCT, for a definition of Violent Extremism for use within a given context. Such a definition must be shared with national partners and relevant stakeholders when engaging in prevention of violent extremism support. See the case of Tunisia.
Radicalization (radical groups/ individuals)	Although the concept of radicalization was originally favoured as it avoided essentialising tendencies in thinking about terrorism, it's use has become politicised. Radicalisation refers to a complex and dynamic process, the outcome of which is where an individual accepts and supports terrorism (or in other definitions violent extremism). In practice radicalization has become associated with policies and practices that target violent extremism and terrorism inspired by or utilizing faith-based ideas. When using this term, UN Women should be cautious not to affirm harmful stereotypes and biases.

43 See General Assembly resolution 70/148, para 6 (o), available at: https://undocs.org/pdf?symbol=en/A/RES/70/148

44 For more information on criminal acts in the context of "terrorism" see, OHCHR Fact Sheet 32., Human Rights, Terrorism and Counter Terrorism, page 11, available at https://www.ohchr.org/documents/publications/factsheet32en.pdf

45 For more information see IDDRS 2.11 "The Security Council Committee concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities was established pursuant to Resolution 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015). It is the only sanctions committee of the Security Council that lists individuals and groups for their association with terrorism. Available at: https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1267#listing_criteria. The website also contains explanatory notes with respect to types of sanctions.

UN WOMEN IS THE UN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality, and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities: Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.