



OUTCOME REPORT

GLOBAL DIGITAL CONSULTATION

CIVIL SOCIETY VOICES ON
THE GENDERED DIMENSIONS
OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND
COUNTER-TERRORISM RESPONSES



UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM
UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT)



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COUNTER-TERRORISM RESPONSES



**WOMEN, PEACE AND
SECURITY SECTION
UN WOMEN**

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UNITED NATIONS
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FOREWORD

Women human rights activists and civil society organizations (CSOs) around the world are building peace in their communities, villages, towns and countries, and they continue to call for increased engagement and active roles in peace and security decision-making. The meaningful participation of women and CSOs is critical to the success of strategies aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Their participation is also essential to ensure that these efforts are not used as a means to suppress women's activism, peacebuilding and rights advocacy, as outlined in the Secretary-General's report on Women, Peace and Security, published in September 2020.¹

Within the framework of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact, UN Women and the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) are, respectively, Chair and Vice-chair of the Compact Working Group on Adopting a Gender-sensitive Approach to Preventing and Countering Terrorism (Gender Working Group). In line with our respective mandates, we continue to work closely with all members of the Gender Working Group and the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism to assist Member States in promoting gender equality and integrating the women, peace and security agenda into their efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism.

During the global digital consultation organized by UN Women on behalf of the Gender Working Group, the civil society participants stated that current responses were ineffective because they focus entirely on militarized approaches. They also flagged that the terminology employed was often vague and

ambiguous, that it could be abused politically and that it generates biases against certain communities, including women.

We need to reinvest in the sustaining peace, sustainable development and human rights agendas, to effectively tackle terrorism and violent extremism. This can be successful only if efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism are both inclusive and participatory, with the meaningful participation of women, including young women, and marginalized groups.

The Global Coordination Compact has a crucial role to play in ensuring that future P/CVE policies are informed by the recommendations of the Public Statement drafted by the participants of the global digital consultation. UN Women and CTED will continue to advocate for the meaningful participation of women and civil society in P/CVE efforts and to support the implementation of these recommendations within our respective mandates.



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Under-Secretary-General;
Executive Director, UN-Women



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¹ United Nations. 2002. Report of the Secretary-General: Women, Peace and Security. S/2020/946. Available [here](#).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is informed by contributions received from 80 civil society representatives from 33 countries, who shared their views, challenges and recommendations on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counter-terrorism for the [Global Digital Consultation “Voices and perspectives of civil society on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counterterrorism responses.”](#) The Global Digital Consultation was organized by UN Women on behalf of the Working Group on Adopting a Gender-Sensitive Approach to Preventing and Countering Terrorism (Gender Working Group) of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact between 25 May and 5 July 2020. It was funded by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism.

We would like to thank all those who participated in the consultation for their continuous engagement and insightful contributions. We would like also to thank the civil society moderators and reviewers whose professionalism and dedication ensured a successful consultation.

The report was informed through a collaborative process involving participants in the Global Digital Consultation, UN Women Regional and Country Office staff across the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Eastern and Southern Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western and Central Africa, as well as UN Women’s Women, Peace and Security section and the Communications

and Advocacy team at headquarters. It was reviewed by a committee of civil society representatives that participated to the Global Digital Consultation.

Particular thanks go out to Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women, UN Women senior management, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, all the members of the Working Group on Adopting a Gender-Sensitive Approach to Preventing and Countering Terrorism, as well as the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism for providing the necessary funding for the Global Digital Consultation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2020, in light of the upcoming biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (UNGCTS), the Gender Working Group of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact (UNGCTCC) held a global digital consultation with women-led civil society organizations (CSOs) and gender equality activists to hear their perspectives on the gendered dimensions of terrorism and counter-terrorism (CT), challenges and recommendations related to their effective engagement and participation in security-related processes, and the impact of counter-terrorism and preventing violent extremism (PVE) measures on women's rights.

The Global Digital Consultation “Voices and perspectives of civil society on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counter-terrorism” took place from 25 May to 5 July 2020. It was organized by UN Women on behalf of the Gender Working Group and it was the first major consultation led by the UNGCTCC involving civil society. The consultation gathered 142 participants from 43 countries, who were representatives of women-led CSOs and gender equality activists.² A total of 80 participants from 33 countries posted 393 contributions in four Discussions Rooms that were moderated by civil society representatives. Participants shared their testimonies on how violent extremist organizations affect them and their communities and detailed their efforts to build peace in contexts affected by violent extremism. They summarized their findings and formulated recommendations in a powerful [Public Statement](#).

The most striking element in the findings and recommendations from participants is that they were so similar across countries and regions worldwide. Their main messages were that violent extremism and terrorism are fundamentally human rights, peace and human development issues. As such, they should be addressed as part of broader peace, sustainable development and democratization efforts – by promoting and protecting human rights, guaranteeing gender equality, tackling socioeconomic inequalities and offering quality education and equal opportunities to all. They also highlighted that gender inequalities are a major obstacle for sustaining peace in contexts affected by violent extremism. In particular regions, gender inequalities were experienced as daily violence.

Women are particularly at risk in contexts of violent extremism – of violations committed both by state

and non-state actors. Women's involvement in violent extremism is also a phenomenon with multiple and complex forms. In most communities, women play different roles, have diverse identities and their experiences are non-linear – meaning they can be both victims and perpetrators. However, CT/PVE policies insufficiently address gender dynamics, the diversity of roles and the intersectionality of women's rights, failing notably to envisage their roles as perpetrators. For that reason, women are rarely included in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes.

Existing approaches, which are often militarized, are clearly not responding to the challenges on the ground. Participants went further to suggest that these approaches often lead to human rights violations, aggravating gender inequalities and making it even more challenging for women to have any agency or contribute to forging peace. Another major issue with existing responses is the lack of definitions and the misuse of concepts and terminology in relation to violent extremism and terrorism, as they can be abused politically and can generate biases against certain communities. Participants were particularly concerned with this issue, which was positioned as the first recommendation in the Public Statement.

Gender equality, women's human rights and women's participation are key to building peace and to addressing violent extremism. Women are front-line peacebuilders at the local level and national authorities should protect women human rights defenders. Today, there is the need to dramatically change existing approaches to confronting violent extremism and terrorism. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated those issues, it also presents an opportunity to reset CT/PVE responses, along the lines recommended by

² This includes participants that registered and logged in during the consultation.



Indonesia - Community Peacebuilding Discussions. Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

the Public Statement. Yet, a change of approaches can take place only if there is wide and meaningful consultation, participation and contribution from all key stakeholders in the design and implementation of CT/PVE responses – from state institutions, civil society, women and men, youth, etc. Policies aimed at responding to violent extremism should be debated democratically, informed by local realities and led by local actors and communities.

The successful organization of the Global Digital Consultation demonstrated that establishing an inclusive and participatory process to discuss policies is possible, even during a global pandemic. In fact, there were a number of advantages to organizing digital consultations: removing language barriers, hearing from individuals that live in countries with visa restrictions or remote, crisis-affected regions and areas where travel is dangerous and/or difficult, and offering a safe space for individuals that might be intimidated or even threatened to contribute in public fora. Still, digital events should not replace in-person fora, which remain important places for networking among participants and strengthening communities of practice.

In either fora, guaranteeing privacy and addressing the protection needs and concerns of participants is critical for civil society representatives to discuss and contribute to CT/PVE responses. This requirement is particularly important when inviting women and gender minorities, as they regularly experience harassment and abuse when taking part in public life and operate in a wider context of gender inequality that makes their activism all the more challenging. It is recommended that the Gender Working Group and the entities that comprise it have policies and protocols related to protection in place when organizing consultations with civil society to allow participants to make risk-informed decisions about participating.³

The Global Digital Consultation generated a number of important recommendations that have been captured both in the Public Statement (available here) and the regional papers (available in Annex). They offer a clear path and concrete recommendations to change CT and PVE responses, which should be considered by the UNGCTCC in shaping debates and supporting the design and implementation of CT/PVE responses at the global, regional and local level.⁴

3 At minimum, those protocols should be in line with existing United Nations guidance, notably: UN *Guidance Document on Intimidation and Reprisals for Cooperation with the United Nations*. 2019 (internal and available by request to UN staff at reprisals@ohchr.org). And the *United Nations Guidance Note on Protection and Promotion of Civic Space*. 2020.

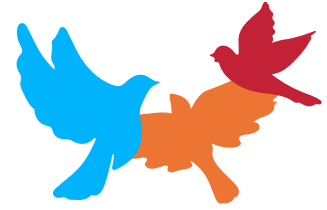
4 The regional papers were produced by civil society actors that took part in the consultation and are based on the contributions of the participants. They are meant to explore regional specificities.

Recommendations:

Further recommendations on the process and benefits of the consultation were reached by the moderators and participants through an evaluation questionnaire shared with all participants and reports submitted by the moderators (both reports are available in the Annex):

1. Recommendations for engaging with civil society on CT/PVE responses:
 - Regularly and meaningfully involve CSOs in the design, implementation and oversight of PVE responses at national, regional and global levels, through transparent and participatory processes
 - Identify and guarantee the privacy and protection needs of participants when organizing consultations
 - Regularly organize both digital and in-person consultations.
2. Recommendations to the UNGCTCC and its members:
 - Disseminate and discuss the outcomes of the Global Digital Consultation, particularly the Public Statement
 - Support the implementation of the recommendations of the Public Statement
 - Support responses to CT/PVE as part of broader peace, security and development efforts and ensure UN-supported CT/PVE responses are informed by the Public Statement findings and recommendations
 - Ensure that CT/PVE responses are evidence-based, using the latest relevant research, and encourage further research in relation to CT/PVE issues
 - Improve the oversight and accountability of UN-supported CT/PVE responses, and ensure that CT/PVE responses are in line with international human rights standards
 - Ensure that UN-supported CT/PVE responses at the national level are in line with Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans.

INTRODUCTION



In 2020, in light of the upcoming biennial review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (UNGCTS), the Working Group on Adopting a Gender-Sensitive Approach to Preventing and Countering Terrorism (Gender Working Group) of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact (UNGCTCC) held a global digital consultation with women-led civil society organizations (CSOs) and gender equality activists to hear their perspectives on the gendered dimensions of terrorism and counter-terrorism (CT), challenges and recommendations related to their effective engagement and participation in security-related processes, and the impact of counter-terrorism and preventing violent extremism (PVE) measures on women's rights.

The organization of this consultation responded to four main concerns:

1. While the gendered dimensions and different roles that women and men play in violent extremism have been acknowledged by many, the Gender Working Group identified a pressing need to further investigate how the gendered responses to violent extremism by both state and non-state entities affect men and women differently, how the interplay of different and contextual factors can lead individuals to join a violent extremist organization, as well as the different roles played by women, men, boys and girls in violent extremist organizations. This understanding is critical to define strategies that address the root causes and factors that are conducive to violent extremism.
2. Another concern is that although the UNGCTS, adopted by consensus by all Member States in 2006, underscores that respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms should be the foundational basis of all counter-terrorism efforts, in recent years, measures adopted by States to counter terrorism have often posed serious challenges to gender equality, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. A link has been reported between the proliferation of CT/PVE laws and strategies and shrinking civic and democratic spaces, as well as with violations of fundamental human rights and freedoms. Human rights defenders, including women human rights defenders, have often become the primary targets of threats and attacks by state and non-state actors in contexts affected by violent extremism and/or terrorism.
3. PVE efforts are often gender blind, meaning there is little consideration of the role of gendered norms and impacts on PVE, for either women or men, rendering

such efforts unreflectively focused on men's security needs and priorities. Because many PVE initiatives are insufficiently grounded in a gender and human-rights-based framework, they can exacerbate gendered inequalities and forms of discrimination. This can lead to contradictory policies, securitizing the gender equality agenda and instrumentalizing women's human rights.

4. Member States have acknowledged the significant role of civil society in preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism in various General Assembly resolutions, as well as during the sixth review of the UNGCTS, in 2018. However, CSOs mounted strong criticism with respect to the lack of participation of civil society in discussions related to the review of the Strategy, and the lack of recognition of the essential role civil society plays in PVE.

The Global Digital Consultation "Voices and perspectives of civil society on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counter-terrorism" took place from 25 May to 5 July 2020 and had the following objectives:

1. Support increased engagement of independent women's/women-led CSOs, CSOs with strong credentials as gender equality advocates, as well as women's human rights and gender equality activists from the Global South in discussions related to security, counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism.
2. Ensure that the perspectives and recommendations of independent women's rights and gender equality CSOs and activists inform global and regional discussions on CT/PVE and secure UN support in the lead-up to the seventh UNGCTS review in 2021.

The methodology used aimed to make the consultation inclusive and participatory, with as many participants as possible from all regions of the world.

It sought to obtain active participation from all registered participants and ensure the necessary privacy and protection for participants to express themselves freely throughout the consultation.

The consultation took place online, through the SparkBlue platform of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The consultation was structured along four ‘Discussions Rooms’ moderated by civil society representatives⁵, each of which focused on the following:

1. Promoting the rights of women in contexts affected by violent extremism and the engagement of independent women’s and gender equality CSOs and activists in PVE responses
2. The impact of national and regional CT/PVE strategies and responses on women’s human rights and independent women’s and gender equality CSOs and activists’ roles in CT/PVE initiatives
3. Gender inequalities, the impact of violent extremism, and PVE responses, and
4. The drafting of a public statement.



UN Women Humanitarian Work with Refugees in Cameroon. Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

More detailed highlights of the discussion and recommendations have been summarized in this report. This report is based on the contributions received on the SparkBlue platform, the Public Statement drafted by the participants, an evaluation of the consultation by the participants (conducted in July 2020), and evaluation reports produced by the civil society moderators.

Public Statement of the consultation to the UNGCTCC on increasing CSO engagement in UN-led CT/PVE process was drafted during the consultation and approved by the participants. It includes a set of 11 recommendations on how to better address violent extremism:

1. Clearly define the terminology associated with CT/PVE and ensure evidence-based approaches
2. Invest in high-quality and inclusive education
3. Invest in a culture of human rights, accountability, respect for diversity and critical thinking
4. Develop a culture of conflict prevention
5. Embrace comprehensive, inclusive and participatory approaches
6. Understand local contexts and invest in local solutions
7. Promote and protect women’s human rights
8. Promote gender equality
9. Promote women’s leadership
10. Focus on implementing human rights-based frameworks and accountability

⁵ The civil society moderators were chosen through a selection process to ensure that they are recognized within their communities/countries and represent various regions worldwide. The moderators received training from UN Women and UNDP.

I. Products of the Consultation

The Global Digital Consultation generated the following products:

- **Public Statement:** drafted as part of the consultation, in a dedicated discussion room, and with the support of the civil society moderators, the Statement was submitted for inputs to the participants through two revision processes.
- **Audio panels:** three audio panels gathering the views of civil society representatives working in contexts affected by violent extremism and terrorism presented valuable content and offered a point of reflection to kick-start the conversation among the participants.
 - Audio panel 1: Promoting the rights of women in contexts affected by VE/PVE.
 - Audio panel 2: Impact of national and regional CT/PVE strategies on human and women's rights.
 - Audio panel 3: Gender equality/inequalities, impact of violent extremism and PVE responses.
- **Video:** a video summarizing the main messages of the Public Statement was produced in the aftermath of the consultation, with civil society participants.
- **Regional papers:** five regional papers were commissioned to civil society participants to capture regional specificities.
- **Feature stories:** 12 feature stories from around the world were gathered to illustrate some of the findings and recommendations of the Public Statement.
- **Outcome report:** the outcome report summarizes the main findings and recommendations in relation to the Global Digital Consultation.
- **Infographic:** the infographic is a visual summary of the main messages of the Public Statement.
- **Evaluation report by the participants:** a questionnaire was sent to all active participants to evaluate the consultation and capture specific recommendations for similar future events.
- **Evaluation report by the moderators:** the moderators of the consultation were also asked to produce a final report that summarizes their main points and recommendations.

All these outputs are available in Annex . They are also available on the Global Compact and UN Women websites:

- [UN Women website](#)
- [Trello board](#)
- [UN Women intranet](#) (accessible to UN Women staff only)
- [UN Global Compact](#) (accessible to the members of the Global Compact only)

II. Key issues identified by participants

Findings and recommendations from participants were similar across countries and regions worldwide and have been captured in the Public Statement. This section provides further details on all the points reflected in the Public Statement.

2.1. Human rights violations are conducive to terrorism

Participants posited that when fundamental human rights are not guaranteed, violence is bound to erupt. Human rights violations, the absence of democratic and accountable institutions, disrespect for the rule of law, intolerance and discrimination against minorities can all be fertilizers for violent extremism in any context — conflict or non-conflict. Such situations create a breeding ground for violent extremist organizations to recruit people, particularly those who have experienced human rights violations. They also have far-reaching impacts on women – reinforcing gender inequalities, limiting women’s rights and making it difficult for women to exercise any agency.

Participants said shrinking democratic spaces and human rights violations were a threat to peace, while freedom of expression—including for media and human rights defenders – was deemed critical to preventing violent extremism. “Freedom of expression is a cornerstone for tackling gender stereotypes and inequalities and it contributes to an environment conducive to peace”, said the Public Statement. Reporting human rights violations, notably those affecting women, is critical for those violations to be acknowledged and addressed by state institutions. According to participants, both the silencing and the invisibility of human rights violations tend to be greater if a State has not officially acknowledged situations of conflict, violent extremism and/or terrorism in its territory – which may be interpreted as “non-existent” or “false”. The invisibility of human rights violations notably affects women, including rape and sexual-based violence in conflict, which may not be reported at all. Participants noted cases where media that sought to report rape against women in contexts of violent extremism encountered barriers, notably because of legislation related to so-called “fake news”.⁶ Uncertainty about freedom of expression also tends to silence women and prevent human rights defenders from denouncing violations, including where witnesses fear reprisals.

Participants highlighted discrimination and exclusion as critical factors leading to violent extremism. Divisions within communities, as well as the absence of dialogue among social groups were important sources of concern. Mistrust between religious groups was also mentioned, both as a consequence of conflict as well as a cause of violent extremism. Violent extremist groups (VEOs) were said to create dissent and divisions in communities by “enforcing single truths”, closing dialogue, rejecting diversity and spreading “narrow-minded” teaching. The absence of dialogue between communities, and even between neighbouring countries, also makes it challenging to build peace. As explained by one participant: insufficient dialogue leads to different views on the same conflict – a “violent extremist” to some is a “martyr” to others. Socioeconomic inequalities and poverty were also deemed to provide fertile ground for violent extremism. In particular, economic hardship and the absence of job opportunities may provide VEOs with a breeding ground to recruit youth and marginalized groups. Various participants mentioned that, in certain countries, CT/PVE laws further exacerbate socioeconomic inequalities by restricting freedom of movement.

2.2. Women’s human rights are particularly at risk in contexts affected by violent extremism

The presence of violent extremist organizations severely affects women’s rights, health, livelihood opportunities and security. Women and girls have to manage various stressors – social, economic, health and physical insecurity for themselves, their children, husbands and extended families. When VEOs control a territory, they often target women’s rights and freedoms, including their ability to move freely, engage in public life, access education and employment, enjoy health services, express themselves without fear of repercussions and live as equal citizens. Women also suffer sexual- and gender-based violence (GBV) by VEOs.

Participants insisted that women’s rights are regularly violated by various actors, both state and non-state, in contexts affected by violent extremism. Many women who live in areas exposed to violent extremism — including women who work to prevent violent extremism — have experienced rape, sexual harassment, abduction and/or brutality by security personnel. Women survivors of violent extremism fear for their lives and those of their family members

⁶ This issue was notably raised by participants from Mozambique.



Colombia - preserving Afro-Colombian Culture through song. Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown



Indonesia - Community Peacebuilding Discussions. Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

and should be protected by States. Participants emphasized the importance of understanding the multiple types of violence that target women activists and leaders. They said women who challenge gender norms are particularly at risk. Participants from conflict-affected regions expressed concern about States' abilities to protect women and women's rights in such contexts, and said it is harder for women to take on leadership roles in peace/security – including PVE activities – in conflict-zones where their rights are not upheld. Participants were concerned that violence against women, particularly in conflict zones, has received little attention in national policies and plans. They also recommended providing specific support to victims of gender- and sexual-based violence.

Women human rights defenders are particularly at risk

Participants said that women human rights defenders, who are challenging gender norms and raising awareness about violent extremism, are particularly at risk and increasingly exposed to attacks. In some cases, death threats, physical violence and social media defamation campaigns have forced women to stay at home and avoid directly addressing topics related to PVE in their respective countries, said participants. They emphasized the importance of understanding the multiple types of violence that target women activists and leaders – not just physically or emotionally, but also symbolically. They also called for States to better protect women human rights defenders and tackle the instrumentalization of anti-terrorism policies against human rights defenders. They also urged the United Nations to increase the protection of women human rights defenders.

2.3. Increased risks of violent extremism in contexts with major inequalities, conflict and global stressors

Violent extremist groups often take advantage of the inequalities posed by weak governance structures, limited rule of law and the absence of development policies. In areas impacted by the climate emergency and characterized by profound inequalities, poverty, high unemployment and low-quality education systems, the feelings of hopelessness that may arise are often exploited by violent extremist groups. The lack of inclusive and quality educational opportunities, especially for girls, opens avenues for recruitment into violent extremism. Family contexts where parents are insufficiently present and/or cannot care for their children, and environments where children do not have space and opportunities to develop a sense of self and speak up for what they need, were equally highlighted as problematic.

In post-conflict settings, the risk of violent extremism may increase, especially where grievances and post-conflict traumas are not dealt with. Mounting intolerance, distrust and hate speech against minority groups can also fuel violent extremism.

Many participants emphasized that the risk of violent extremism increases in conflict and post-conflict settings, as well as in contexts hard-hit by global stressors, such as the climate emergency and the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷ As long as the root causes of a conflict are not addressed, injustices and unanswered grievances can give rise to secondary conflicts and drive some people to violent extremism. Unaddressed grievances were mentioned as factors driving some women to join violent extremist groups in particular.

7 The climate emergency, as well as crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, were also flagged as “threat multipliers”, exacerbating existing weaknesses and threats, especially in conflict/post-conflict situations, as well as in contexts affected by violence.



Credits: UN Women/Ryan Brown

For that reason, participants said it is critical to protect human rights, provide livelihoods opportunities for youth, offer redress and guarantee the dignity of all in conflict-affected contexts. Providing justice for survivors of violence and establishing the rule of law were highlighted as essential to tackling impunity, bringing peace and rebuilding societies. Establishing transitional justice measures for truth-seeking, criminal prosecutions and reparations were equally deemed critical. Providing psychosocial support to survivors of violence, including mental health, was also flagged as extremely necessary, yet insufficiently addressed. Also, participants recommended that reparations be provided for families of victims of violent extremism. They said that women whose husbands were the victims of violent extremist groups were often left behind and forgotten. This feeling of abandonment was said to generate indifference towards VEOs and hostility towards authorities.

2.4. Gender inequalities are conducive to terrorism

Most participants emphasized that gender inequalities and norms contribute to creating environments that are conducive to violent extremism and prevent

women from actively contributing to peacebuilding. They recommended placing women's human rights and gender equality at the core of CT and PVE efforts, laws and policies.

According to most participants, there is an obvious correlation between gender inequalities, violations of women's human rights (including GBV), and violent extremism. Inequalities in the law, institutional barriers, as well as certain sociocultural norms, result in human rights violations for women and girls. In some countries, those violations are even experienced as daily violence by women. Gender-based inequality and discrimination interact with political, economic, religious and cultural factors, creating an environment that is conducive to violent extremism. Participants noted that violent extremist groups excel in manipulating social constructions of masculinity and femininity to recruit women and men, by using gender narratives. Gender inequalities and injustices, such as social norms, subordination, marginalization and violence against women, can become an "incentive" to join violent extremist groups.

Addressing gender inequalities and tackling violence against women and girls is thus an important route to preventing extremism and breaking cycles of violence

in contexts affected by violent extremism. However, deeply rooted norms and attitudes about women and gender – notably patriarchal norms – are hampering efforts in this regard. Patriarchal norms were said to reinforce gender inequalities, including discrimination and violence against women and other marginalized groups. Sociocultural norms were also considered a major obstacle to women’s participation in peace and security, particularly in CT/PVE responses. In some cases, patriarchal norms were said to intensify the factors contributing to violent extremism.

Participants said it is time for the gender equality agenda to be prioritized and implemented in its own right, as significant improvements are possible with appropriate support. They said existing national, regional and international frameworks and policies related to gender equality and women’s empowerment – including National Action Plans (NAPs) on UN Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS), which are rarely funded – should be implemented. Participants said that PVE policies should also be aligned with WPS NAPs.

Participants said media, both digital and traditional forms, also play a critical role in shaping public opinion and addressing gender stereotypes of men and women in the context of terrorism. Last but not least, participants emphasized the importance of having both men and women champion gender equality.

Women’s roles in violent extremism

Women’s involvement in violent extremism is a phenomenon with multiple and complex forms. In most communities, women play different roles and have diverse identities. However, CT/PVE policies insufficiently address gender dynamics, the diversity of roles and the intersectionality of women’s rights. They also tend to exacerbate long-standing gender inequalities. The lack of gender-sensitive national laws promoting and protecting women’s rights can

leave women in vulnerable positions for recruitment and contribute to the rise of violent extremism. Extremist groups exploit gender stereotypes in their recruitment strategies and propaganda. Participants highlighted that forced marriage is one of the pathways for women to join VEOs. In some conflict-affected areas, women are entering into marriage with combatants, either through coercion or stigmatization. Another challenge is that women’s conventional roles as mothers and wives are instrumentalized in policy instruments and that women are not included in concerns of security, disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration. Those issues are still very much seen as masculine endeavours.

Many participants highlighted the challenges faced by women who are members of violent extremist organizations and want to return to their communities – notably the lack of social acceptance in the community. Participants recommended taking into account gender dimensions in the reintegration of former combatants and of women living in areas affected by violent extremism, including in camps and displacement sites. Further efforts are also necessary to develop relationships of trust in communities to increase acceptance for reintegration, and to strengthen the capacities of local governments and of any public service that can contribute to rehabilitation and reintegration at the local level.

Participants said that national and international institutions should collect and provide gender data on these aforementioned issues. Gender analysis and research will enable national and international institutions both to understand the different pathways and specific factors that lead women to join violent extremist groups, and to develop appropriate responses. In contexts where VEOs are present and recruit women, often forcibly, women’s experiences are diverse and non-linear. CT/PVE responses should look at women’s experiences beyond the binary lenses of victims-perpetrators.

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2.5. Effective responses take place at the local level and are often led by women

Participants voiced that “violent extremism is a locally-driven problem that requires local solutions and local leaders” and that the effective prevention of conflict and violence takes place at the local level.

Women are at the front lines of such efforts, to keep their communities together and build peace at the local level. Women try to guarantee their own security, the security of their loved ones and of their communities in very complex contexts. They use multiple resources for that purpose, including informal negotiations and interactions with various entities – State and non-State – often before, or in the absence of, effective State responses. Women peacebuilders ask communities – in a safe way, without using pressure or leading questions – what they perceive to be the major conflict priorities in their community, specifically with regard to the well-being of youth and other groups that may feel marginalized. Community-led context analysis is crucial to locally led, grass-roots peacebuilding, as it gives communities the chance to set their own agendas. Participants said that involving local communities and local women peacebuilders is critical to understanding the context in which violent extremist organizations operate.

Women also address the marginalization of social groups. For example, they approach local male religious leaders, influential male community leaders and media representatives and sensitize them in relation to women’s participation in economic activities and public life. Participants said that building trust among religious, political and other influential figures in communities is critical to building peace at the local level. Yet participants said that local communities, and especially women peacebuilders, are rarely consulted by those working on CT/PVE responses, whether they are national or international stakeholders. They recommended that local expertise be considered in



Credits: UN Women/Emad Karim

the framing of CT/PVE laws, policies and strategies, and for women local peacebuilders to be actively and meaningfully involved in such responses by national and international institutions.

Participants also recommended developing the capacities of local leaders and community activists, notably, on existing strategies and tools, as well as good practices related to conflict prevention. They also suggested sensitizing local media on peace and security issues and partnering with civil society actors to promote peace at the local level. Participants also identified a lack of research at the local level by academic and research institutions, and insufficient dissemination of existing knowledge in relation to peacebuilding within communities. Some participants mentioned good practices, such as observatories that capture the work of civil society at both local and national levels.

2.6. Challenges with existing CT/PVE responses

Participants said that their experience with CT/PVE laws, strategies and practices is that they often create more problems than they solve, because they lead to human rights violations and make it challenging for women to have any agency. Participants observed that current CT/PVE strategies tend to be “reactive”, favouring militarized and criminal justice approaches that often violate human rights, over human-rights-based responses that should be at the core of any CT/PVE strategy. Participants said that the securitization and militarization of civic spaces is affecting civil liberties, freedom of speech and of movement in many areas. Such approaches also involve normalizing the use of force and violence and idealizing violent masculinities and can lead to violent acts and human rights violations against women.

Another challenge with existing CT/PVE policies is that they insufficiently address gender dynamics, including the diversity of roles and the intersectionality of women’s rights. As a matter of fact, some participants said that CT/PVE responses may exacerbate long-standing inequalities, notably gender inequalities. Another concern was that responses are often developed behind closed doors, with limited participation from women and insufficient consideration given to gender equality and women’s rights.

The participants said that human rights violations resulting from CT/PVE legislation and policies, and the risks associated with CT/PVE measures, should be

fully acknowledged. They encouraged relevant stakeholders to move away from existing approaches and develop policies and strategies according to a human-rights- and human-development-based approach and look at long-term peaceful solutions.

Participants equally recommended better linking existing CT/PVE strategies and policies with WPS National Action Plans so that such plans can tackle the instrumentalization of anti-terrorism policies against human rights defenders. They said existing NAPs need to translate into concrete gains for women.

The issue of definitions

Participants were particularly concerned with the lack of definitions and the misuse of concepts and terminology in relation to violent extremism and terrorism. Many participants expressed the need to clarify or redefine key concepts related to violent extremism and said there are risks of human rights violations when the terms ‘extremism’ or ‘radicalization’ are applied to non-violent activity. They emphasized that “terrorism” and “extremism” are ambiguous terms that can be abused politically and that generate biases against certain communities. While threats related to terrorism are considered low, several countries issued legislation in relation to terrorism that is allegedly leading to human rights violations.⁸ The ambiguous terms “terrorists” and “extremists” have been used to stigmatize and exclude certain individuals, groups and communities from participating in public life. In some countries, women human rights defenders and women leaders have been criminalized through the application of anti-terrorism legislation in relation to human rights activities they conduct.⁹ This is notably the case of women defending rights related to land and territory, the environment and the use of natural resources, including in many rural and indigenous communities in Latin America. Lawyers assisting individuals who have been charged with terrorism are equally affected by that situation. Participants said that the use of “terrorism” charges is rooted in discrimination, misogyny, stereotypes and prejudices that affect women in their societies and communities.

⁸ See the assessment by the Security Council’s Terrorism Committee: <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/focus-areas/regional/>

⁹ Such accusations may also target women and men working in the field of sexual and reproductive rights and the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons – sometimes accused of being “feminist terrorists”.

¹⁰ Participants recommended considering the intersectionality of rights and the political economy of conflicts.

2.7. The need for human-rights-based and peacebuilding approaches

Participants said that the root causes of violent extremism are structural and interconnected with a range of inequalities and human rights violations that must be addressed.¹⁰ They recommended adopting multi-disciplinary approaches, where human rights, peacebuilding and economic empowerment offer a solution to those vulnerable to being recruited by extremist groups. Placing the CT/PVE agenda under a bigger framework, such as peacebuilding efforts and the Sustainable Development Goals, was considered a strategic and necessary step.

Ensuring human rights for all and respect for the rule of law are the fundamental basis for the fight against terrorism, participants underscored. They called for the promotion and protection of fundamental human rights, civil liberties, freedom of speech and freedom of movement in particular. They also recommended enhancing and strengthening democratic space as it opens collaboration between government and civil society actors, facilitates dialogue among groups and enables a multi-stakeholder approach to PVE. Participants also recommended bringing CT/PVE laws and policies in line with international human rights and humanitarian law and for accountability frameworks to be developed accordingly.

Developing a culture of respect for diversity and inclusivity is key, and participants said that people should be comfortable with their identities, however diverse they might be. As one participant said, “our strength is because we are a plural society”.

Quality education was identified as a critical element to respond to violent extremism and build peace. Participants said that education should prepare children to live in multicultural and multi-faith societies. They called for all children to receive “peace education” – i.e. an education based on universal ethics and values, that promotes values of tolerance and pluralism, and is based on critical thinking. Participants said that quality education is a critical tool to promote gender equality, address social and cultural prejudices and confront discriminatory practices faced by marginalized groups, including women. There should be no room for discrimination and prejudice in national curricula, narratives and history

textbooks. However, participants flagged that in some contexts, girls' education is not prioritized, particularly in rural areas and regions with limited public services. Participants said that schools are often the primary targets of violent extremist organizations. As mentioned, the absence of educational opportunities also opens avenues for children to be recruited and to serve as soldiers in violent extremist groups.

Some participants shared their experiences in using women's economic and social empowerment as a tool to address violent extremism, as well as in adopting and supporting women's ideas, initiatives and projects and implementing them on the ground. Such activities help raise the awareness of women in relation to their rights, enhancing their strengths and their ability to apply them in their field of work. Participants emphasized that women's economic empowerment must be delivered together with increased participation in public life and the full enjoyment of political and civil rights. Economic empowerment works best when it occurs in a safe space where people from different backgrounds can enjoy the exercise of their fundamental freedoms – notably freedom of expression, and their right to be different without fear or being judged.

2.8. The need for approaches based on evidence and meaningful engagement with CSOs and communities

Participants flagged that responses to violent extremism need to be evidence-based and mindful of realities on the ground. Such approaches require an in-depth understanding of specific contexts and local solutions that are locally driven. For that reason, meaningful engagement with civil society and communities is required, particularly at the local level. Participants noticed that, too often, the CSOs that participate in drafting CT/PVE laws and frameworks are not operating in the areas where acts of violent extremism are most intense and prevalent. Meanwhile, many CSOs that do operate at the subnational level do not have the opportunity to contribute to shaping national frameworks and responses. Evidence-based approaches also require proper gender analysis that is too often lacking in existing CT/PVE responses, and further research should be conducted on the gendered dimensions of CT/PVE.

Participants also called for civil society to be involved in the design and implementation of CT/PVE responses,



Jordan - 'Spring Forward for Women' project.
Photo: UN Women/Christopher Herwig

notably women-led civil society and gender equality activists. They said that, regardless of the CT/PVE laws and practices in place, the work of women-led organizations, particularly at local and community levels, have a greater impact in addressing the root causes and consequences of violent extremism. Participants also called for efforts of civil society, and particularly organisations working on gender equality and women empowerment, should be supported and adequately resourced. Partnerships between state and civil society actors should be promoted to create synergies in the implementation of CT/PVE policies, National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325, as well as national human rights and women's rights action plans.

2.9. The need for the participation of women, including young women

The need for the meaningful participation of women and youth in peace and security was a major topic of discussion. Participants said women's participation is critical to achieve sustained peace, as well as for the promotion and protection of women's human rights.

Women-led CSOs detailed the challenges they face in participating in PVE policy discussions and decision-making. The participation of women in government-led consultations on CT/PVE policies and WPS National Action Plans remains limited. An important obstacle to women's participation is their lower economic status, which makes it challenging for them to fully participate in public life. For that reason, participants demanded that States empower women socially, economically and politically, so that they can take on more decision-making roles – whether in the family or in society – and contribute meaningfully

to peace and security challenges. Participants called for women involved in building social cohesion at the local level to be recognized as peacebuilders and leaders, and to be given opportunities to participate in peace processes. A major requirement to guarantee the participation of women in public life and peace and security issues in particular, relates to security. Participants demanded that States to guarantee the security of civil society organizations (CSOs), women-led CSOs in particular, as well as of local human rights defenders. Participants also suggested leveraging technology to overcome the barriers women face to having their voices heard at national and global levels.

Participants urged the United Nations to establish concrete measures to facilitate such participation, notably in relation to the implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. They also called for the United Nations to provide better protection to women-led CSOs and women human rights defenders. As one participant put it: “The United Nations must develop instruments that can protect CSOs who are engaged in legal and legitimate work within Member States”. By organizing the Global Digital Consultations, UN Women provided a safe space for all participants to engage in an open dialogue about women’s rights, violent extremism and CT/PVE, share best practices and develop networks to promote a culture of trust and communication. However, creating more permanent safe spaces where women living in conflict zones can access knowledge, network with other women and learn skills is becoming a critical priority for women who are at the forefront of preventing violent extremism.

Participants emphasized the role that young women can play in preventing and countering violent extremism. They recommended strengthening their voices, sharpening their leadership skills and supporting their activities. They also suggested conducting mentorship programmes and ensuring that they are consulted and given a role in developing peacebuilding initiatives. Participants said youth need to identify with role models in their communities.

Participants also urged recognition of women clerics’ contributions to human development and peace. They recommended engaging women in religious leadership positions to prevent violent extremism.

2.10. The COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to bring about change

The participants said that the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted and exacerbated inequalities in societies and reinforced gender discrimination, while responses to the pandemic have highlighted the shortcomings of current CT/PVE approaches. In some countries, participants shared that COVID-19 policies and regulations have prevented people from exercising free speech, and in some cases silenced “dissenting voices”. Traditional gender norms have reportedly been reinforced and socioeconomic inequalities aggravated. Women have also been experiencing increasing gender and sexual-based violence. In fact, these challenges occur in all emergencies. Participants said the COVID-19 response should be an opportunity to reset CT/PVE interventions.

Participants called on UN Member States to adhere to and uphold human rights in designing mechanisms to address COVID-19, to provide space and support for civil society initiatives, to demilitarize COVID-19 responses and to instead allocate greater resources to healthcare, social services and education. They emphasized the need to value women’s role in crises and emergencies, to include women in decision-making processes at all levels, and to promote and protect human rights and women’s rights in particular.

2.11. The need to disseminate the Public Statement, support the implementation of its recommendations and improve accountability in relation to CT/PVE responses

Participants suggested presenting and discussing the Public Statement in countries where spaces for dialogue and the accountability of institutions would allow the aforementioned issues to be analysed and discussed. They specifically recommended the Public Statement and outcome report to inform the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy, as well as at national level; and encouraged Member States to include the recommendations of the consultation in the new resolution that will be released for the 20th anniversary of UNSCR 1325.¹¹ Last but not least, participants demanded to improve the accountability over CT/PVE, and for CT/PVE responses to be assessed and measured against human rights- and gender-based indicators.

¹¹ Public Statement (available [here](#)).

III. Regional perspectives

While the findings and recommendations were similar across countries, specificities were perceptible, with certain issues being particularly prominent in certain regions. For that reason, UN Women commissioned five regional papers that analysed the specificities of each region – Arab States, Asia-Pacific, Eastern and Southern Africa, Latin America, and West and Central Africa. The papers are included in Annex 3. Of the issues raised in this chapter, those that were specifically raised in each region are detailed below:

IN THE ARAB STATES: Participants detailed the violations that women and children face in their respective countries, which are linked to inequalities in the law and institutional barriers, as well as to conservative norms. The participants said the various human rights violations that women and children face in their respective countries – forced marriage, subordination, kidnapping, lack of opportunities, exclusion, gender inequality, etc. – are experienced as daily violence. The participants unanimously agreed that the deprivation of women’s human rights has

become a crucial problem in the region, resulting in increased violence and violent extremism across countries. According to most participants, there is an obvious correlation between GBV, the absence of women’s rights laws and policies and the recruitment of women by violent extremist groups. Tackling violence against women and girls is thus an important route to preventing extremism and breaking cycles of violence in the region.

IN ASIA-PACIFIC: Divisions and exclusion within communities, as well as the absence of dialogue among social groups were important sources of concern. Violent extremist groups were said to create dissent and divisions in communities by “enforcing single truths”, closing dialogue, rejecting diversity and spreading “narrow-minded” teaching. The absence of dialogue between communities, and even between neighbouring countries, makes it challenging to build peace. Participants from Asia also emphasized the need for children to be adequately prepared to live in a multicultural and multi-faith society, through “education for diversity” and “shared values” programmes in schools. People should be comfortable with their identities – however diverse they might be.



UN Women Humanitarian Work with Refugees in Cameroon. Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA: Participants highlighted a wide range of issues that prevent women from engaging in peace and security issues, particularly on CT/PVE. They noted that a major obstacle to women’s participation are social norms – in particular “conservative” values. Patriarchal norms were said to reinforce gender inequalities, including discrimination and violence against women and other marginalized groups. Another obstacle to women’s participation is their lower economic status, which makes it challenging for them to fully participate in public life. Participants emphasized the need to advocate for women’s participation in security responses, and to value their work at the grass-roots level. They said it is time for the gender equality agenda to be prioritized and implemented in its own right.

IN LATIN AMERICA: While threats related to terrorism are considered low in most countries, the main challenges seem to be the political use of the ambiguous terms of “terrorists” and “extremists” to stigmatize and exclude certain individuals, groups and communities from public life. This situation affects women in particular, with women human rights defenders and women leaders participating in protests often being criminalized through the application of anti-terrorism legislation – notably women who defend rights related to land and territory, the environment and the use of natural resources, including in rural and indigenous communities. The use of “terrorism” charges is allegedly rooted in discrimination, misogyny, stereotypes and prejudices that affect women in their societies and communities. Such accusations may also target women and men working in the field of sexual and reproductive rights and the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons – who are sometimes accused of being “feminist terrorists.”

IN WEST AFRICA: Participants insisted that VEOs are both a symptom and a consequence of structural inequalities that profoundly affect the population in the subregion. There was broad agreement that the absence of basic services to the population, grave human rights violations and horizontal inequalities form the bedrock of violent extremism. Pre-existing conflicts were also identified as a major enabling factor. Participants said existing CT/PVE militarized approaches fail to address violent extremism and are often counterproductive, as they threaten fundamental freedoms and restrict the civic and democratic space. They called for a radical change of paradigm. Such change is critical at a time where the response

to the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the restriction of civil liberties and fundamental human rights, was seen as another failure to tackle an emergency. They added that women’s experiences with VEOs should be considered beyond the binary prism of victims or perpetrators. In contexts where VEOs are present and recruit, often forcibly, women’s experiences are diverse and non-linear. The difficult reintegration of women and children in their communities also remains unaddressed. Participants further emphasized that existing CT/PVE responses do not acknowledge the variety of roles women play, and that demobilization, disarmament, reintegration and reinsertion processes focus on men/boys and their methodology and criteria remain opaque. Participants recommended a human rights-based approach to peace and security, improving democratic governance, and addressing the profound gender inequalities, including the absence of women in decision-making. They also called for transitional justice processes and for greater accountability of institutions designing and implementing CT/PVE responses.

IV. Participation, diversity and protection

4.1. Participation and inclusivity

The consultation gathered 142 participants from 43 countries,¹² with a total of 80 participants from 33 countries who posted 393 contributions in the four Discussions Rooms.

The organizers made important efforts to identify and reach out to the largest possible number of civil society organizations working on gender equality and women, peace and security issues across continents, with invitations sent to close to 400 civil society representatives.¹³

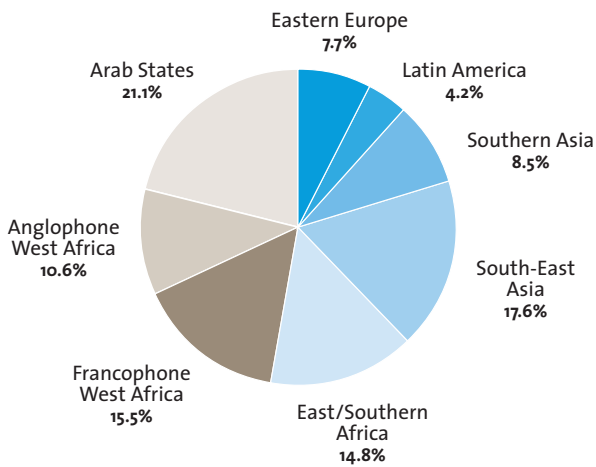
Those organizations were identified by UN Women regional and country offices, as well as by UNDP. The organizers also designed a space for CSOs, managed by civil society, to ensure open and free-flowing conversation on topics that are sensitive by nature. For that purpose, the organizers hired six moderators from civil society to animate the various discussion rooms.

12 This includes the participants that registered and logged in during the consultation.

13 Invitations were sent to civil society representatives from the ‘global South’.

GLOBAL DIGITAL CONSULTATION

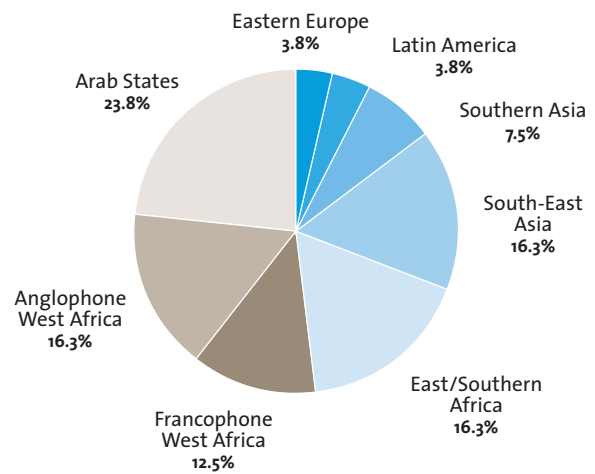
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS LOGINS



Eastern Europe	11
Southern Asia	12
South-East Asia	25
Latin America	6
Eastern/Southern Africa	21
Francophone West Africa	22
Anglophone West Africa	15
Arab States	30
Total	142

GLOBAL DIGITAL CONSULTATION

TOTAL ENGAGEMENT



Eastern Europe	3
Southern Asia	6
South-East Asia	13
Latin America	3
Eastern/Southern Africa	14
Francophone West Africa	10
Anglophone West Africa	13
Arab States	19
Total	80

The moderators were civil society activists working on CT/PVE issues in their respective countries. The choice of civil society moderators was an effective way of engaging with marginalized groups and expanding the number of partners engaged in the platform. It also enabled the conversation to be led by civil society experts, who questioned existing approaches and highlighted good practices across countries. The moderators said that organizing a consultation by and for civil society on CT/PVE was a good practice that should be replicated by the Global Compact in the future.

All documents and contents on the platform were made available in the five official languages of the United Nations. Besides, the platform SparkBlue offered participants the opportunity to contribute in more than 100 languages.

The consultation gathered participants from all regions of the world that contributed in six different languages: English, French, Arabic, Portuguese,

Russian and Spanish.¹⁴ Participants from all regions were actively engaged in the consultation. The level of participation demonstrates that violent extremism and CT/PVE responses affect a large number of countries, albeit differently, and raise many challenges across continents. The strong participation from CSOs in all regions also demonstrates the need to involve civil society, and especially women-led CSOs and gender equality activists, when defining CT/PVE policies.

The consultation was assessed by both the participants and the moderators through a dedicated questionnaire sent after the consultation.¹⁵ The participants expressed strong satisfaction with the consultation and requested that similar consultations be organized in the future – at the global, regional and national level.¹⁶ They also asked for the platform to be maintained and for further opportunities and tools for networking among civil society representatives to be provided.¹⁷

¹⁴ Unfortunately, only a limited number of participants contributed from the Balkans, Caucasus and Central Asia.

¹⁵ Both reports are available in Annex 6 (evaluation by participants), available [here](#), and Annex 7 (evaluation by the moderators), available [here](#).

¹⁶ See Annex 6. The evaluation questionnaire was accessible in English and French. A total of 32 participants responded to the questionnaire (a 22.5% response rate). This response rate was only slightly below the average response rate of online surveys.

¹⁷ See Annex 6.

4.2. Protection

Thorough protection measures were put in place by the organizers. The consultation was made private, to allow only invited participants to contribute and avoid intrusion from any third parties. Participants were given the possibility to contribute through a pseudonym. Likewise, information on their country of residence was not required in order to register. A guidance tool for identifying protection concerns was developed and shared with all UN Women offices that identified potential participants.¹⁸ Detailed information on privacy and protection was provided to the participants ahead of the consultation – through a note sent to all participants, as well as in a dedicated chapter on privacy available on the digital platform. Such information enabled participants to identify the risks and make an informed decision as to whether or not they would like to participate in the consultation. The organizers also decided that participants would be quoted in the reports, but only anonymously.

While respondents were very satisfied with the privacy and protection measures put in place by the organizers (more than 90 per cent gave these a positive rating), their responses demonstrate privacy and protection issues are of utmost importance for participants in consultations related to CT/PVE. Respondents were unanimous in saying protection measures are critical for them when deciding to take part in consultations on CT/PVE. Also, all respondents said that having a closed consultation was an important element for them to participate.¹⁹ While all respondents agreed that their privacy and protection needs were met in the consultation, a closer analysis of the responses reveals the need to further explore and respond to protection concerns – and to have solid risk-management mechanisms in place when consulting with civil society on CT/PVE issues, particularly women and gender equality activists. A separate evaluation conducted among the moderators demonstrated the need to train moderators on such protocols as well.²⁰

It is recommended for the Gender Working Group and the entities that comprise it to have policies and protocols related to protection in place when organizing consultations with civil society, and particularly

with women-led organizations and gender equality activists. Any consultation should be organized in line with existing protection guidance and tools developed by the United Nations, notably the 2019 *UN Guidance Document on Intimidation and Reprisals for Cooperation with the United Nations* and the 2020 *United Nations Guidance Note on Protection and Promotion of Civic Space*.²¹ Participants should be able to make risk-informed decisions when participating to consultations in relation to violent extremism and terrorism and their protection requirements and needs should be guaranteed by the organizers. Such guarantees are especially important when inviting women. Multiple reports demonstrated that women involved in public life tend to be targeted for a range of abuses, notably online violence, and operate in a wider context of gender inequality that makes their activism all the more challenging.²²

4.3. Digital Format

The consultation was organized on UNDP's digital platform, entitled *SparkBlue*. The consultation took place online in lieu of holding a conference in Dakar, Senegal. The use of a digital format was dictated by the COVID-19 pandemic, but it proved to be a very useful format to gather participants from all regions worldwide.

The consultation was structured around four Discussion Rooms:

1. Promoting the rights of women in contexts affected by VE/PVE and engaging independent women's and gender equality CSOs and activists in PVE responses
2. The impact of national and regional CT/PVE strategies and response on human and women's rights, as well as women's role in CVE initiatives
3. Gender equality/inequalities, the impact of violent extremism, and PVE responses
4. Public Statement

¹⁸ The guidance tool was based on the following documents: United Nations. 2019. *Guidance Document on Intimidation and Reprisals for Cooperation with the United Nations*; and UN Women. 2019. *Supporting Women Human Rights Defenders, UN Women Internal Guidance*.

¹⁹ This, reflects responses from all respondents who expressed an opinion on that issue. See Annex 6, available [here](#).

²⁰ Some moderators were not aware of all existing protection measures in place. See Annex 7, available [here](#).

²¹ The 2019 UN Guidance Document on Intimidation and Reprisals for Cooperation with the United Nations is an internal and available by request to UN staff at reprisals@ohchr.org

²² See, notably, https://www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/women/wrgs/sexualhealth/info_whrd_web.pdf



Guatemala - Rural Women Diversify Incomes and Build Resilience. Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

This structure was evaluated as being “very good” by both the moderators and the participants, although the Public Statement room did not fully perform its initial function until the last week of the consultation.²³

All discussion rooms were open from 25 May to 26 June. ‘Discussion Room 4’ was also open for an additional week, from 26 June to 5 July. This extra week enabled participants to focus on drafting the Public Statement. All the Discussion Rooms were managed by civil society moderators.²⁴ Specific seed content produced for the consultation included a concept note and three videos.

Benefits and Challenges of a digital structure

The benefits of a digital platform proved to be many, notably in terms of participation and ensuring inclusivity. Participants from all countries were able to participate and there was no segregation between national/capital-based and local NGOs. Participants could also contribute at a time of their choice during the entire duration of the consultation (which spanned 6 weeks), which meant that time differences were not a barrier. This also provided greater flexibility for often time-strapped CSOs.

At the same time, holding a digital consultation raised several challenges for participants.

²³ See Evaluations by the participants and moderators in the list of Annexes

²⁴ With the exception of the Discussion Room that was initially moderated by two UN Women staff from 25 May to 26 June. The Discussion Room was moderated then by civil society moderators from 27 June to 5 July, when participants were asked to actively engage on the drafting of the Public Statement.

Language: There were few language barriers to participating in the consultation itself, as the UNDP SparkBlue platform offers simultaneous translation of comments in more than 100 languages. While the platform was accessible in more than 100 languages and organizers translated the seed content (concept note and videos) in five UN languages, as well as in Portuguese, the prevalence of English as the main language of communication used by the organizers might have put off certain participants, notably in francophone West Africa, Latin America, as well as in Central Asia.²⁵ Although efforts were made by the organizers to reach out to CSOs in French, Spanish and Russian, there may also have been some language barriers in early communications, as the initial invitations to participate in the consultation and communication by the SparkBlue platform were only extended in English.

Access: Participants from all countries were able to participate, provided they had an Internet connection. However, the lack of Internet connection seems to have deterred some participants from contributing, notably participants living in peripheral regions and areas affected by conflicts.²⁶ It is worth recalling that there is a wide gap in Internet access in the least developed countries – particularly in rural areas, where 17 per cent of the population lives in areas with no mobile coverage at all, and 19 per cent of the rural population is covered by only a 2G network.²⁷ Internet access is also less available in countries affected by conflict.²⁸ Another important advantage is that participants from countries that may face visa restrictions when travelling were able to participate.

Contribution quality standards: There were a substantial number of contributions posted, with moderators keeping high standards regarding the contributions. This involved following up with participants and asking them to provide specific and detailed information on points raised, and to share concrete experience and lessons learned. The need to prepare such elaborate written contributions might have put off some participants, notably younger participants from youth organizations.

Transparency: Producing a Public Statement online also proved to be challenging as it required important efforts in terms of inclusivity, participation and transparency. A solid participatory methodology was developed to ensure that all participants would have the opportunity to provide inputs and validate the final version of the statement. Likewise, participants were informed of the drafting process via the platform and by email, to ensure that they understood the methodology adopted and had the opportunity to make their contributions on time. Transparency and participation were guided by the moderators and these were ultimately seen as strengthening the legitimacy of the resulting Public Statement.

Privacy/protection: Although a digital consultation raises the need to address privacy and protection concerns, to ensure that these do not put participants at risk, when adequate measures are taken, it can also bring in participants that would not otherwise attend presential meetings. This point was notably made by participants from countries where violent extremism and terrorism issues are not publicly debated. The electronic format also enabled to vet the participants and ensure a space safe from intrusions and verbal violence.

25 Although the organizers sent emails in French, Russian and Spanish to the participants, the prompts used to communicate to the participants were available in English only.

26 This was the case notably of participants from francophone West Africa and some countries in Asia Pacific

27 International Telecommunication Union. 2020. “Household Internet access in urban areas twice as high as in rural areas.” 30 November. <https://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/Pages/pr27-2020-facts-figures-urban-areas-higher-internet-access-than-rural.aspx>

28 According to 2018 World Bank statistics, the global percentage of the population with Internet access is 51 per cent: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS>. However, the rate falls to 28 per cent in conflict-affected countries: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=F1>.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Global Digital Consultation was the first attempt of the Gender Working Group, and consequently of the UNGCTCC, to engage meaningfully with civil society, particularly with women-led CSOs and gender equality activists. The success of the consultation, both in terms of the high number of participants worldwide and the quality of the contributions, demonstrates the need for platforms and opportunities enabling civil society to discuss issues related to gender, violent extremism and counter-terrorism.

The messages received highlighted that women, particularly those working in areas affected by conflicts and young women, are rarely associated to official peace and security responses in their respective regions but also in international fora. The articulated nature of the contributions demonstrated the scope of the work and results delivered by civil society, notably women-led CSOs and gender equality activists. A large number of civil society actors, often marginalized in their own countries, are effectively responding to violence and building peace. This is the case of women-led organizations and gender equality activists. It is time to involve them as equal partners in the design and implementation of CT/PVE responses at national, regional and global levels – not only because they have relevant expertise and experience, but also because any CT/PVE policy should be in line with international human rights obligations and deliver sustaining peace to their communities.

The main message participants expressed, across countries and regions, was that violent extremism and terrorism are fundamentally human rights, peace and human development issues. As such, they should be addressed as part of broader peace, sustainable development and democratization efforts – by promoting and protecting human rights, guaranteeing gender equality, tackling socioeconomic inequalities, offering quality education and equal opportunities to all, and guaranteeing justice outcomes for all victims of violence. Moreover, gender equality and women's participation are key to building peace and to addressing violent extremism.

Existing approaches, which are often militarized, are clearly not responding to the challenges on the ground. Participants went further to suggest that

these approaches often lead to human rights violations, aggravate gender inequalities, and make it even more challenging for women to have any agency and contribute to peace. Another major issue with existing responses is the lack of definitions and the misuse of concepts and terminology in relation to violent extremism and terrorism that can be abused politically and that generate biases against certain communities. Participants were particularly concerned with that issue and placed it first among all recommendations in the Public Statement. Another important limitation of existing approaches is that they are gender blind. Because existing CT/PVE responses are insufficiently based on gender analysis, they fail to consider the various roles of women in contexts affected by violent extremism, and the importance of gender equality in responding to violent extremism.

Today, there is a need to dramatically change approaches in relation to violent extremism and terrorism. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated those issues. At the same time, it represents an opportunity to reset CT/PVE responses, along the lines recommended by the Public Statement. But a change of approaches can take place only if there is large and meaningful consultation, participation and contribution of all relevant stakeholders in the design and implementation of CT/PVE responses – state institutions, civil society, women and men, youth, etc. Today's responses are narrow and ineffective because they were not developed through inclusive and participatory approaches. Policies aimed at responding to violent extremism should thus be debated democratically, informed by local realities and implemented in consultation and partnership with all relevant partners, notably civil society, marginalized groups, women and local actors.



Photo: UN Women/Louie Pacardo

To respond efficiently and effectively to violent extremism and terrorism, laws, policies and actions should be developed and implemented through human-rights- and gender-equality-based approaches. Besides, the institutions tasked with these CT/PVE responses should be accountable both in relation to results achieved and compliance with international and national human rights obligations. CT/PVE responses should also be informed by – or developed in tandem with – WPS National Action Plans, as today NAPs and CT/PVE responses are mainly developed in parallel, by and with different sets of actors. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should equally be used for that purpose, notably SDGs 5 (gender equality), 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) and 17 (partnerships), as they offer a solid framework for planning, monitoring, evaluation and accountability of PVE/CT responses.²⁹ Existing accountability frameworks, such as international human rights treaty bodies – notably the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Universal Period Review – as well as Security Council resolutions related to WPS – notably UNSCR 1325 – should be applied when designing, implementing and reporting on CT/PVE responses.

The consultation organized by the Gender Working Group was considered important, but it is an initial step by the Global Compact to engage with civil society. It is clear that the Global Compact needs to



Photo: UN Women/Catianne Tijerina

engage regularly and meaningfully with civil society on issues related to CT and PVE when supporting global, regional and national responses to violent extremism and terrorism. The Global Compact also needs to consider civil society as equal partners, with a leading and meaningful role in such consultations. Any consultation with civil society requires significant efforts in guaranteeing that equal opportunities are offered to participants across regions – notably through translations and platforms that enable participants to express themselves in their own language. It also requires proper guarantees and measures in relation to protection concerns. Lastly, although the digital consultation proved to be a great opportunity to connect participants from all regions across the world, in-person events will remain necessary, notably to allow participants to network.

A major outcome of the consultation was the publication of the Public Statement – a critical and solid document that reflects the findings and recommendations of 80 participants across 33 countries and was drafted by the participants themselves – with the help of the civil society moderators and through a participative and transparent process. As such, it should be used by the Global Compact when supporting CT/PVE responses at the global, regional and local level and help shape the debates on CT/PVE responses. Moreover, its recommendations should be implemented by the Global Compact and its members.

²⁹ CT/PVE responses should notably contribute to SDG 5 Target 5.1, on ending discrimination against women and girls; 5.2, on ending violence against women and girls; 5.5, on promoting women's leadership and participation in public life; and 5.c, on policies that promote gender equality. Policies and plans to address violent extremism and terrorism should also contribute to Target 16.1, on reducing all forms of violence; 16.3, on promoting the rule of law; 16.6, on accountable institutions; 16.7, on inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making; and 16.b, on non-discriminatory laws and policies. Lastly, efforts to tackle violent extremism and terrorism should favour exchanges of experience, practices and lessons learned, as recommended by Target 17.6, on enhanced North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation.

VOICES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ON THE GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

CHANGE IS NEEDED!

To prevent and properly address violent extremism we must develop a culture of **tolerance** and **peace**, where **freedom of expression** is guaranteed and where communities, including **women and girls**, are fully engaged in the design and implementation of **peace strategies**.



Between 25 May and 5 July 2020, women and men from civil society organizations across 43 countries joined the [global digital consultation](#) to reflect on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counter-terrorism approaches. They drafted a [Public Statement](#) with recommendations on how to change current approaches.



80 participants from 32 countries posted

142 participants from 43 countries logged on



6 regions:

- Arab States
- Asia and the Pacific
- Eastern and Southern Africa
- Europe and Central Asia
- Latin America
- Western and Central Africa



393 comments in total



6+ languages:

- English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian, Portuguese



PUBLIC STATEMENT

Some of the issues highlighted by civil society and some of the key recommendations they put forward during the consultation include:

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Women's human rights are particularly at risk in contexts affected by violent extremism. They are caught between the violence of both violent extremist groups and State actors, who often fail to protect them

LIMITS OF EXISTING APPROACHES

To address violent extremism, many States adopt "militarized" approaches, which lead to human rights violations, increased gender inequalities and reduced agency for women

GENDER EQUALITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

To address violent extremism and terrorism we must protect human rights and promote gender equality

TERMINOLOGY ISSUE

"Terrorism" and "extremism" are ambiguous terms that can be abused politically to generate biases against certain communities

LOCAL SOLUTIONS

Violent extremism is often a locally-driven problem and it requires local solutions and leaders

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Women are on the frontlines as peacebuilders and human rights defenders in contexts affected by violent extremism. States must protect their rights and ensure their meaningful participation in peacebuilding processes

INVESTING IN PEACE

Existing or past conflicts are fertile grounds for the emergence of extremism. We must address social injustices, build democratic and accountable institutions and eradicate poverty

POWER OF EDUCATION

Investing in quality education for all, including for women and girls, is key to addressing violent extremism

LIST OF ANNEXES

1. Public statement [here](#) (in English, Arabic, French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish)
2. Infographic available [here](#)
3. Regional papers and feature stories available [here](#)
 - 3.1. Regional Paper Arab States
 - 3.2. Regional Paper Asia and the Pacific
 - 3.3. Regional Paper Eastern and Southern Africa
 - 3.4. Regional Paper Latin America
 - 3.5. Regional Paper Western Africa
4. Videos and video-audio products
 - 4.1. Video – available [here](#) in English, French and Spanish
 - 4.2. Video-audio expert panels
 - 4.2.1. “Promoting the rights of women in contexts affected by violent extremism and PVE” – available in [English](#), [Arabic](#), [French](#), [Russian](#) and [Spanish](#)
 - 4.2.2. “Impact of national and regional CT/PVE strategies and responses on human and women’s rights & women’s role in CVE initiatives” – available in [English](#), [Arabic](#), [French](#), [Russian](#) and [Spanish](#)
 - 4.2.3. “Gender equality/inequalities, impact of violent extremism and PVE responses” – available in [English](#), [Arabic](#), [French](#), [Russian](#) and [Spanish](#)
5. The evaluation by participants is available [here](#)
6. The evaluation by moderators is available [here](#)
7. The concept note is available [here](#) (in English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Russian and Portuguese)

GLOSSARY

CSO	civil society organization
CT	counter-terrorism
CT/PVE	counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism
CVE	countering violent extremism
GBV	gender-based violence
LGBTIQ+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, and others
NAP	National Action Plan
PVE	preventing violent extremism
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNGCTCC	United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact
UNGCTS	United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy
UNOCT	United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council resolution
VEO	violent extremist organization
WPS	Women, Peace and Security



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

This report is informed by the contributions submitted by 80 civil society representatives from 33 countries, who shared their views, challenges and recommendations on the gendered dimensions of terrorism and violent extremism during the Global Digital Consultation “Voices and perspectives of civil society on the gendered dimensions of violent extremism and counter-terrorism responses” (25 May – 5 July 2020).

The consultation was organized by UN Women on behalf of the Gender Working of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact and it was funded by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre in the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism.

Views and recommendations from civil society were gathered in a Public Statement produced by civil society members. A series of technical publications were also produced, including an outcome report and regional analytical papers highlighting issues specific to key regions represented in the consultation.



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