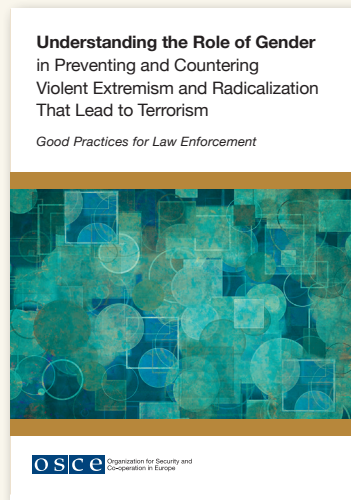




التحالف الإسلامي العسكري لمحاربة الإرهاب  
ISLAMIC MILITARY COUNTER TERRORISM COALITION

## BOOK REVIEW 14



# Understanding the Role of Gender In Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism

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## Book Review

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**Book Review**

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## **Understanding the Role of Gender In Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism**

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The term “gender” gained prominence in the 1970s to describe the socially constructed roles of women and men, and to refer to biological differences between both. Under this term is subsumed the concept of gender and sexuality to draw a defining line between each term. Epistemologically, sex refers to the whole gamut of biological characteristics that divide human beings into males and females. Sexuality, however, includes the social characteristics that distinguish between men and women, whereby the psychological, biological, economic, historical, cultural, religious and other dimensions overlap. As such, the term ‘gender’ is a general social phenomenon.

Terrorism per se is a male phenomenon par excellence; although women are involved in terrorism and associated issues, they remain in the public image on the sidelines of the hotbeds and graphic scenes of terrorism, whether adopting extremist ideology, joining terrorist organizations, engaging in their direct and indirect activities, or by rejecting extremism and radicalization, combating and countering terrorism. It is no secret that violent extremism and terrorism have today become a formidable and cross-border challenge, not limited to race, religion, sect, people, country, ideology or gender. The snowballing nature of terrorist threats that cannot be foreseen makes it very difficult to prevent and nip them in the bud.

This report highlights a research study that examines women’s involvement in preventing and combating violent extremism and terrorism, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has attempted to bridge the existing gap on this topic to reach an objective study based on scientific and realistic grounds. The report reveals the commitment of the OSCE to support a gender-sensitive approach across the security sector to prevent fundamentalism and violent extremism leading to terrorism. One of the main elements in achieving a gender-sensitive response to the threat of violent extremism and terrorism is to ensure adequate presence of women and robust engagement in setting policies, programs and strategic plans, as well as participation in practical and operational tasks, especially in law enforcement.

## Daesh Lure

Much of the terrorist activity across the OSCE region is attributable to ISIS in particular. At the peak of ISIS operations in 2014 and 2015, ISIS attracted more than 40,000 foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) from all over the world. A large number of these FTFs came from the member states of the OSCE, and the number of those coming from Western Europe was only estimated at about 6,000 fighters, and women comprised 13% of these FTFs or affiliates, according to a study conducted in 2018 by the International Center for the Study of Radicalization. Overall, on average, 17% of the nearly 20,000 FTFs have come from the OSCE Region.

## Far-Right and Left-Wing Terrorism

Notoriously enough, a subtly-nuanced sense of polarizing rhetoric has been ubiquitous across the United States, Europe and further beyond these regions by increasingly xenophobic movements. The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (EUROPOL) finds that this has triggered and fueled the violent right-wing extremist groups. Due to increased migration flows from conflict zones outside the OSCE area, the appeal of this kind of rhetoric, especially when presented in a populist political package, has been increasing. Furthermore, it gave impetus to extremist groups that gained prominence afresh strongly after decades of being marginal and ineffective movements; now they are gaining more and more followers, who are more open and accepting their motives and increasingly believe in their ideological and social goals. Women have a clear involvement

in the actions and activities of these movements, and the potential tasks and responsibilities that women can assume have increased.

Region	Estimated Total	Estimated Women
Albania	90-150	13-29
Bih	192-340	36
Croatia	1-6	1-4
Kosovo	100-232	42
Macedonia	12-146	1
Montenegro	13-30	N/A
Serbia	50-350	1

Table (1): Media and analytical estimates of foreign fighters and migrants to the Islamic State from the western Balkans

In addition to the foregoing, left-wing terrorism remains a persistent threat in several major member countries in the OSCE. The EUROPOL found that in 2017, the percentage of left-leaning attacks was 12% of all attacks in the European Union and were left-wing in nature.

## Prevention and Response Measures

Given the fact that the factors leading to or creating conditions that are breeding grounds for violent extremism and terrorism impact men and boys differently from women and girls. As such, it is critically important that the strategies of prevention and countering of violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism incorporate a strong gender analysis and a comprehensive gender awareness. These strategies should be specifically designed in such a way that reflects the socio-economic, cultural and political needs of the

entire society, while also taking into account the many gender differences that exist.

A number of international, national, regional and local bodies have recognized the need for gender-based prevention, and the integration of women in combating violent extremism and fundamentalism leading to terrorism. The United Nations also recognized the importance of women's empowerment, participation and leadership in its programs and political efforts to prevent and combat violent extremism. For example, the 2015 United Nations Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism calls on member states of the United Nations to ensure that strategies to combat violent extremism and terrorism do not adversely affect women's rights. The United Nations' Violent Extremism Action Plan makes gender equality and women's empowerment part of the seven core areas of the strategy to prevent violent extremism and terrorism, 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. This includes identifying the reasons that lead women to join violent extremist groups and the impact of counterterrorism strategies on their lives. This helps to develop targeted and evidence-based policy, data and analyses;
- ▶ Involving women and other under-represented groups in national law enforcement and security agencies.
- ▶ Building and enhancing the capacity of women and their civil society groups to better engage in effective prevention and response efforts against violent extremism;
- ▶ Making certain that part of all funds set for addressing violent extremism are allotted to projects that address women's needs or empower women, as recommended in the 2015 report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on women and peace and security.

## Women and Violent Extremism

The involvement of women in violent extremism and terrorism is not a new phenomenon. Women have been active in terrorist groups and networks throughout history; however, their engagement as front-line activists, propagandists, recruiters and fundraisers has become more remarkable and visible in contemporary terrorist groups all over the world. While much attention has been attached to the numbers of women in terrorist and violent extremist groups, less explored are the reasons revealed by research why women choose to leave such groups.

Simply put, the motivation for women to leave nationalist or far right-wing groups that fervently support populist parties can have various manifestations. Telling reasons include the disillusionment that not all members of the group are deeply committed to the cause they fight for, or possibly unmet expectations and feelings of betrayal, especially for women who joined the far right hoping to find a healthy and welcoming family to substitute for the troubled relationships they have sustained and experienced elsewhere. Equally important, women also leave – out of their motherhood-driven feelings – when violence becomes a threat to their children.

## Gender-Based Analysis of Extremism

Extremism, violent extremism and terrorism are closely related to gender; women and girls suffer differently from the way men do, whether they are victims to terrorism or perpetrators thereof, or they have worked to prevent the terrorist threat, or to address those fighting it. While the majority of violent extremists are men, women also perform important actions, which have a profound impact on violent extremist groups. For the authorities to successfully prevent or counter violent extremism and terrorism, it is imperative to be aware of these facts that should not be tolerated.

There is, therefore, an urgent need to shatter the stereotype of why individuals have joined these

terrorist groups and organizations, especially stereotypes that show women as merely meek followers and submissive victims. Initial efforts to understand the impact of women on violent extremist organizations and terrorist groups have been awkward due to the absence of rapid quantitative analyses. Despite the fact that there are women in leadership and operational positions in some violent extremist organizations and terrorist groups, it is noted that their relatively low numbers among extremists often lead to a misunderstanding that women are not important in the performance of these groups in general; therefore, women are reduced to being unimportant, silhouetted as helpless victims, and their work is limited to taking care of the family members within a given extremist group.

The Council of Europe Counter-Terrorism Committee has divided the role of women in ISIS into three main categories: necessary agents of state-building, recruiters and militants. The active role of women in terrorism also included suicide bombings. As reported, women perpetrators accounted for about 15% of all suicide attacks between 1985 and 2006. Additionally, women have assumed various roles in far right-wing extremist groups.

Violent extremist organizations understand the power of gender influence well and deal with “gender” norms and stereotypes in their advantage in recruitment and advertising messages, specifically targeted to men or women. For instance, the German alt-right campaign (120 decibels), which is a reference to the volume of pocket alarms carried by some women as a defense against harassment in public places blames immigrants and refugees for sexual violence across Europe. The website of the campaign invites women to share their experiences with imported violence and join the resistance against the replacement of white Europeans with black migrants coming from Africa.

One of the Daesh propagandas calls on Muslims on its territories to join the organization to constitute a True Muslim Community. The propaganda has appealed to female European recruits who have suffered forms of discrimination on religious grounds in their home countries. Women were also

attracted by the temptation to become mothers of the future generation of children who bear the ideology of the organization and believe in its jihadist ideology.

## Gender and Criminal Justice

Criminal justice sectors are often one-sided in their “gender perspective”, adopting approaches that primarily target male perpetrators, while turning a blind eye to the different way of dealing with women. This problem is often exacerbated by the scarcity of women working in the criminal justice sectors. In the context of terrorism, mistrust in the criminal justice system may fuel conditions conducive to violence and abuse. Negative experiences with those active in criminal justice, including sexual and “gender” discrimination or violence by these actors, may be a driver of violent extremism and terrorism among both women and men. In addition, gender gaps in the criminal justice system may provide strategic and tactical advantages to violent extremist organizations, such as those extracted from gender-based assumptions that women are more peaceful, or that they are less likely to be involved in extremism and affiliated to terrorism. These organizations take advantage of these gaps in their actions and activities to catch counter-terrorism institutions off guard.

## Role of Women in Preventing Extremism

Initiatives to prevent violent extremism should be comprehensive, taking into account the different factors that drive men and women to extremism. Approaches to preventing violent extremism and terrorism aimed at addressing the root causes of violence should be gender-sensitive. In addition, such approaches should prioritize inclusion of key stakeholders, especially women, in the development and implementation stages. Officials in uniforms may be more effective in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism, and in collecting important information about security threats, as gender differences and cultural expectations prevent

men from reaching specific societies. Moreover, if women occupy leadership positions in government institutions concerned with preventing violent extremism and terrorism, this helps to ensure that these efforts provide a full approach to society, and address “gender” drivers of violent extremism and fundamentalism leading to terrorism.

## Successful National Experiences

Tajikistan’s recent national strategy to combat violent extremism and terrorism and associated action plan have created opportunities to increase women’s engagement in preventing violent extremism. Nearly, one million people, predominantly male citizens, are migrants working outside Tajikistan, which makes it necessary for women to be involved in such strategies because many others take over the duties of a caretaker for their families.

The Parents against Terrorism Campaign of the OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe, targeting awareness raising and training on Prevention and countering violent extremism leading to terrorism has reached over 8,000 stakeholders, almost half of them are women.

The project has proved that engaged community members whose relatives have left as FTFs generate credible voices across these communities; they are able to foster awareness and help spread persuasive counter-narratives through storytelling activity. In addition, the training in the framework of the Parents against Terrorism Campaign created valuable opportunities for police officers to better communicate with local community members, gain a clearer and deeper understanding of their needs and improve their own relationships.

The OSCE Mission in Kosovo has been working to strengthen the preventative functions by training female police officers in combating violent extremism as part of the national strategy aimed at different representatives of the community (men, women, law enforcement, religious leaders and journalists). In late 2018, 35 projects set at preventing and countering violent extremism that

leads to terrorism came underway. Female police officers received in-depth training session on a new approach based on a number of foundations:

- ▶ How to encourage community engagement and empowerment to prevent violent extremism and terrorism, with a special attention attached to empowering women in general and mothers in particular in society to influence and deal with individuals at risk of extremism.
- ▶ Improving communication with different groups of influencers, including parents, elders, preachers and religious leaders to demonstrate inclusiveness and foster more trustworthy relationships with state agents and to promote tolerance in and across societies, while also preventing polarization, prejudice and discrimination of all manifestations and forms.
- ▶ Providing skills in psychology and social conflict management to facilitate communication with individuals who are upset or traumatized, including youth who are at risk of extremism and victims of violence and abuse.
- ▶ Enhancing knowledge of how to address individual cases of extremism, including designing messages in traditional ways, on various websites and social media, that provide an alternative option for affected individuals, or encouraging critical evaluation of religious propaganda.

## Gender Perspective Incorporation

The integration of law enforcement institutions with “gender” considerations into their strategic roles to prevent violent extremism and terrorism is critically important. This is why law enforcement leaders need a full understanding of the benefits of integrating “gender” considerations into preventing violent extremism and fundamentalism leading to terrorism and steps. Among other key things, senior leaders can also do the following:

- ▶ Developing ad hoc outreach programmes that aim at establishing relations with women in minority communities. Such teams should consist of both genders – women and men – to



make certain that equal access is provided to all stakeholders of both men and women.

- ▶ Suggesting creating internal structures to better facilitate the integration of a gender perspective into prevention and countering violent extremism leading to terrorism when institutional review and re-structuring come into play. This may involve establishing gender-related advisers in community outreach teams and in teams working on de-radicalization and terrorism.
- ▶ Conducting regular meetings among community engagement teams and officers working to prevent and counter violent extremism leading to terrorism to further share relevant information and to make certain that there is a mutual understanding on the benefits of establishing community-based relations.
- ▶ Mainstreaming gender-based perspective into all of the programmes they develop. To do so, they need to conduct a gender analysis that covers all phases of a programme, beginning with the programme assessment and ending with monitoring and evaluation.
- ▶ Making certain that standard operating procedures and risk assessment protocols reflect gender-based differences.
- ▶ Working on strategies to increase the recruitment of female police officers. Female police officers should also be involved in de-radicalization and counter-terrorism teams, and be encouraged to hone their skills and polish up knowledge pertinent to the subject-matter.
- ▶ Promoting a work environment that respects the rights of women and men, making it free of gender-fueled stereotypes.
- ▶ Developing a zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment and a code of conduct on gender equality and non-discrimination to ensure that all personnel should be aware of these institutional commitments.
- ▶ Making certain that gender training in preventing violent extremism and terrorism

includes an overview of the international structure on gender and preventing violent extremism. These include all relevant Security Council resolutions, strategic documents of the United Nations and the OSCE.

- ▶ Targeting female police officers working in community police, or in police patrols or their intelligence-oriented units, and encourage them to participate in advanced and specialized training at a high level in preventing violent extremism and terrorism. This is to increase the likelihood of women joining the fundamentalist and anti-terrorism units. This specialized training for female officers may depend on cross-cultural competencies, taking into account conflict perspectives, and languages useful to reach out to minority communities.

## Gender-Based Analyses

Before developing strategic plans, policies and programs to prevent and combat violent extremism and terrorism, a thorough and accurate analysis should be conducted by those active in the security sector to assess the differences and gaps existing in the context between women and girls on the one hand, and between men and boys on the other hand. This is meant to assess how this affects the sustainable implementation of their efforts. "Gender analysis" allows a comprehensive assessment of the differences between women and men in the distribution of resources, opportunities, constraints and power structures in a specific context, which is necessary to ensure that any gender differences in the factors driving violent extremism and terrorism in a specific community are taken into account, before any prevention efforts. Terrorism and counter-terrorism could help those active in the security sector understand the core drivers of joining extremist and terrorist networks. This analysis can evaluate various aspects, including:

- ▶ The impact of "gender norms" on the recruitment strategies of violent extremist organizations.
- ▶ Differences in the roles of women and men in targeted violent extremist organizations.





- ▶ The potential impact of these differences on disengagement, de-radicalization, and community-based reintegration programs.
- ▶ The gender-specific roles in family structures and how this may differently impact the resiliency of family members against violent extremist recruitment.
- ▶ Constraints, opportunities and entry points to narrow down gender gaps and empower women with accurate strategic prevention plans.
- ▶ The various potential effects of strategic plans, policies and programs for both women and men alike, including unintended or negative effects.

## Gender Personnel Teams

Security sector institutions involved in efforts to prevent violent extremism and terrorism should invest in resources dedicated to full-time personnel of “gender” issues to assist these institutions in taking into account “gender” considerations as intended in their roles. Ideally, this may include highly experienced full-time advisers of “gender-related issues”, working as technical outreach experts.

For the “gender teams” to be stronger and more impactful, clear and practical methods of reporting should be established in security sector institutions, which enable senior leaders to hold entities accountable for the progress made, and

to constantly monitor and evaluate the impact of this work. It is of great importance to these efforts that these methods of reporting integrate “the reporting process” into the national strategic plans for preventing and combating violent extremism and terrorism and integrating them into the national action plans related to women, peace and security, while also ensuring an explicit compatibility between these strategic plans.

## Capacity Building Initiatives

Parties at risk of violent extremism and terrorism and their surrounding communities are likely to come into contact with actors in the security sector, especially members of law enforcement teams. It is equally important to understand how the “gender power” relates to violent extremism and terrorism, and their impact on communities in which individuals at risk of extremism and violent extremism live or interact with. It cannot be assumed that each and every party in the security sector has a clear understanding of this “gender power”. Therefore, experts and specialists recommend that the OSCE member countries invest in training initiatives for actors in the security sector, seeking to take into account a “gender perspective” in their operations and activities.

The scope of women engagement in violent extremism can be understood through capacity-

building initiatives. This includes gender differences in jobs and tasks that women and men perform in violent extremist organizations, and how these tactics use “gender” standards, stereotypes and power in planning their operations and implementation while attracting and recruiting followers and supporters.

## Security Sector Reform

This handbook has provided a set of key considerations pertinent to integration and consideration of “gender perspective” into security sector reform efforts, particularly criminal justice reforms, which are undoubtedly essential components for responding to violent extremism and terrorism. These considerations include recruiting more women into police and leadership positions, and that male (men and youth) and female police (women and girls) officers understand “gender power” in work closely related to extremism, violent extremism and terrorism.

## Coordination with Civil Society

Civil society enjoys knowledge of local dynamics that may be useful for preventing criminal activity, including violent extremism and terrorism. The police should work with civil society to better facilitate local efforts made to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism. This requires creating open communication lines to recognize activities that are of interest to communities. Woman-oriented groups should also be included seriously in this work.

Finally, it is important that the involvement of women in violent extremism and terrorism, or their affiliation with these organizations, groups or movements, is not only seen as an aspect of their relationships with men; rather, women should be seen as special influencers. Equally important, it is also important that women and men are not seen as one unified group, as their motives for joining up violent extremist organizations may differ individually and collectively to a great extent.

### Other Publications:

#### Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

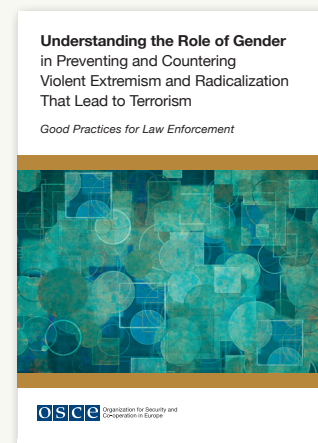
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