

GENDER-SENSITIVE NATIONAL ACTION PLANS ON PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM:

Lessons from Asia and the Pacific

WOMEN AND PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Terrorism and violent extremism impact women and girls in specific ways. Many terrorist and violent extremist groups are placing control over women and girls at the heart of their agendas, using gender stereotypes to radicalize and recruit. Limitations on women's rights, including restrictions on their freedom of movement and freedom of expression can signal early warning signs of rising extremism. Increasingly, women and girls are themselves being recruited forcibly or willingly to these groups.

But women are not just victims or perpetrators of this phenomenon. Women play a powerful role in the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) and in the promotion of messages of peace and tolerance. Women are uniquely positioned to influence community and family values, identify early signs of radicalization that lead to terrorism, gather intelligence as security sector actors that are unattainable by their male counterparts, preach tolerance as religious leaders from a variety of faiths,

and create counter narratives that speak to an audience of young women and men from a female perspective. In addition, the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment is in itself a counter-measure to the spread of radicalization, and combats the gendered approach used by violent extremist groups in perpetuating their ideologies.

However, to date women's participation in national, regional and global processes to tackle violent extremism, and their roles and priorities within prevention and response frameworks, have been underrepresented and undervalued.

At the national level, as policy and programmatic responses move away from military and security interventions to a more prevention-focused agenda, recognizing women's diverse roles and engaging with them as leaders in prevention efforts has never been more vital to ensure effective responses and the promotion of a culture of peace.

WOMEN PLAY KEY ROLES IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND ITS PREVENTION:



NATIONAL ACTION PLANS ON PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND GENDER

In December 2015, the UN Secretary General called for a “comprehensive approach” to preventing violent extremism that goes beyond “security based counter-terrorism measures” and put forward a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.¹

The Plan of Action is designed to encourage cooperative efforts between Governments, civil society groups, NGOs and think tanks to tackle violent extremism. As a measure to encourage comprehensive efforts at the national level, the Plan of Action recommends that “each Member State should consider developing a national plan of action to prevent violent extremism which sets national priorities for addressing the local drivers of violent extremism”. This was echoed in the Fifth Review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2016).

Against the background of these guiding documents, the development of National Action Plans to Prevent Violent Extremism (NAPs-PVE) envisions the adoption of policy frameworks that governments, in consultation with civil society,

can implement to promote a holistic approach to PVE. This integrated approach ensures that diverse sectors including education, employment, and media and communications, can all promote efforts to promote peace and tolerance.

The Secretary-General’s Plan of Action provides seven key areas for national action. While ‘gender equality and empowering women’ is a stand-alone focus area, the engagement of women is mainstreamed throughout the recommended actions in all seven priority areas. Where express references to women’s participation are absent from the recommendations, strong opportunities remain to ensure that the national-level interventions implemented by a NAP-PVE take into account gendered dynamics in order to ensure robust and comprehensive action.

To support the development of gender-mainstreamed NAPs-PVE, a gender analysis of the seven areas for national action proposed in the Secretary-General’s Plan of Action is detailed below. All numeric references refer to paragraphs in the Plan of Action.

¹ A/70/674, Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. Report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly, 24 December 2015.

THE 7 AREAS FOR PVE ACTION: A GENDER ANALYSIS

1. DIALOGUE AND CONFLICT PREVENTION (A/70/674, 49)

Unresolved conflict is a major driver of violent extremism. Where conflict already exists, promoting and sustaining dialogue between warring parties is essential to prevent it from escalating. Engaging women in dialogue and conflict prevention approaches is critical to ensure that these actions are holistic and effective. For example, research indicates that women's participation increases a peace agreement's probability of lasting at least 2 years by 20%, and 15 years by 35%; and that a peace agreement is 64% less likely to fail when civil society, including women's groups, participate in the process.

It is critical that women are involved in the design of NAP-PVE frameworks to ensure that their perspectives are integrated, their views heard and that their engagement in prevention and response efforts is invested in, and prioritized.

Engaging religious leaders to provide a platform for intra and interfaith dialogue is fundamental to effectively engage with communities to promote

peace and tolerance (49(e)). However, too often the role of female religious leaders and their capacity to promote peaceful religious messages is undervalued. Greater attention must be paid to the unique role female religious leaders can play and their reach to female members of their communities.

Preserving cultural and religious diversity as symbols of pluralism and tolerance is vital to ensure that the social and cultural rights of communities are protected (49(f)). The Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights, in her July 2017 Report to the General Assembly on the impact of fundamentalism and extremism on women's cultural rights, recommended that States emphasize the promotion and respect of cultural rights of women. This includes the right to freedom of artistic expression with adequate funding as core aspects of any strategy for tackling extremism. NAPs-PVE are well-placed to provide support to women's engagement in cultural life as a measure that promotes diversity and deters ideologies that seek to limit women's visibility in public arenas.

Female religious leaders in Indonesia: A model of women's religious leadership to promote peace and tolerance

In East Java, Indonesia, the women's wing of NU – a traditionalist Sunni Islam movement – leads a range of activities designed to prevent radicalization. These include supporting preachers to advocate for anti-radicalism, and working with local people that have been affiliated with ISIS to promote tolerance. They also support women who have experienced gender-based violence, and work with the LGBTIQ community.



Photo: UN Women/Ryan Brown

² UN Women, Global Study on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325, 2015.

³ A/72/155, Report of the special rapporteur in the field of cultural rights to the General Assembly, 17 July 2017.

Dialogue and conflict prevention through theatre

In Bangladesh, the development organisation BRAC organizes community theatre events to explore messages of peace. This 'Popular Theatre' utilizes drama to prompt community conversations on themes such as the importance of gender equality and social cohesion.



Photo: UN Women/Snidha Zaman

2. STRENGTHENING GOOD GOVERNANCE, HUMAN RIGHTS AND RULE OF LAW (A/70/674, 50)

Governments can reduce the appeal of violent extremism by promoting good governance and upholding the rule of law through policies and initiatives firmly grounded in human rights. Ensuring that laws, policies and initiatives are gender-sensitive and promote women's human rights is an essential component of this.

To strengthen the professionalism and compliance with human rights standards of security forces, law enforcement and justice actors (50(d)) through capacity building and trainings should encompass international standards for the protection and promotion of women's rights and on Women, Peace and Security commitments. Additionally, women must be well-represented in the security sector. Female law enforcement is successful in accessing information outside the reach of their male counterparts. For example, they can visit homes where females are present to conduct interviews or secure evidence and search female suspects in a respectful and non-threatening manner. Research has also shown that policewomen improve the ability of their local police forces to engage in early warning of violent acts through collecting vital intelligence.

Where gross violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law occur, accountability measures to ensure investigation and prosecution of perpetrators is needed to restore community trust that impunity

will not be tolerated and reduce the potential for grievances to give rise to extremism (50(e)). These accountability mechanisms require expertise to ensure that the gendered dimensions of rights violations are comprehensively addressed. A dedicated gender advisor should be assigned to any accountability mechanism. Such expertise is available through the Justice Rapid Response/UN Women SGBV Justice Experts Roster.

Reforming penitentiary systems to counter radicalization in prisons (50(f)), must account for the increasing number of women imprisoned for crimes related to violent extremism. For example, of the 47 ISIS-affiliated detainees in the Philippines in the aftermath of the Marawi conflict, 17 are women.⁴ Yet tailored correctional systems are often ill-equipped to address women's needs while in custody or to include them in counter radicalization interventions. Increasing programmatic attention to working with females in custody for violent extremist acts is necessary.

Likewise, gender-sensitive disengagement, rehabilitation and counselling to reintegrate persons engaged in violent extremism (50(g)), requires implementing both gender sensitive programmes for women to disengage from extremist groups, as well as programmes that support women whose male family members are disengaging from such groups.

⁴ Institute for Policy Analysis of Conflict, 'Post Marawi Lessons from Detained Extremists in the Philippines', 27 November 2017

Yayasan Prasati Pedamaian (Institute for International Peacebuilding), Indonesia, works with women imprisoned on terrorism charges and the female family members of men imprisoned for terrorism.

Dete Aliah, Managing Director shares:

Sometimes the [male] extremists are hesitant to talk to me because I am a woman. But I can talk to the wives, and this makes a big difference. They need women to talk to and to work with women. In this culture, the husband will not allow the wife talk to the men, but I can talk to them.

One time, there was a terrorist group in a standoff with the military on top of a mountain. The military called me to talk with the wives and ask them to tell their husbands to go down from the mountain and surrender peacefully. The military could not talk to the wives because they were men. So, I talked with the wives, and they convinced their husbands to come down.

A gender approach is very important to be able to understand [violent extremism] and to design interventions. Women play many roles: as educators, campaigners, financiers, brides. It is important to strengthen and empower the women, so they can say no to their husbands and also so they can be agents of change.



Photo: UN Women/Stuart Mannion

WE ARE WORKING IN FOUR KEY AREAS:

1



Empowerment of women

2



Policy influence

3



Research

4



Knowledge exchange



UN Women Asia Pacific has worked in Indonesia and Bangladesh to promote social cohesion through women's economic empowerment. Under the one-year programme **"Empowered Women, Peaceful Communities"**, 1638 women organized in 111 loan and business development groups across six districts in Java Island, Indonesia, and 1,200 women in Bangladesh across 85 unions in six districts were economically empowered, with peace dialogues being led by the women at community and local levels.

Independent research has found that the programme has directly contributed to increasing women's understanding of the problem of violent extremism and their confidence to participate in initiatives to prevent it. Similar results were found in the communities where the programme was implemented. Both men and women in the programme sites recognized that the economic empowerment of women decreased tensions within the family and community and thereby contributed to more peaceful and resilient societies.

3. ENGAGING COMMUNITIES (A/70/674, 51)

Community engagement strategies that engage family networks and civil society are vital to dismantle support for violent extremist groups.

Strategies with local communities to prevent the emergence of violent extremism and protect communities from its threat (51(a)), should be gender-sensitive and engage women in strengthening social cohesion and promoting tolerance as a prevention tactic.

The provision of essential services to communities effected by violent extremism must be supported through government-lead initiatives integrated into National Action Plans (51(d)). Medical, psychosocial and legal services are critical to support victims and deliver recovery measures from violent extremist incidents, including sexual and gender-based crimes. Service providers must be trained in gender-sensitive responses in order to properly address the needs of women in these communities. Following the Marawi siege in the Philippines in

May 2017 that left nearly 400,000 people internally displaced, local organisations such as UNYPHIL-Women supported the gender-sensitive provision of basic relief and psychosocial support services to those displaced in evacuation centers and 'home-based' with friends and family.

Establishing regional and global networks to share good practices on promoting peaceful dialogues is a strong tool for community engagement (51(f)). The model of a network such as the global Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network which brings together government and civil society representatives from over 61 countries on an annual basis to share national experiences of WPS initiatives can be replicated to share good practices on PVE interventions. In addition, networks of civil society, youth, and religious leaders must have strong participation and leadership from women to ensure that women's perspectives from across these groups are mainstreamed.

4. YOUTH (A/70/674, 52)

Young people are a core constituency in efforts to prevent violent extremism. However, efforts to support young people to adopt the causes of peace, pluralism and mutual respect often focus on engagement with young men as a cohort that is high-risk for being targeted by recruiters to terrorist causes. Failing to engage young women in PVE measures both excludes the perspectives and influence they have in prevention efforts and strengthening their families and communities, and risks them becoming susceptible to recruitment. The increasing phenomenon of women working as migrant domestic maids in Asia becoming radicalized highlights the risks in overlooking young women in the implementation of PVE actions.

Young women spreading messages of empowerment

In Bangladesh, young women from rural backgrounds that previously had no access to the internet and had never used a smartphone, were trained to write, film, edit and upload videos on the topic of “Amar Shokti” (“my power” in Bengali). The videos present the women’s own perspectives of female empowerment and provide a platform for discussion among their families and communities.

In order to build trust between decision makers and young people (52(c)), it is essential that youth delegations in consultations on PVE represent a gender-equal composition of young women and young men, including in leadership capacities. University students in Bangladesh and in Mindanao, the Philippines, have been recruited to violent extremist causes. To combat this, young men and women must be engaged through universities and other arenas to participate in and influence PVE approaches to encourage their sense of commitment and ownership.

Involving young women from underrepresented groups (52(d)), including rural and religious minority women, is also essential to ensure these processes are inclusive and effective.



5. GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERING WOMEN (A/70/674, 53)

While it is critical that gender is mainstreamed throughout thematic areas of a NAP-PVE, it is also essential to have standalone initiatives that address the gendered dynamics of extremism. Gender-specific approaches must also ensure that

efforts to counter terrorism and violent extremism do not impact adversely on women’s rights.

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of research on violent extremism and the

motivations of violent actors. However, research addressing women’s roles in violent extremism has been limited. Strengthened research and data collection on women’s roles (53(b)) will enable Governments to better understand the gendered dynamics of extremism, and how to effectively tailor programmatic responses through a NAP-PVE to disengage and deter women from

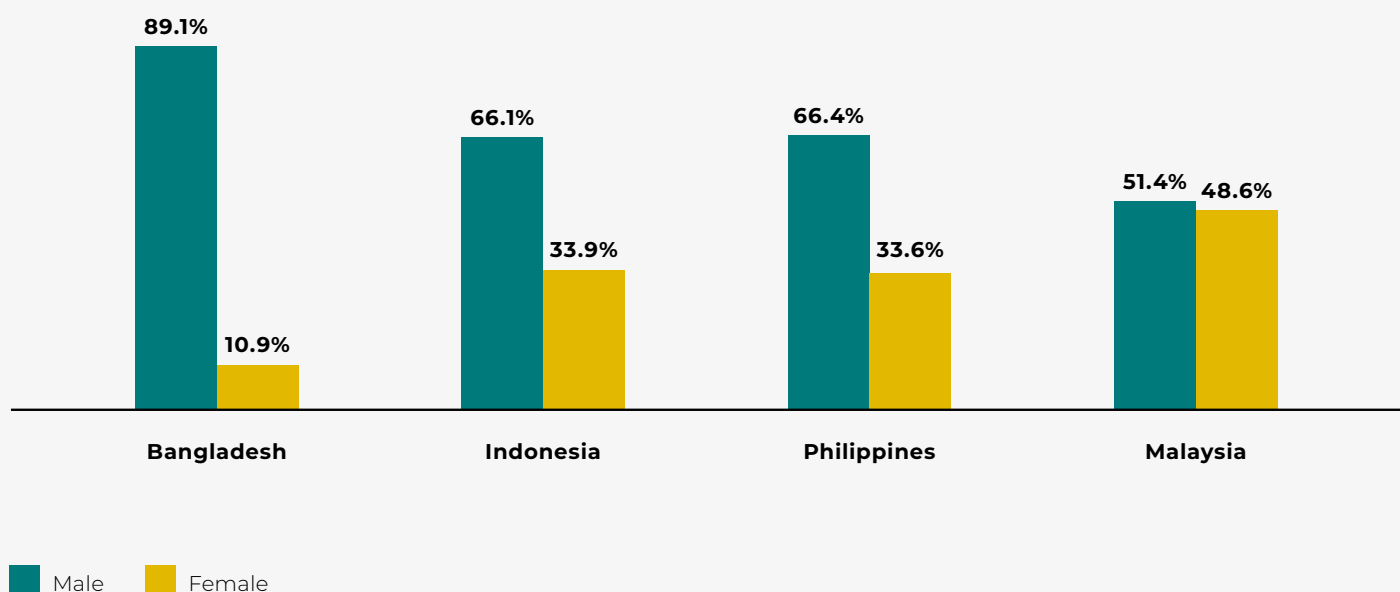
supporting violent extremism and enhance their engagement in prevention actions. Funding must also be allocated for PVE activities that address women’s specific needs or empower women (53(e)). Yet it is also vital that this funding does not reduce financial allocations for other women’s empowerment initiatives, particularly to grass-roots women’s organizations.

Innovative research on women’s roles in violent extremism

In 2018, Moonshot CVE generated the first gender-disaggregated study of support for violent extremism in the online space in Indonesia, Bangladesh, the Philippines and Malaysia. This project also aims to highlight any potential associations between rates of sexual and gender-based violence (GBV) and support for violent extremism across these countries.

The research found striking differences in the gender breakdown country by country, with almost half of Malaysian users being female. This has serious implications for how CVE programmes are planned and implemented, and highlights the crucial role that an understanding of gender dynamics play in effectively reducing extremism.

GENDER BREAKDOWN OF SEARCH ENGINE USERS ATTEMPTING TO ACCESS EXTREMIST CONTENT



Source: Moonshot CVE, Violent Extremism and Gender: An analysis of Jihadism online across Asia and the Pacific, preliminary results, 2018.

6. EDUCATION, SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYMENT FACILITATION (A/70/674, 54)

Access to education promotes the teaching of tolerance and critical thinking, which stems the likelihood of violent extremism arising. Similarly, skills development and access to decent work opportunities provide meaningful alternatives to engagement in terrorist activity. A NAP-PVE may task Ministries including those responsible for education, labour, and rural development with leading interventions to achieve these results. Ensuring that responsible Ministries develop programmes that women have access to, and can benefit from, is a precondition of their success.

In implementing education that promotes “global citizenship” and skills such as critical thinking 54(b), educational programmes must also promote gender equality as a core value of tolerant societies. Building the capacity of teachers to support this agenda requires integrating learnings on women’s empowerment in training institutions for educators.

Creating social and economic opportunities, in both rural and urban locations (54(d)) promotes development and meaningful livelihoods that provide an alternate source of economic security than engagement in violent extremism. Local labour markets must be assessed from a gender perspective to evaluate good entry points for the economic engagement of women that promotes their entrepreneurial talents.



Photo: UN Women/ Roni Bintang



Photo: UN Women/Snigdha Zaman

7. STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS, THE INTERNET AND SOCIAL MEDIA (A/70/674, 55)

Violent extremist groups utilize the Internet and social media to lure new recruits into their ranks. Terrorist organizations often use messages that promote gender stereotypes including particularly violent notions of masculinity in recruiting young men and women.

To counter these messages, campaigns must be disseminated by a variety of stakeholders, including activists and artists who are able to reach diverse audiences through music, art, film, comics and humour. In adopting strategic communications to spread these positive messages of peace, narratives must both feature women, and be tailored to women audiences.

NAPs-PVE can cooperate with social media companies and the private sector to challenge the narratives associated with violent extremism (55(a)) and support grass-roots efforts (55(c)) to advance the values of tolerance, pluralism and understanding through gender-sensitive media and communications.

Initiatives can include supporting public broadcasters to develop TV and radio on themes that promote women's empowerment to create peaceful societies and partnering with social media companies to support the dissemination of viral campaigns.

Countering terrorism through comedy

Mythos Labs works with comedians and social media influencers to counter the narratives of terrorist and violent extremist groups through humorous viral videos.

In South Asia, they partnered with East India Comedy, to create the video **I Want to Quit ISIS**. In less than one month, the video amassed more than 900,000 views on Facebook and YouTube.

Their latest productions – **Brainwash** and **Hi-Sis** – use satire to counter the messages used by terrorist organisations to recruit women to their cause. Targeted at audiences in South Asia and Southeast Asia, the comedic videos highlight the false promises of violent extremist groups that seek to recruit women, and promote the message that withholding support from these groups and promoting messages of peace is the empowered choice.

Strategic communications to promote gender equality and peace to young audiences

The Peabody award-winning “Burka Avenger” is Pakistan's first-ever animated superhero TV series. The protagonist of the show is Jiya, an inspirational school teacher whose alter ego is the superhero Burka Avenger, who fights for ‘Justice, Peace, and Education’ for all. The show has significantly boosted support for girls' education, women's empowerment, and tolerance in Afghanistan where it is watched by 85% of children in urban areas. It has recently been launched in Indonesia.



Photo: courtesy of Unicorn Black and Aaron Haroon.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING A GENDER SENSITIVE NATIONAL ACTION PLANⁱ

Effectively integrating a gender perspective in a NAP-PVE requires promoting the participation and leadership of women to design and implement counter terrorism and PVE strategies. This is a human right, which is indispensable to the operational effectiveness of prevention and response efforts. Excluding women from the processes where relevant policies are discussed and developed leads to gaps on how such policies affect their rights.

All forms of engagement must include a risk assessment, analyzing when, where, and how women's rights are impacted by both terrorism and counter-terrorism. Such an approach also reveals where the promotion of women's rights has been tied to national security goals in ways that undermine gender equality.

Integrating a gender perspective also requires engaging with men and boys, and contesting the construction of violent masculinities promoted by violent extremist groups.

It is also critical that a gender analysis does not conflate "women and youth" or "women and children/ girls" as a "vulnerable group". This has been the default in recent international frameworks and policies on countering terrorism and/ or violent extremism. A gender analysis requires moving beyond the mere lumping of perceived vulnerable groups. Women are not by definition "vulnerable", although many women face multiple or intersecting forms of discrimination based on their gender, age, class, race, ethnicity, religion and other status, while "youth" and "children" includes both girls and boys, and requires gender sensitive and specific programming and policy responses.

Programming design and development need to take into account sensitivities in terminology as well as relevant policies and legislation, while being grounded in agreed international frameworks including human rights law and the women, peace and security agenda.

Practical steps for the design and implementation of a gender-sensitive National Action Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism

Drafting process of the NAP-PVE

- Assign a dedicated gender advisor to the core drafting team;
- Ensure inclusive processes by conducting local and national level consultations with women civil society, including women religious leaders, women teachers, rural women, and young women; and ensure that women are equally represented in all consultations including those with the justice and security sectors;

Contents and implementation of the NAP-PVE

- Provide for gender-specific interventions under each of the 7 key areas for PVE action drawing from the good practice examples highlighted, and ensure that all other interventions are gender-sensitive;
- Governments should partner with NGOs to implement gender-responsive programme actions, recognizing their expertise in accessing diverse communities and building trust;

Coordination and financing

- Ministries and Departments responsible for implementing PVE activities under the NAP should receive capacity-building on the intersections of gender and PVE;
- NAPs-PVE should be costed and have predictable and sustainable financing for the delivery of interventions, which allocate funding gender-specific activities;
- NAPs-PVE should be aligned with existing national policies, including sectoral policies on education, justice, security, labour, migration, social welfare, arts and media, and gender including National Action Plans on the Advancement of Women, to ensure synergies between interventions. NAPs-PVE should also be aligned with international obligations including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Monitoring and evaluation of the NAP-PVE

- Ensure that indicators for NAP-PVE implementation include gender targets as to the number or proportion of women engaged and/or reached by interventions;
- Establish mechanisms within responsible Government departments to monitor sex disaggregation of PVE actions;
- Provide for review processes that enable the NAP-PVE to be flexible to emerging situations and changing dynamics of extremism, including the changing role of women's involvement in violent extremism and the need to adapt programmatic responses;
- Civil society, including women's organizations, should be supported to monitor the NAP-PVE to identify and share best practices and lessons learned and improve the efficacy of new strategies.

ⁱ This guidance note was produced by UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. Authors: Carla Silbert and Alison Davidian. Photos: UN Women/Stuart Mannion, Ryan Brown, Snigdha Zaman, Roni Bintang

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