GENDER AT THE NEXUS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS IN MUSLIM MINDANAO

UN WOMEN

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UN WOMEN
June 2020

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Ansurul Khilafah Philippines
ARMM	Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
ASG	Abu Sayyaf Group
BARMM	Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
BOL	Bangsamoro Organic Law
BTA	Bangsamoro Transition Authority
CAB	Comprehensive Agreement on Bangsamoro
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CTOC	United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime
ICT	Information and communication technology
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
NPA	New People's Army (of the Communist Party)
OFW	Overseas Filipino worker
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PAG	Private armed group
SALW	Small arms and light weapons
UN	United Nations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The linkages between organized crime, including trafficking in persons, and violent extremism are a global concern. These linkages are starting to receive some attention, but this is limited to specific conflict contexts such as Iraq and Syria. In recognition of the link between violent extremism and trafficking in persons and the gendered nature of both, the UN Security Council adopted its first resolution on trafficking in persons in areas affected by armed conflict in 2016 (UNSCR 2331). But overall, there is little understanding of the relationship between violent extremism and trafficking in persons, or of how gender informs this interaction.

This report will examine the gendered dimensions of the nexus of violent extremism and trafficking in persons in the context of the Philippines. In particular, it will focus on the ways in which the gendered context of violent extremism creates different vulnerabilities toward trafficking in persons. The links between violent extremism and trafficking in persons are particularly important to identify entry points for gender-specific interventions that can address both trafficking in persons and violent extremism, rather than reverting to siloed approaches.

The report builds on key informant interviews as well as existing research to unearth emerging trends and to specifically examine potential links between violent extremism and trafficking in persons, and the contribution of gender to each. At the same time, it examines how violent extremism and trafficking in persons have shaped the gender identities and gender relationships of affected populations.

Key findings

The presence of violent extremist groups in post-conflict Muslim Mindanao increases people's vulnerability to trafficking in persons due to uncertainties regarding the implementation of the peace process, weak or lacking governance, insecurity, poverty, and misogyny. Violent extremism can thrive in such an ecosystem and groups can recruit across age, gender, ethnicity, and class as people are susceptible to promises of financial rewards and improvement of life conditions. Indeed, the Philippine National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism clearly states that the volatile environment of Muslim Mindanao produces actors "whose coexistence and activities give rise to factors that make [communities] vulnerable to radicalization."[1] In this context of heightened vulnerabilities, violent extremism and trafficking in persons do not exist in a vacuum; factors rendering people vulnerable to trafficking in persons are amplified by violence associated with extremist groups.

Unless there is wider recognition of how violent extremism intersects with trafficking in persons, and the interplay of both with gender dynamics, the currently siloed approaches to address trafficking in persons and violent extremism will fail to change the ecosystem. This also means that individual perpetrators should not be the only or main concern in this context, as they can easily be replaced if the ecosystem stays intact and remains conducive to violent extremism and trafficking in persons. Three main connectors were identified for this study. They are inherently gendered and interconnected. They indicate a trend in Muslim Mindanao that speaks to the volatility of the peace process amid growing foreign influence that is, in turn, driving a change in the perception of self-determination of the Moro people.

1. Structural challenges

a. Viable economic opportunities and infrastructures are limited due to the protracted peace process and the ongoing insecurity, including *rido*, or clan feuds. As a result, frustration, coupled with

high levels of poverty, provide a fertile ground for recruitment of men and boys (and sometimes women and girls),[2] while women and girls are forced to seek employment, often falling victim to false promises of overseas work.[3] In the context of underage boys and girls, recruitment into an armed group is a violation of international law and a form of trafficking in persons.

b. Gender roles in extremist settings are complex. Women and girls undertake a variety of roles in violent extremism, not only as preventers but also as fighting actors. In the Philippines, women have been actively involved in suicide attacks as well as in the recruitment of women and men to extremist groups. During the Marawi siege in 2017, female snipers were fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) affiliated actors at the frontlines, and in recent years, militants in the Philippines have attempted to use female operatives to thwart security apparatuses. The multitude of roles played by women can be observed in cases of human trafficking as well. While women are overrepresented as the main victims of trafficking, Filipino traffickers increasingly include women as active recruiters.

c. Remittances and money transfers, including in the context of potentially trafficked overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), can also be redirected for terrorism financing. There is a gap in understanding the gendered dimensions of money transfers. For example, women are traditionally occupied as low-skilled or unskilled workers, thus sending smaller amounts of money.[4] These small-value transfers fall outside monitoring agencies but risk being used by violent extremists. At the same time, the retention of Christian last names of female converts also allows Muslim Filipinas to open bank accounts or to transfer funds without raising immediate suspicion.[5]

2. Foreign influence

a. The historical legacy of Filipino foreign fighters coupled with the exposure of OFWs and exchange students to more conservative religious interpretations of Islam might impact the traditionally open and moderate practice of Islam in Muslim Mindanao, especially in relation to women's human rights. Conservative Islam cannot be equated to violent extremism. But the lack of concrete data on foreign-funded and -staffed religious institutions, as well as the number of Philippine boys and girls studying in the Middle East, makes it difficult to understand the risk factors of radicalization, especially among youth. Conservative religious views may fuel anti-feminist rhetoric. The confinement of women to gender-stereotypical roles as expressed by subordination to their husbands and as caregivers to their families may attract women and girls even though such narratives curtail their rights. One explanation for this paradox may be the value that is placed on female chastity and purity, which gives women and girls a sense of identity that is otherwise challenged in the turmoil of the protracted peace process.

3. Changing narratives

a. Violent extremist groups have successfully tapped into the identity-based structure of *rido*, linking local grievances to religious fundamentalism. At the same time, violent extremist groups hinder the peace processes by fuelling antagonistic sentiments of splinter groups. Active involvement in violent extremist groups by women is reportedly limited to those from certain clans. But the prevalence of insecurity renders a majority of women and girls in the affected areas vulnerable to trafficking.

b. Violent extremist groups justify trafficking in persons in terms of their ideology. They may thus subject women and girls, especially non-Muslim women, to sexual exploitation and abuse, and forcibly convert women, men, boys, and girls to Islam. The high number of early marriages in the aftermath of the 2017 siege of Marawi City also indicates stronger adherence to particular interpretations of *sharia* law[6] as they pertain to child marriage in some communities. The culturally sanctioned practice of early marriage, with the consent by both spouses and their guardians, has allowed parents to marry off their daughters as a form of caretaking.[7]

1. INTRODUCTION

Globally, both violent extremism and trafficking in persons are considered major obstacles to achieving sustainable peace and security. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognize these challenges and emphasize the gendered nature of them in several of its targets: The need to address all forms of violence against women and children, which includes trafficking in persons, is covered under targets 5.2, 8.7, and 16.2, while target 16.A highlights the need to combat terrorism and other crime to protect people from violence and insecurity.

The SDGs acknowledge the link between trafficking in persons and the lack of peace and security, including terrorism. Recent attacks in the Philippines demonstrate a propensity for violence among some extremist groups. Such violence may contribute in turn to trafficking in persons and amplify vulnerabilities of already affected communities, although the impact and experiences are different for women, men, boys, and girls. Indeed, gender intersects with and compounds other factors (e.g. age, race, ethnicity, disability, or religion) that drive inequality, insecurity, and marginalization. Understanding the linkages between violent extremism and trafficking in persons while taking into consideration the specific experiences, vulnerabilities, and needs of women, men, boys, and girls is key to ensuring that trafficking in persons and violent extremism are no longer treated as separate issues.

This report will examine the gendered dimensions of the nexus of violent extremism and trafficking in persons in the context of the recent evolution and prevalence, respectively, of these factors in the Philippines. In particular, it will focus on the ways in which the gendered context of violent extremism creates different vulnerabilities to trafficking in persons. But it will also shed light on links between violent extremism and trafficking in persons. The latter is particularly important as it will help relevant stakeholders to identify entry points for gender-specific interventions that can address both trafficking in persons and violent extremism, rather than reverting to siloed approaches. As the research will demonstrate, several factors that underlie distinct vulnerabilities toward trafficking in persons also enable exposure to violent extremist ideologies.

A gender lens that takes into consideration distinct local features in the Philippines will support existing and new efforts to combat trafficking in persons and violent extremism, while simultaneously contributing to the implementation of the SDGs under the Philippines' commitments to eradicate all forms of violence against women and children, including trafficking in persons and the risks associated with violent extremism. Such a holistic and gender-sensitive approach requires an analysis of the different experiences, vulnerabilities and needs of women, men, boys, and girls. This report is a first step in that direction.

1.1 Gender in the context of trafficking in persons and violent extremism

Gender in the context of this report refers to the socially constructed characteristics, roles, and behaviours associated with being male (masculinities) and female (femininities); gender also dictates what is expected of and valued in women and men, respectively.[8] In most cases, what is considered feminine is socially less valued than what is considered masculine. These differences determine how power plays out between and within the sexes. Gender equally refers to those individuals who fall outside the binary of the male or female sex.[9] Notions of gender are taught through socialization processes, vary across populations and regions, and are subject to continuous change. If people do not adhere to gender norms, they are often subjected to stigma and discrimination such as unequal access to resources or decision-making processes, ostracization, or violence. Gender is an important aspect of identity-building and cannot be considered in

isolation from other identity markers such as age, class, caste, race, ethnicity, religion, or disability; this is commonly referred to as intersectionality.

Gender shapes the experiences of women, men, boys, and girls exposed to violent extremism and trafficking in persons. An intersectional approach to examining the relationship between violent extremism and trafficking in persons, in particular the impact of the former on the latter, not only broadens our understanding of the complexity of gender identities and relations in the contexts of violent extremism and trafficking in persons in the Philippines. It also allows for the development of strategic and targeted interventions and policies that have gender equality at their core.

International legal frameworks and policies governing trafficking in persons and violent extremism acknowledge the gendered nature of both. Given the high number of women and girls affected by trafficking in persons and their different roles in violent extremist groups, the Philippine government has incorporated many of the international standards into their national legislation and policies. For example, the 2019 Philippine National Action Plan (NAP) on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) addresses the particular role women can play in supporting P/CVE interventions while also highlighting the gender-specific vulnerabilities of violent extremism. Similarly, the 2003 Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (Republic Act 9208) acknowledges the distinct challenges and vulnerabilities of persons exposed to trafficking in persons in the Philippines, especially women and girls.

Trafficking in persons in the context of conflict and displacement has garnered much attention over the years and there is a substantial body of literature detailing the distinct experiences of women, men, boys, and girls in any given conflict. Several Security Council Resolutions have also recognized the intersection of violent extremism, terrorism and trafficking in persons and the gendered dynamics between and within each of them, albeit with different goals and intentions. For example, Security Council Resolution 2242 (2015) was the first to highlight the exploitation of women and girls through the use of sexual and gender-based violence as part of strategic objectives by violent extremist or terrorist groups in areas affected by armed

conflict. This resolution falls under the women, peace and security (WPS) regime, and is aimed at the greater integration of frameworks for counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism with the WPS agenda. In 2019, Security Council Resolution 2467, also falling under the WPS regime, went further by linking trafficking in persons perpetrated by terrorist groups with sexual violence in conflict.

Security Council Resolution 2242 called upon expert groups to designate, among others, terrorist groups engaged in sexual and gender-based violence in new or renewing sanctions. Security Council Resolution 2253 (2015), which added ISIL to the sanctions regime already in force against Al-Qaida, reiterated the concerns of Resolution 2242 but did not mention sexual and gender-based violence as a criterion. However, Resolution 2253 did highlight the concerns over terrorist groups or those associated with them benefiting from transnational organized crimes, including trafficking in persons. In 2016, 2018 and 2019, respectively, Security Council Resolutions 2331, 2388, and 2462 recognized the exploitative, gendered, and violent nature of trafficking in persons in conflict-affected areas. All three Resolutions also emphasized the link between transnational organized crime, including trafficking in persons, and terrorism financing. They further called upon the obligation of Member States to investigate these links under the sanctions regime concerning Al-Qaida and ISIL and their associates.

Despite these important documents, little is still known about the role of violent extremism in exacerbating trafficking in persons. This report will contribute to filling specific knowledge gaps in the gendered dimensions of the linkages between trafficking in persons and violent extremism.

1.2 Key definitions and legal frameworks

Policy makers, law enforcement and non-governmental organizations cannot work effectively without a shared understanding of violent extremism and trafficking in persons, and of how both relate to their jurisdiction and legal provisions. Divergence in understandings of violent extremism and trafficking in persons can inhibit cooperation and coordination between stakeholders. At the same time, it is critical to recognize that the experiences of women, men, boys,

and girls in the context of violent extremism and trafficking in persons can only be understood through a gender lens. After all, gender not only shapes individual experiences; it is equally shaped by institutions and systems structured around hierarchies of power (including ethnicity, class and age) that advantage one group at the expense of another. Put differently, gender contributes to power differentials[10] that, in the context of violent extremism and trafficking in persons, determine how and why women, men, boys, and girls are affected differently and what needs to be done to address their distinct needs accordingly. After all, the environment in the Philippines that is conducive to both trafficking in persons and violent extremism allows perpetrators to exist. Removing one or the other without changing the environment will only lead to a brief respite of either trafficking in persons or violent extremism.

Though both violent extremism and trafficking in persons are complex issues, particularly in the context of decades of insurgencies in the Philippines, the report will adhere to internationally established definitions, or, in the absence of such, adopt language that matches the definition of the United Nations.

1.2.1 Gender and violent extremism

There is no universal agreement on the definition of violent extremism, or on its pathways, trends, or patterns.[11] Violent extremism is also not a new phenomenon, though the scale, global spread, technologized modus operandi, and gendered nature have posed serious challenges to nation states, regional bodies, and the international community in recent years. Social media has played a particularly strong role in the radicalization and recruitment of individuals, especially youth. However, it is important to note that radicalization does not necessarily lead to committing terrorist acts or using violent means to achieve certain goals.[12]

While violent extremism may be conducive to terrorist acts, it is conceptually broader than terrorism and encapsulates different manifestations of ideologically motivated political violence;[13] violent extremism is therefore not limited to violence based on extremist religious ideology.[14] It is categorized and driven by push and pull factors which vary across gender, communities, regions, and from one individual to the next.[15]

Push factors may affect individuals or entire communities, especially those who have experienced or witnessed social, political, cultural, religious, economic, or ethnic marginalization or exclusion. Structural conditions can also attract communities or individuals to sympathize with groups which hold violent extremist views. These conditions can be entrenched conflict, a lack of or poor governance, corruption, gender inequality (including gender-based violence), imprisonment, persecution, human rights violations, or state-driven violence.

At the same time, violent extremist groups may employ strategies that exploit psychology by propagating ideologies that are conducive to, in the words of the UN General Assembly, "transforming ideas and grievances into violent extremist action."[16] These pull factors are calculated attempts to manipulate people's sense of alienation or search for identity that appeal equally to women and men.[17] They range from exploiting or corrupting people's religious, societal, or political views, to appealing to people's personal aspirations and motivations through promises of social, political, or material gain.[18]

For women and girls, affiliation to a cause they understand as just and liberating often translates into a perceived sense of empowerment. The means by which they reach empowerment, however, differ from group to group. For example, right-wing groups often appeal to women through anti-feminist rhetoric that propagates proper womanhood,[19] while leftist groups have often utilized feminist narratives of women's oppression to justify the use of force.[20]

The presence of women and the targeted recruitment of women and girls demonstrate that violent extremists are not just men, although media coverage gives the impression that violent extremism is predominantly a male issue. On the contrary, women, men, boys, and girls each play different roles and fulfil the distinct responsibilities necessary to maintain a violent extremist group. ISIL is a good example where women are actively supporting the group in myriad ways, even if their involvement often curtails their own freedom and agency.

Indeed, recent research on gendered drivers of violent extremism (including in the Philippines) indicates that gender-regressive ideologies of

conservative fundamentalist groups were shared even among women supporters.[21] It is not completely clear how women's support of violence against women or their sexist views link to women's endorsement of violent extremist attitudes. One possible explanation is that women and girls are drawn to the narratives of the value of female chastity which, if not properly observed, may lead to threats of gender-based violence.[22] Whatever the case, women's contribution to violent extremism spans a wide spectrum of activities that does not confine them to the two roles of victims or perpetrators of violence.[23]

Though the factors mentioned in Figure 1 above appeal to individuals and communities alike, radicalization toward violent action is generally limited to individuals. It is important to note here, however, that radicalization does not necessarily lead to committing terrorist acts or using violent means to achieve certain goals.

In a nutshell, violent extremists are recruited among males and females who hold a set of extreme and radical beliefs in an environment where structural conditions are conducive to violence.[25] These beliefs and attitudes may not necessarily reflect reality; rather they may be representations of a subjective understanding of the socio-economic and political conditions of a given culture, country, region, or society.[26] Violent extremists are not a monolithic group of individuals. These individuals may have education or no education at all, follow different religious belief systems, range across age, gender, and socio-economic as well as political status, and have different geographical backgrounds.[27]

Understanding the gendered nature of the dynamics that underpins recruitment and support, and recognizing the localized structure in which violent extremist groups thrive, are crucial in creating preventative interventions that are effective. A thorough analysis, particularly of the roles women and girls play in violent extremist groups, can help build early-warning systems in situations where the increase of misogynistic attitudes and cases of violence against women indicate risks of violent extremism. At the same time, a comprehensive gender analysis helps to understand how women's agency can be redirected from supporting violent extremism to countering and

FIGURE 1

Factors driving violent extremism[24]
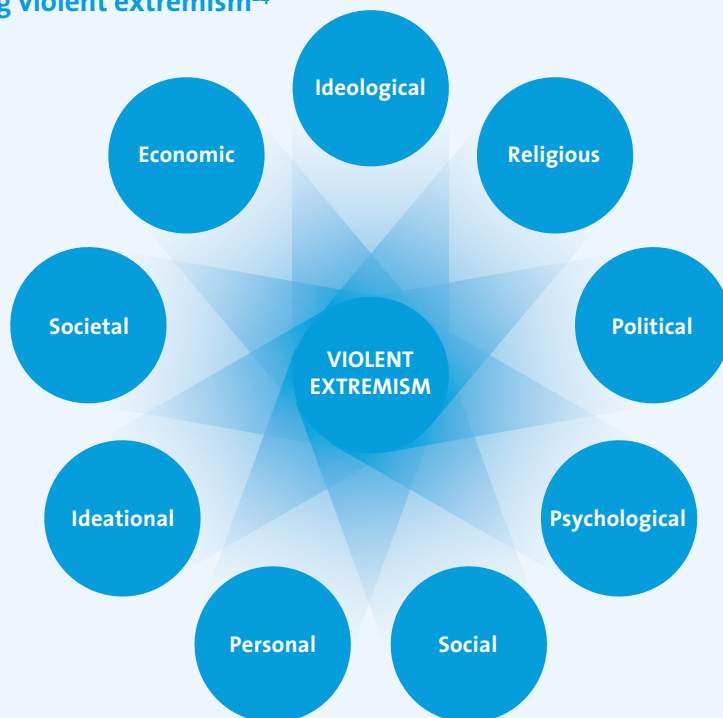
preventing it, especially in cases where women join voluntarily. Because, even if they engage with violent extremist groups in narrowly defined roles that relegate them to gender-stereotypical duties, women's involvement nonetheless speaks to the level of agency women perceive for themselves. In other words, efforts to prevent violent extremism can only be effective if there is recognition of both the gendered ecosystem in which violent extremism evolves and operates, and the roles of women and girls as meaningful and active participants.

1.2.2 Gender and trafficking in persons

Several documents provide the framework to combat trafficking in persons and highlight the special needs and vulnerabilities of women and children, especially as they pertain to sexual exploitation. Chief among them are two protocols that supplement the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (CTOC): the 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, (hereinafter referred to as the Palermo Protocol) and the 2000 Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air. The Philippines have ratified both. The Philippines have systematically collected data on trafficking victims since 2001, one of the first countries in the region to do so.[28] A wide range of actors and constant efforts to identify and assist victims have continuously placed the Philippines in Tier 1 of the US Department of State's annual ranking of countries complying with international standards to combat trafficking in persons. Tier 1 indicates a top-performing state, while Tier 3 indicates states in which people are especially vulnerable to trafficking in persons. Countries in the middle are in Tier 2. Those that move up go into Tier 1. Those that face a downgrade go first into the Tier 2 Watch List: Placing on that Watch List for two consecutive years means relegation to Tier 3 unless waived by the President of the United States.[29]

The Palermo Protocol was the first legal instrument to establish a binding definition of trafficking in persons (Article 3) while also highlighting the need for gender-sensitive approaches toward tackling the issue (Article 6, paragraph 4):

> Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.[30]

> Each State Party shall take into account, in applying the provisions of this article, the age, gender and special needs of victims of trafficking in persons.[31]

The definition also distinguishes *smuggling* from *trafficking*, whereby a person who was first smuggled but then forced to work is overall considered as having been trafficked. Thus, a person does not necessarily have to be forced or coerced to constitute a trafficking case; that person may not have had any option other than to comply. Given the complexity of trafficking in persons, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) has developed a list, though not exhaustive, of indicators to identify victims of trafficking in persons.[32]

At its core, the Palermo Protocol obliges signatories to develop and implement domestic legislation for law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute trafficking in persons (Article 5) through a child- and gender-sensitive approach, while also calling upon State parties to address the transnational nature of the crime (Article 4) through collaboration and cooperation. Equally important are the provisions for signatories to develop comprehensive frameworks to assist victims of trafficking in persons (Article 6) that are gender-sensitive and inclusive (Article 6, paragraph 4).

Regional bodies such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have incorporated these standards, including the application of a gender-sensitive approach, into their respective policies and regulations.[33] These include the 1997 ASEAN Declaration on Transnational Crime and its concomitant Action Plan to Combat Transnational Crime (1999) as well as the 2004 ASEAN Declaration against Trafficking in Persons, Particularly Women and Children, which was enforced by a resolution in 2005 and later expanded to the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (2015) and its concomitant Action Plan.[34]

Moving beyond the need to recognize the distinct vulnerabilities and needs of women and girls, the United States' Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report has, in the past few years, begun to account for the risk of trafficking for members of the LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex) communities in many countries, especially transgender persons. Though their numbers are unknown, the highlighting of this vulnerable group indicates a strong shift to a broader conceptualization of gender in the context of trafficking in persons. It may also indicate attempts at making data collection for the purpose of protection and prevention more inclusive.

This is an important evolution in the way of looking at the gender dynamics of trafficking in persons, because gender determines both the risk of being trafficked and the sectors into which people are trafficked. For example, according to the UNODC's 2018 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, identified male victims were overwhelming trafficked for forced labour (82 percent) while detected women were predominantly trafficked for sexual exploitation (83 percent).[35] Women and girls constituted the majority of detected trafficking victims at 70 percent.[36] Under-reporting by victims as well as a lack of detection capacities by authorities and other agents make it difficult to ascertain why men and boys are less affected by trafficking in persons than women and girls.

At the same time, the rise of violent extremism in recent years has increased vulnerabilities of at-risk persons, especially where trafficking in persons has become a tool of violent extremist groups to suppress and control populations under its command. Such trafficking can involve forced marriages, forced labour, or the forced recruitment of women, men, boys, and girls as fighters. In fact, stories from regions under ISIL's control reveal the magnitude of the strategic trafficking of persons for gender-specific reasons.[37] These include, for example, the luring of underage girls from Europe to be *jihadi* brides, and the enslavement of thousands of Yazidi women[38] and other non-Muslim women,[39] which constitute crimes under the frameworks that govern trafficking in persons. The forced recruitment (for labour or fighting) and the forced conversion of women, men, boys, and girls to Islam equally constitute trafficking in persons.[40]

In this context, trafficking in persons and violent extremism converged in an ecosystem where lack of governance and other safeguards in addition to an exploitative system created by ISIL enabled the group to exploit the vulnerabilities of the populations under its control. Violent extremist groups not only manipulated notions of gender strategically to abuse women, men, boys and girls, but also used power systems that intersect with gender, namely ethnicity, age and, religion. This highlights that violent extremist groups like ISIL understand and thereby exploit the fact that gender is a fluid concept[41] that adapts to the changing nature of social environments. Under these circumstances, conflict, including violent extremism, may be beneficial to certain groups and communities when gender hierarchies are broken up or softened, although the same scenario may also be harmful to other groups and communities. Policies and laws need to take this into consideration to tackle emerging trends in trafficking in persons. More to the point, the development of interventions requires a deep analysis of the specific local drivers that underpin gender relationships in the context of trafficking in persons.

1.3 Methodology

The linkages between organized crime (including trafficking in persons) and violent extremist groups and the risks associated with radicalization are a global concern. As mentioned above, there is a nascent awareness of how trafficking in persons and violent extremism intersect, though it is limited to specific conflict contexts such as Iraq and Syria. And, while gender mainstreaming has become more prevalent in work streams around trafficking in persons and violent extremism in recent years, the two continue to be tackled in isolation. As a result, there is little understanding of the relationship between violent extremism and trafficking in persons and how gender informs this interaction.

The growing body of literature on violent extremism and trafficking in persons in the Philippines continues to treat these two issues as separate phenomena. In addition, the gendered nature has been established for trafficking in persons but continues to be mostly neglected in research on violent extremism, beyond addressing women's victimhood. This is problematic as anecdotal evidence suggests that women played an active role leading

up to the Marawi City siege as well as transferring funds from the Philippines to offshore accounts elsewhere. These issues are further compounded by the socio-political complexity in the southern Philippines, especially the Sulu archipelago where extremist, armed, and transnational organized criminal groups often overlap with the intricate clan structure. As a result, local, political power dynamics of some clans intersect with organized crime and political violence. This hampers development while also rendering people vulnerable to radicalization or trafficking in persons. Given the complexity of trafficking in persons and the rise of violent extremism in recent years in the Philippines, the report builds on existing research on the gendered dynamics of violent extremism and trafficking in persons while also using key informant interviews to unearth emerging trends and to specifically examine potential links between violent extremism and trafficking in persons. The evolution of violent extremism and the pervasiveness of trafficking in persons are investigated to determine how notions of gender, among other factors, have contributed to the rise in violent extremism and the prevalence of trafficking i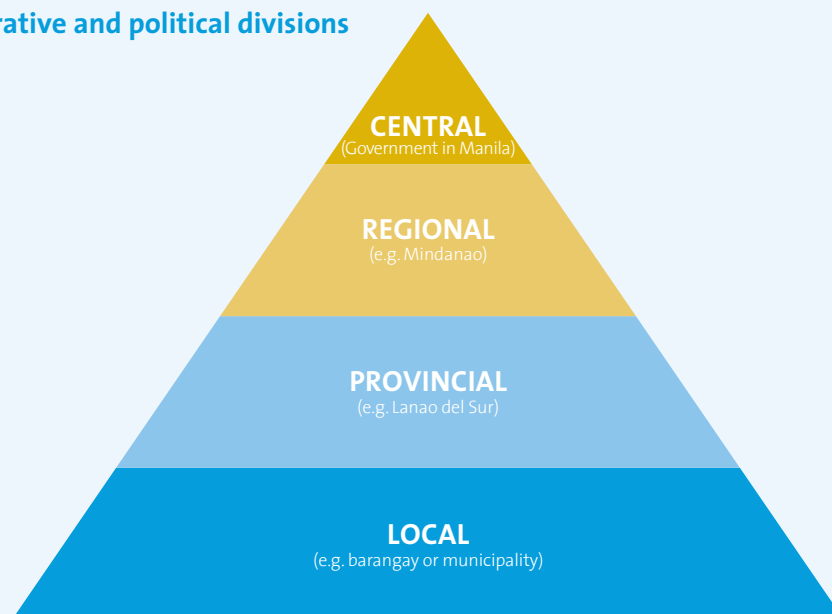n persons. At the same time, a retrospective approach allows for the examination of the ways in which the presence of violent extremism and trafficking in persons have shaped gender identities and gender relationships of affected populations.

1.3.1 Research questions and framework

This research is qualitative in nature and based on several consultations conducted in the Philippines in October 2019, in addition to a comprehensive literature review. The main geographical focus of the research was Mindanao generally, and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (BARMM)[i] in particular. Some data was collected from Davao City, which is also in Mindanao but outside the BARMM. This was partly to ensure a wider range of consulted stakeholders, and partly because some stakeholders from the BARMM were located there.

More than 30 men and women from government agencies, non-governmental organizations and international organizations were interviewed in Manila and across Mindanao, including Davao City. This select group of stakeholders was initially identified through local teams of the UN Women office in Manila and

FIGURE 2
Administrative and political divisions

CENTRAL
(Government in Manila)

REGIONAL
(e.g. Mindanao)

PROVINCIAL
(e.g. Lanao del Sur)

LOCAL
(e.g. barangay or municipality)

i   The BARMM consists of the five core provinces of the former Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao: Basilan (except Isabela City), Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, Sulu, and Tawi-Tawi. The 2019 plebiscite to vote on the Bangsamoro Organic Law led to the inclusion of Cotabato City and 63 barangays of North Cotabato to the BARMM.

expanded during in-country field work. The participants were asked questions as follows:

1. The research aims at examining the gendered dynamics at play in the context of trafficking in persons and violent extremism; this also includes a look back on trafficking in persons in the southern Philippines and the evolution of violent extremism in the context of armed violence.

   a. How did the conflict environment prior to the signing of the peace agreement provide a fertile ground for trafficking in persons, and how have changing conditions on the ground impacted the gendered nature of trafficking in persons? What has changed since the signing of the peace agreement?

   b. What are gender-specific aspects of vulnerability in the southern Philippines and how does the continuous insecurity in this area compound these vulnerabilities? What role does violent extremism play under these circumstances and how does it impact women, men, boys, and girls?

   c. How is trafficking in persons linked to violent extremism and how does gender interact between the two?

For the purpose of this study, the different administrative levels will be referenced as displayed in Figure 3. As such, local issues will concern people in the smallest administrative unit, known as *barangay*. Provincial level will be based on provinces, and the term "regional" will pertain to the 17 regions that make up the Philippine islands. Central will refer to the central Government of the Philippines in Manila and sits on top of the pyramid.

The report is structured around the key issues of violent extremism and trafficking in persons, and how gender dynamics inform the interaction between the two. Given the complexity of those issues, the first two major parts of this report will describe each of them separately. The section on trafficking in persons will also look at the issue in the context of internal displacement. Including displacement in this section is not to deny its connection to violent extremism. Rather, the separate treatment is to

build an initial bridge that connects violent extremism to trafficking in persons, and which will further be discussed in the third part of this report. The final and concluding section will look ahead to the opportunities but also the challenges. This section will be informed by current developments and observations as well as existing programmes dealing with these two issues in Muslim Mindanao.

1.3.2 Limitations

Qualitative research of such complex topics naturally does not lend itself to generalizations of the experiences of all women, men, boys, and girls. However, qualitative research allows for more nuanced approaches to complex topics, especially where it pertains to understanding gender dynamics of trafficking in persons and violent extremism. This report, thus, can complement existing research and address issues that quantitative research, for example, may not be able to explain entirely.

Although their experiences would have provided valuable insights, neither trafficking survivors, former members of violent extremist groups, nor people exposed to violent extremism, especially residents of Marawi City, were interviewed for this study, due to security concerns as well as reasons of confidentiality and potential risks of re-victimization.

Gender identities

The report will apply a gender lens along the binary of biological differences. Though other genders are certainly present in the Philippines and are impacted by trafficking in persons and possibly violent extremism, neither the scope of the project nor the geographical focus of the report gave space for inclusion in this study. However, the report acknowledges that gender identities go beyond the biological binary of male and female.

Research questions not covered in this review

The research initially also aimed to examine the main actors and networks involved in trafficking in persons, specifically those linked to transnational organized crime, in addition to the linkages between trafficking in persons and violent extremist groups. The former line of investigation was dropped during the field work due to scope of the research, time,

and sensitivities around these potentially danger-ous topics, in addition to aspects of under-reporting. However, where possible as part of consultations, the report will address traffickers and the role women play in trafficking in persons.

Profiles of victims not entirely addressed in this review

Given the short time allocated for field work, a thorough analysis of trafficking victims and sur-vivors of violent extremists was not feasible. For the same reason, the research was unable to delve deeper into aspects that render women and girls particularly vulnerable to trafficking in persons. Some reasons for the disproportionate vulner-ability of women and girls were given by several interviewees, but it remains not quite completely clear why men and boys are seemingly less affect-ed. One explanation could be that the gendered dimensions of vulnerability are not clearly under-stood by law enforcement agencies, which may reduce detection capacity. Another explanation could have to do with a higher demand for females by trafficking endpoints.

2. VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS IN MUSLIM MINDANAO

The volatile setting of post-conflict Muslim Mindanao is conducive to both trafficking in persons and violent extremism. Historical grievances over self-determination and economic neglect compound emerging frustrations over the slow pace of the implementation of the peace agreement. Violent extremist groups have been able to exploit this situation by creating narratives that encourage people to abandon the path of peace. The same conditions that fuel violence also render people vulnerable to trafficking in persons, as a shortage of economic opportunities and insecurity provide ill-intentioned traffickers with a steady supply of victims.

The root causes and drivers for both violent extremism and trafficking in persons are inherently gendered as those two phenomena create different risks and vulnerabilities for women, men, boys, and girls. For example, displaced women are particularly vulnerable to trafficking in persons. Since men and boys are often confined to camps for fear of forced recruitment or arrest, women and girls often become the breadwinners for their families and leave camps in search for food or work. They may fall victim to traffickers posing as recruiters in the hope of finding income-generating opportunities to support their families. At the same time, children in displacement camps or temporary shelters may be left without primary care by their parents and can fall victim to recruitment into armed or extremist groups. Financial incentives by extremist groups, in this context, appears to be especially appealing to men and boys. Finally, the mechanisms by which traffickers lure women and girls also apply to non-displaced persons in Muslim Mindanao. Given the tradition of overseas work, women and girls are easily duped into exploitative activities.

The following sections are an attempt to shed some light on the complexity of violent extremism and trafficking in persons in the Philippines. They are based on themes derived from the interviews in the Philippines and substantiated by consulting existing literature on the issue. The sections are not an an exhaustive analysis but an attempt at summarizing and explaining certain patterns and emerging trends.

2.1 Conflict dynamics and the evolution of violent extremism

Several factors may explain the rise of violent extremism in the Philippines. It is difficult to pinpoint the date of the rise due to the impact of decades of armed insurgencies in Muslim Mindanao coupled with the rampant proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) as well as the existence of thousands of unregistered *madaris*[ii], some of which may have facilitated violent extremist thought. Arguably, the 2017 siege of Marawi City was a decisive break from the historical dynamics of armed struggle for self-determination in Muslim Mindanao because of the way ISIL, a foreign group, exploited local grievances not only by providing a foreign ideological justification for violence but also by actively bringing in foreign fighters.

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ii   *Madaris* is the plural form of madrasa, or Muslim school.

Of particular concern is the role of women in the emergence of violent extremism. However, there is a long history of women's engagement in armed conflict in the region. Both the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) had women among their ranks,[42] who supported the groups in combatant and non-combatant capacities. Their presence in both groups was driven by a determination to fight for the Bangsamoro identity. In many cases, demobilized women members (combatants and non-combatants) also pursued activities for the cause through non-violent means; their former membership in either the MNLF or MILF reportedly gave them valid credentials among community members.[43] Thus, women's support for violent causes is not new in the Philippines.

On a global scale, women's role in terrorism is also not a new phenomenon.[44] However, trends in recent years suggest a noticeable escalation both in activities and numbers. It should be noted in this context that there is often a fine line between voluntary and involuntary recruitment.[45] Social media, under these circumstances, has played a key role in attracting women and girls. UN Women-commissioned research in four Asian countries (including the Philippines) in 2018 indicated that women do actively search the internet for content related to terrorism and violent extremism, but they tend to keep both their support and interest hidden from the public more than men and boys.[46] The research also revealed the gender-specific targeting mechanisms that terrorist and extremist groups employ. The strategic manipulation of gender stereotypes around femininities and masculinities often correlate with existing norms that ostensibly empower women, but that in fact relegate women to subordinate roles within patriarchal societies and communities.[47]

As early as 2014, Security Council Resolution 2178 highlighted the United Nation's concern regarding the "mother narrative" as an effective tool not only to attract women but to ensure women radicalize their entire family to the cause. In the Philippines, this is best exemplified by the mother of the Maute family where identity-based conflicts were instrumentalized to forge alliances that strengthened their base and widened their reach.[48] According to most interviewees, enforced recruitment of women and girls was a prominent activity leading up to the siege of Marawi City. By successfully combining

Historical grievances

Armed conflict and resistance in Muslim Mindanao go as far back as the 15 th Century. Since the founding of the Sulu Sultanate in 1457, the Moro people of the predominantly Muslim regions of the Mindanao islands group – Basilan, Lanao del Sur, Sulu, Tawi-Tawi, and Zamboanga – have been resisting foreign rule (by Spanish and American colonial forces) and control (by the central government) to preserve their customs, identity, and religion. Self-determination was a prominent goal, The issues of the Moro in Mindanao were political and cultural as well as economic. The lack of infrastructure and development coupled with socio-political marginalization sparked dissatisfaction in Muslim Mindanao, which culminated in civil unrest and the beginning of the main non-state armed actors: the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). At the time of writing, both have reached peace agreements with the central government.

religious virtues with identity-based frustration regarding the perceived slow implementation of the peace process, ISIL was able to tap into local grievances to spread their radical ideology.

In fact, one can trace an arc from the different stages of peace negotiations to the proliferation of splinter groups who defected from the main armed groups over frustrations regarding the outcomes of the peace negotiations and thus used violence to advance their respective political agendas. These frustrations are quite tangible in Muslim Mindanao. Neither the MNLF nor the MILF were able to achieve their initial goals of acquiring independence for Muslim Mindanao. Instead, both eventually opted for autonomy, as a military resolution of the decade-long conflict was unattainable for the groups as well as the Philippine Armed Forces.

The peace process with the MILF was ground-breaking in that it became the first high-level negotiation that included a woman signatory. In 2010, Miriam Coronel-Ferrer was appointed by then President Benigno

Aquino III to become the first woman chief negotiator to the negotiating panel with the MILF, whose staff had been all-men until 2012.[49] She later also became the first chief negotiator to sign a peace agreement.

Commitments to women's inclusion began earlier, however, when the Office of the Presidential Adviser on the Peace Process in 2003 was headed by a woman: Teresita Quintos Deles. Women's meaningful participation was further anchored in the 2012 Framework Agreement on the Bangsamoro, and their participation increased significantly by the time the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsmoro (CAB) was reached in 2014,[50] reaching parity with male negotiators and constituting 25 percent of all signatories.[51] As a result of women's continued engagement, the peace agreement recognized women's role in peace and security and included gender-sensitive language.

As of early 2020, the martial law imposed in 2017 in response to the Marawi City incident has been lifted and the implementation of the CAB is moving forward. However, several armed actors in Muslim Mindanao are still actively challenging the central government in Manila. As outlined in Figure 4, all of these groups are splinter groups of the MNLF and MILF that formed over frustrations with the peace negotiations. Proclaiming themselves true representatives of Moro concerns, these groups are able to draw recruits among disenfranchised people of different ages and socio-economic backgrounds.

Though the scale of violence is nowhere near the levels of previous years, the Marawi City incident indicates that the peace processes with two other major non-state armed groups, the MNLF and the MILF, are volatile at best. The propensity of these small groups to seek political goals by extremely violent means also indicates that the main drivers and root causes that fuelled the conflict for self-determination are still not fully addressed. Incentives for recruitment as well as the risk of displacement rendering people vulnerable to exploitation (including trafficking in persons) in such a context thus remain plentiful and attractive.

FIGURE 3

Profiles of non-state armed actors in Muslim Mindanao

AKP	Established in 2014 and mostly active in Sultan Kudarat; the group is said to have established the first ISIS camp in the Philippines. Origins of the group are reportedly criminal in nature until one of their leaders are radicalized in prison which led the group to pledge allegiance to ISIS.
ASG	Established in 1989 by Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani who was a former MNLF member and Afghan War veteran; after his death, his brother Khadaffy Janjalani would lead the group until he was killed in 2006. The group fell apart and developed into two main factions which became deeply involved in criminal activities, most notably kidnapping for ransom. One of the factions would later be led by Isnilon Hapilon and become involved in the Marawi City siege after he pledged allegiance to ISIS. The ASG is a designated terrorist group and known for its kidnapping operations in the Sulu Sea. In its early days, the ASG received financial and logistical support through the global network of al-Qaida. Since Hapilon's death in Marawi, the ASG has become more decentralized and continues to operate across the Sulu archipelago.
BIFF	Break-away faction from the MILF that was established in 2008 by Ameril Umbra Kato. After Kato's death, who was allegedly a well-respected former MILF commander, the BIFF split into three factions. While one faction would pledge allegiance to ISIS (see Turaifi group), the other two reportedly issued fatwas against ISIS.
MILF	Founded in 1977 in response to the peace agreement between the MNLF (see below) and the central government; former MNLF member Salamat Hashim considered MNLF to moderate and blamed the group for settling for autonomy rather than independence. Hostilities between the MILF and the Philippine Armed Forces continued despite a brief ceasefire in 1997. During the presidency of Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, the MILF resumed peace talks though violence continued in Maguindanao and elsewhere in Muslim Mindanao. There have been alleged ties between the MILF and al-Qaida, though the group has denied it. Similarly, the MILF has denounced terrorist acts committed by the ASG and ISIS, though anecdotal evidence suggests there are ties among these groups at the local level due to clan and family structures. In 2012, the MILF agreed to autonomy and they subsequently signed a peace deal in 2014. After several delays and setbacks, the autonomous region was signed into law by President Rodrigo Duterte. The 2019 plebiscite established the locality of the future autonomous region (the BARMM).
MNLF	Founded in late 1960s by Nur Misuari who later went into exile (until 1986) under the Marcos regime. The main goal of the MNLF was to achieve independence for the predominately Muslim communities in Mindanao, though it later conceded to the central government and settled for autonomy which caused several members to leave the MNLF and form the MILF. Libya's leader Muammar Gaddafi brokered a peace deal between the MNLF and the central government in 1976 which eventually led to the establishment of the ARMM in 1990. The ARMM has been replaced by the BARMM in 2019 due to a peace agreement signed by the MILF and the central government. Animosities between the MNLF and MILF have risen over time, partly due to Misuari's arrest in Malaysia in 2001. His deportation to the Philippines as well as Malaysia's support for the peace process under President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo have soured relations between the MNLF and MILF to this day. Ethnic tensions (Tausugs versus Maguindanaoans) are reportedly also amplifying tensions.
Turaifi group	Break-away faction from the BIFF, led by former BIFF leader Abu Turaifi. Under his lead, foreign fighters from Indonesia are said to have come to the Philippines.

2.2 Trafficking in persons in the context of Muslim Mindanao post-peace agreement

There are no exact numbers on the frequency and volume of Philippine women, men, boys and girls being trafficked. Estimates of the Global Slavery Index put the number of people living in modern slavery-like conditions in the Philippines at close to 800,000,[52] although this number does not give an accurate indication of the number of trafficked persons. It is also not known how many of the approximately 10 million Filipinos and Filipinas[53] who work or live overseas are directly affected by trafficking in persons. What is clear, however, is the ongoing feminization of migration and its links to trafficking in persons in Muslim Mindanao.[54] Indeed, in 2018 the number of female overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) from Muslim Mindanao was significantly higher at 2,900 than that of their male counterparts at 1,200.[55]

One of the indicators used by the Global Slavery Index to determine vulnerability to trafficking in persons is conflict. Among the states of the region, the Philippines's risk toward vulnerability due to conflict scores quite high at almost 70 percent.[56] Links that connect migration and trafficking in persons to large-scale displacement are well established.[57] In 2019 the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) listed the Philippines as the highest-ranking country of the Asia-Pacific region for internal displacement. Of the almost 4 million persons displaced in 2018, most were displaced by natural disasters,[58] but close to 200,000 were displaced by armed conflict in Central and Western Mindanao.[59]

To this day, approximately 66,000 people from Marawi City are still in evacuation centres or temporary shelters (down from an initial 369,921 internally displaced persons[60]).[61] Close to 15,000 people[62] have been displaced due to violence in the square area made up of the municipalities of Salibu, Pagatin, Mamasapano and Shariff Aguak, known as the SPMS Box, and 11,000 men, women, boys, and girls were displaced in Sulu in January 2019.[63] Such environments are conducive to forced recruitment by violent extremist groups as reported during the Marawi City siege, where men

and women were reportedly forced to fight,[64] and women and girls enslaved to provide sexual services to fighters.[65] At the time of writing, only one person has been convicted for crimes against humanity,[66] including sexual violence against a captured female minor. Other affidavits from women hostages during the siege, according to one interviewee, were only used to substantiate court cases of rebellion.

The reasons for migration and concomitantly the risk of trafficking in persons - often associated with destination countries not providing efficient, if any, protection for overseas workers[67] - are as manifold as the ways by which people move. High levels of poverty and conflict featured strongest among factors mentioned by people interviewed for this report.[iii] These two drivers are inherently gendered and interconnected. For example, the majority of female OFWs come from Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao[68] which feature both high incidences of poverty[69] and violence associated with extremist groups (more details in chapter 3).

Trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation has not been mentioned as a prevalent issue in Muslim Mindanao, but several interviewees stated that the culturally sanctioned practice of early marriage in many cases should be considered a form of trafficking in persons as the nature of consent of young girls may be questionable. The Philippine Code of Muslim Personal Laws (1974), unlike the Family Code of the Philippines (1987) where legal age of marriage is set at 18 years and older, allows the marriage of males and females as early as age 15, though if puberty begins sooner, girls as young as 12 are allowed to enter marriage if properly solemnized,[70] meaning free consent has been given by both spouses or through a guardian.[71] The use of a guardian, in particular, leaves room for interpretation regarding consent in both the *shariah* law and the Philippine Code of Muslim Personal Laws, and, arguably, means that early marriages may include elements of trafficking in persons, such as coercion or deceit. Regardless of the ambiguity around the issue of consent, the common practice of child marriage made it possible to wed girls off during and in the aftermath of the Marawi City siege as a way to ostensibly safeguard young girls against the economic and financial losses suffered from the five-month battle. [72]

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iii   Several interviewees also mentioned *rido* though the numbers, in comparison to poverty and conflict, are smaller.

According to one expert on the issue, only 2 percent of female trafficking victims in Muslim Mindanao are adults at the time of migration and/or trafficking. Anecdotal evidence suggests that families from Maguindanao use Butuan City in Agusan del Norte, General Santos City in Sarangani, and Pagadian City in Zamboanga del Sur to forge birth certificates saying girls are 18 or older in order to obtain travel documents. Cotabato City is not used because of the alleged tightening of control of relevant government authorities. Since conditions are said to have improved also at ports of exit, e.g. airports, the preferred routes for out-migration are mostly maritime: Young girls take internal flights from Zamboanga City to Tawi-Tawi, where their journey continues by boat to Sabah in Malaysia. In a few cases, journeys begin by boat also from Zamboanga City. The Middle East is a preferred region of destination for OFWs from Muslim Mindanao because of religious affinities.[73]

There is a fine line in migration between voluntary movement (labour migration) and involuntary movement (trafficking in persons). Coercion during voluntary migration constitutes trafficking in persons according to the Palermo Protocol, and lending assistance to the forging of government documents for exit from the Philippines is an act of promoting trafficking in persons under Republic Act 9208. However, the implementation of such legal definitions in terms of launching investigations remains challenging. Indeed, responses from law enforcement indicated that the underlying opinions on the vulnerability of economically deprived communities toward trafficking in persons was to characterize it as "business as usual." Expressions such as "they're so poor, they leave to work overseas," though partially true, simplify the problem and also gloss over the structural challenges of the BARMM. Moreover, this attitude impedes the development of proper screening tools to identify trafficking victims from labour migrants.

Despite these daunting numbers and the complexity of the situation, the Philippines' legal architecture governing labour migration and trafficking in persons complies with many standards set forth in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).[74] The state has also been awarded Tier 1 for four consecutive years (2016-2019) by the United States Department of State's annual Trafficking in Persons Report as meeting the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking in persons set forth in the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act].[75]

2.3 Emerging trends in violent extremism and trafficking in persons

Until official elections in May of 2022, the BARMM will be led by the Bangsamoro Transition Authority (BTA), mostly of former MILF fighters. Though the two major peace processes and the current martial law across the BARMM have brought relative security to the region, Muslim Mindanao continues to remain behind; poverty rates in Western Mindanao, including

FIGURE 5

Conflict context and dynamics in Muslim Mindanao

RELIGION

Self-determination

BTA

Conflict

RIDO

Post-conflict

Economic neglect
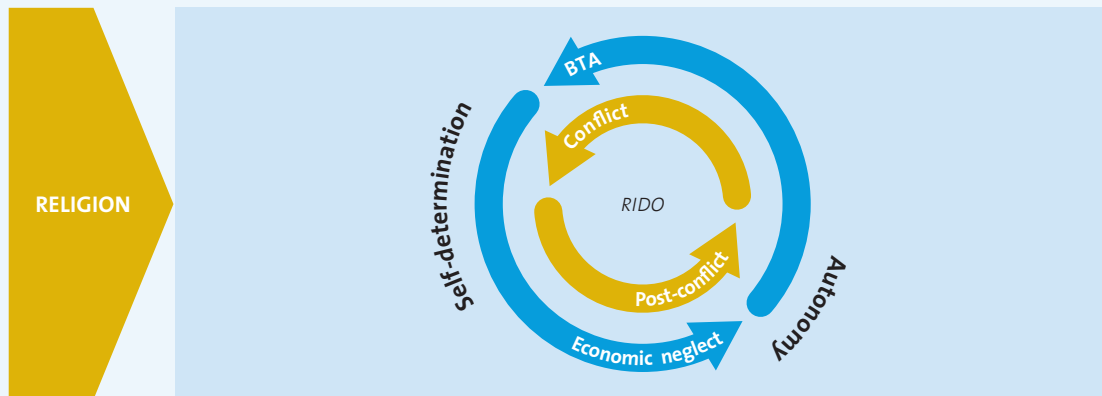
Autonomy

Zamboanga, are the highest in the Philippines[76] and the region's per-capita gross domestic product (GDP) is only half the national level, with the former Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao faring even worse than the rest of Mindanao.[77] Martial law has arguably suppressed violence, but has not changed the circumstances that accelerated the growth of violent extremism. Such conditions make the local population ripe for targeted recruitment, as armed groups such as the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF) or ISIL-inspired groups[iv] exploit the sentiments of the disenfranchised and economically deprived in Muslim Mindanao. Martial law also exacerbated the vulnerabilities of displaced persons in Muslim Mindanao, while the shortage of economic opportunities has pushed parents to adopt negative coping strategies for generating income.

Violent extremism – conservative religious ideologies and youth

In Muslim Mindanao, the provinces of Cotabato, Maguindanao, and Lanao del Sur have been affected by armed conflict for decades. Though the frequency of violent incidents has gone down considerably over time,[78] battles between Philippine Armed Forces and non-state armed groups continue to take place frequently despite the 2014 peace agreement. Casualties have equally declined in number overall.[79] There have been geographical shifts of armed violence across the

BARMM with the most prevalent battles currently taking place in the SPMS Box.

Though the Maute group began operations years before ISIL provided a incentive (see chapter 3.3) to join forces with other groups, the support it received as part of its clan structure says much about the ability of violent extremist groups to attract recruits and to sustain military operations.[80] With the death of ISIL leader Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi in October 2019 still recent at the time of writing, it remains to be seen what his demise will mean for the ISIL-inspired groups in Muslim Mindanao. However, since the struggle to establish a caliphate in the Philippines has been considered a local *jihad*,[81] the death of the ISIL leader might not have ideological or strategic consequences per se. According to many interviewees, the volatility of and the uncertainty around the development of the BARMM coupled with poverty and shortage of opportunities provide enough local context for extremist groups to continue to recruit.

Religious ideology, though an important component, was said to play a lesser role for economically deprived persons than do financial incentives. Recruitment fees, according to interviewees, newspaper articles and UN monitoring, range from 15,000 Philippine pesos (US$ 300)[82] to 30,000 pesos,[83] exceptionally reaching 70,000 pesos.[84] Monthly stipends or salaries also range from 10,000 pesos to 30,000[85] pesos, though

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iv   For reasons of consistency and in line with UN nomenclature, the report will stick to "ISIL-inspired groups", although these small units are commonly referred to as ISIS-inspired groups in the Philippines.

it remains unclear if women and men receive similar wages and if these vary depending on activities. For example, a recent study gives the example of a young woman who actively recruited others in the lead-up to Marawi with a monthly wage of 20,000 pesos.[86] Such financial incentives for an individual in a household in a region where the monthly family income was recorded at 11,583 pesos in 2015[87] can explain a rise in recruitment to violent extremist groups.

At the same time, several interviewees cautioned against a reduction of the motivation to join extremist groups simply to economic gain. After all, many recruits have come from middle-income families and have studied at Mindanao's universities.[88] Even members of the Maute group had their origin in organizing among university students and were said to have had "the smartest, best-educated and most sophisticated members of all of the pro-ISIS[ISIL] groups in the Philippines."[89]

This trend among recruits is as notable as the increase of niqabis among Moro women. Though considered by one interviewee as a symbol of empowerment to demonstrate her freedom and choice to wear it, the proliferation of conservative expressions of religious identities, which has not been part of Moro culture until recently, is a cause for scrutiny (see chapter 3.2). This is especially the case as the Moro identity is primarily political, according to one interviewee. In their words, the struggle for self-determination has its origin in the preservation of the Moro culture, which only happens to be predominantly Muslim.

In sum, violent extremist groups have been able to penetrate different socio-economic strata of communities in Muslim Mindanao, casting a strategic, gendered net to attract a wide range of actors. The growing influence of foreign religious views, especially the more conservative views of Salafism,[90] in this context are of concern. Foreign influence is most visible in financial assistance to religious institutions such as *madaris*, which some interviewees perceive as breeding grounds for the slow radicalization of youth in Muslim Mindanao and abroad. It is important to note here that puritanical religious attitudes are not synonymous with radicalization or violent extremism. However, conservative religious views will have an impact on the traditionally moderate practice of Islam and the political landscape in Muslim Mindanao.

In the volatile environment of post-conflict Muslim Mindanao, Salafism and other streams of conservative Islam are reportedly becoming more and more appealing to youth because these religious interpretations are perceived as purer and less corruptible.[91] Such an environment allows extremist groups to spread their radical doctrines of justifying the enforcement of stricter religious rules by violent means.

Trafficking in persons - the growth of cybersex

In the context of post-conflict Mindanao, the presence of extremist groups continues to pose serious challenges to the security of persons. Here, security extends beyond physical integrity to include food security, access to basic services and education. In the absence of all, people are vulnerable to being trafficked.

However, at the national level, the preoccupation with online child abuse has pushed other forms of trafficking in persons to the backseat. This is neither myopic nor intentional indifference by the government but rather a response to a growing problem. In 2018, over 1.5 million children, or 7.5 percent of the total population aged 5 to 14, were engaged in labour in the Philippines.[92] Although it is unclear how many of those were forced into work or worked under hazardous conditions, it is also not completely clear how many children are forced into sexual exploitation. This is particularly true for children trapped in the hidden nature of homemade production of pornographic materials. Low productions costs with revenues ranging from PhP 500 to PhP 2,000 (US$10 to 40)[93] render girls and boys vulnerable to this form of trafficking and abuse, with girls globally more affected than boys.[94]

The ubiquity of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in recent years has accelerated growth in this global sex trade.[95] In particular, ICTs cater to a growing demand for child pornography by providing better access to and supply of cybersex. As early as 2014, UNICEF highlighted that child online abuse was one of leading forms of cybercrimes in the Philippines.[96] More broadly, viewership of pornography in the Philippines has grown dramatically in recent years.[97] As a growing industry with increasing demand, it will render children more vulnerable, even though any form of participation in pornography (production, distribution, etc.), as defined by the Revised Penal Code,[98] the Republic Act 7610,[99] and Republic Act 9775,[100] is subject to legal penalties.

The perpetrators of child pornography are often family members, but abuse also takes place without parents' knowledge within the neighbourhood where children rent a small room to generate some income for their families. As such, the act itself is not always entirely criminally motivated or part of a larger or transnational criminal network. In fact, several interviewees stated that live streaming of pornographic acts by children is considered a legitimate form of additional income for families.

The payments for online child pornography are fund transfers which are processed through the vast net of Philippine remittance companies.[101] It is, therefore, challenging to disentangle all the international payments going into the Philippines and to disaggregate the money paid for online child pornography from the massive flow of legitimate remittances from OFWs. At the same time, the top receiving areas for remittances in the Philippines are also well-known hubs for the Philippines' commercial sex industry such as Cagayan de Oro, Cavite and Cebu. In fact, Cagayan de Oro in Mindanao was reported as receiving the highest amount of remittances not only for Mindanao but also for of all the Philippines between 2016 and 2018.

Due to the influx of internally displaced persons from Marawi City since 2017, Iligan City in Lanao del Norte has reportedly recorded an increase of online child abuse. This may demonstrate the vulnerabilities of people in conflict zones to different types of abuse and exploitation. It also indicates the evolution of trafficking in persons in the context of increasing use of ICTs and what further displacement due to violent extremism might mean for already vulnerable people in Muslim Mindanao.

The situation provides a fertile ground for recruitment into both extremist groups and work overseas, with risks of trafficking in persons. Though violence in Muslim Mindanao has decreased since the signing of a peace agreement between the MILF and the Government in 2014, ongoing conflict in geographic pockets of Muslim Mindanao continues to displace large portions of populations, or threaten to do so. The following chapter will describe in more detail the factors that link violent extremism and trafficking in persons and how gender informs these activities.

3. INTERSECTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

The presence of violent extremist groups in the post-conflict setting of Muslim Mindanao amplifies the vulnerabilities of persons toward trafficking in persons due to uncertainties regarding the implementation of the peace process, weak or lacking governance, insecurity, poverty, and misogynist attitudes. Violent extremism can thrive in such an ecosystem and groups can recruit across age, gender, ethnicity, and class, while contributing to trafficking in persons.

Unless there is a wider recognition of how violent extremism intersects with trafficking in persons and how gender dynamics shape and are shaped by this interaction, the approaches of tackling violent extremism and trafficking in persons will remain siloed and separate from each other, and will fail to change the ecosystem. Put differently, the ecosystem is conducive to violent extremism and trafficking in persons. In this context, the perpetrators of either crime should not be the only or main concern because they can easily be replaced as long as the ecosystem stays intact. It is true, as stated by the Philippine National Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, that the presence and activities of key actors associated with violent extremist groups can make communities vulnerable to radicalization. However, these actors can only thrive and operate if the environment allows them to.

Three main connectors were identified for this study. They are inherently gendered and interconnected. They indicate a trend in Muslim Mindanao that speaks to the volatility of the peace process amid growing foreign influence that is, in turn, driving a change in the perception of self-determination of the Moro people. This has repercussions for women, men, boys, and girls, who all have varying degrees of vulnerabilities.

1. Structural Challenges

a. In the absence of viable economic opportunities and infrastructures due to ongoing insecurity (including *rido*), women and girls are forced to seek employment overseas, often falling victim to false promises or becoming entrapped during their journeys, while men and boys are lured by financial incentives into joining violent extremist groups. In the context of underage boys, recruitment into an armed group is considered a violation of international law and a form of trafficking in persons.

b. Remittances, including in the context of potentially trafficked overseas workers, trafficking in persons can also be redirected for terrorism financing though there is a gap in understanding the gendered dimensions, especially where small-value transfers are concerned.
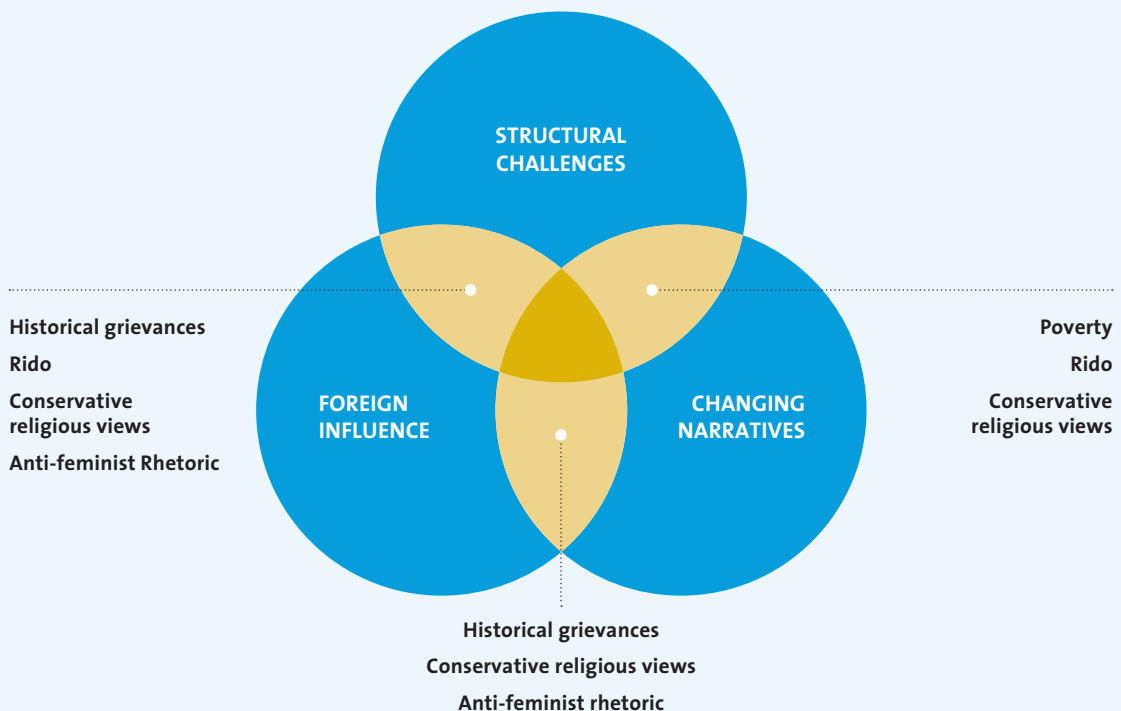
2. Foreign influence

c. The historical legacy of Filipino foreign fighters coupled with the number of Filipino graduate students from Saudi Arabia raise concerns over the influx of conservative religious views. The conversion of female overseas workers to Islam, though voluntary in some instances, may still imply techniques of deception that render them vulnerable to exploitation.

d. Conservative religious views fuel anti-feminist rhetoric that attracts women and girls while simultaneously curtailing their rights.

3. Changing narratives

e. Violent extremist groups have successfully tapped into the identity-based structure of *rido*, thus linking local grievances with religious fundamentalism. At the same time, violent extremist groups drive the condemnation of the peace processes by fuelling antagonistic sentiments of splinter groups. Though women of certain clans are reportedly actively involved in violent extremist groups, the prevalence of insecurity renders women and girls vulnerable to trafficking.

f. Violent extremist groups justify acts of trafficking in persons in terms of their ideology. These acts can include subjecting women and girls, especially non-Muslim women, to sexual exploitation and forcibly converting men and boys to Islam. Early marriage in the aftermath of the Marawi City also indicates possibly a last resort for families to ensure the survival of their daughters.

FIGURE 6

Connectors linking violent extremism to human trafficking

STRUCTURAL CHALLENGES

FOREIGN INFLUENCE

CHANGING NARRATIVES

Historical grievances
Rido
Conservative religious views
Anti-feminist Rhetoric

Poverty
Rido
Conservative religious views

Historical grievances
Conservative religious views
Anti-feminist rhetoric

As mentioned above, none of these factors operate in isolation. They intersect, as indicated in Figure 7. Though violent extremism is depicted as a perpetrating force driving trafficking in persons in Muslim Mindanao, the following sections are an attempt at explaining the environment in which both are able to thrive. Indeed, the three connectors underpin the gendered vulnerabilities toward trafficking in persons and violent extremism. Of course, neither violent extremism nor trafficking in persons are new phenomena in Muslim Mindanao. But the factors that link the two, in fact the factors that enable both to persist, have not been studied comprehensively., The following sections will describe each of the connectors independently. Due to the interconnected nature of these factors, however, a certain level of repetition may occur occasionally despite the distinct focus of each section.

3.1 Structural challenges

Globally, only a few studies exist that have shown direct links between trafficking in persons and violent extremism[102] such as the sexual exploitation of young women fleeing the violence unleashed by Boko Haram[103] or the slave trade in Libya.[104] In the Philippines, the links are newer, though each of the issues has
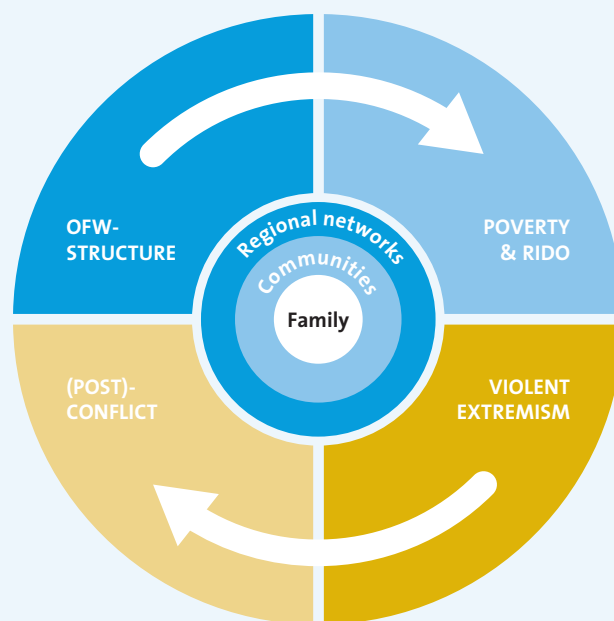
developed in the context of decades of insecurity and armed conflict within the Philippines.

As a result, trafficking in persons in Muslim Mindanao is multi-faceted, as depicted in Figure 8. Trafficking in persons is an outgrowth of violence (including violent extremism), meaning that violence, including violent extremism, drives trafficking in person. Trafficking in persons also occurs in the context of labour migration overseas, with the lack of economic opportunities and persistent levels of physical insecurity providing a steady supply of potential trafficking victims within conflict-ridden Muslim Mindanao. At the same time, the cultural practice of rido – and the emerging conflation of clan-based identities with religious fundamentalism - contribute to insecurity, while remittances can be used to fund violent extremism. As such, trafficking in persons takes place amid the cultural, political, and socio-economic dynamics of Muslim Mindanao with differential impacts for women, men, boys, and girls.

The OFW-poverty-trafficking in persons nexus in the context of violent extremism

Overseas work is deeply ingrained in Philippine culture and tradition, due to limited opportunities for local

Human trafficking in the evolving context of conflict and violent extremism

OFW-STRUCTURE

Regional networks
Communities
Family

POVERTY & RIDO

(POST)-CONFLICT

VIOLENT EXTREMISM

employment and the promise of higher income when working abroad. It is a major contributor to family income and status. In the war-torn areas of Muslim Mindanao, overseas work is often the only way to ensure financial security.[105] Jeopardizing such valuable financial contributions is often out of the question, and families go to great lengths to send their children overseas to work. Girls are especially affected. In cases where parents do not directly send the children abroad, they may leave their children with "aunties" and "uncles" (family friends who are not blood relatives but referred to as such) who are often connected to traffickers in Manila.[106] Addressing the targeted recruitment of women and girls through familial ties requires local knowledge of communities and families in order to engage these brokers. The extent of these networks, however, is unclear. Nonetheless, the tactics speak to the sophistication of recruiters in Manila to exploit local grievances at the expense of the physical and mental integrity of young women and girls.

Given the religious structure of Muslim Mindanao, stigma and shame prevent reporting on trafficking in persons. Furthermore, children forced into overseas work are less likely to report the facilitators of trafficking in persons if those are their parents. As a result, abused women and girls reportedly undergo the hardship of the journey multiple times. The social pressures combined with the financial incentives in these cases can outweigh the threat to their own well-being in their decisions.

Remittances, both through formal and informal channels, represent an important form of income and support, at times, for entire communities. In 2018, personal remittances contributed almost 10 percent to national GDP.[107] Despite their positive impact on standards of living, remittances can also contribute to terrorism funding, thus linking labour-migration-cum-human-trafficking to violent extremism.

The Marawi City incident is a case in point. Remittance centres in Marawi City not only increased in numbers prior to the siege,[108] they also registered a 200-percent increase in internal remittances from February to October 2017 while international remittances declined slightly from the average commonly registered for that area. Neither OFWs nor local businesses could explain this spike in 2017,[109] and the availability of such

massive amounts of cash has been linked to payments in exchange for allegiance.

Though the Anti-Money Laundering Council states that the small-value and dispersed transaction[s] associated with remittances have not identified a link, the system may be conducive to exploitation,[110] especially since financial transfers below a certain amount are not tracked. In addition, payments through the informal Muslim money-transfer practice of *hawala* are difficult to trace.[v] This has historically been used by extremist groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah to raise funds.[111] In the absence of regulations governing *hawala* operators in the Philippines and elsewhere, it is likely that funds for violent extremist groups are channelled through this system.[112]

This underestimation of small transfers is worrisome and represents a critical gap in fully understanding terrorism financing, especially in light of the gendered nature of transfers. For example, anecdotal evidence suggests that women garment workers' remittances, though small in scale, may contribute to financing violent extremist groups, either indirectly through familial ties or directly.

The *rido*-poverty-trafficking in persons nexus in the context of violent extremism

Aside from poverty and conflict-induced migration and trafficking in persons, many communities feature the distinct issue of debt bondage, which drives both trafficking in persons and recruitment into armed or extremist groups, and is steeped in the socio-economic inequalities in Muslim Mindanao, as depicted in Figure 9. As one interviewee pointed out, many families in Muslim Mindanao are indebted to wealthier families or clans, often over land. Women, then, are coerced into providing free-of-charge domestic work. They can often only escape this slave-like work through emigration. In fact, recruiters from Manila target these vulnerable populations strategically. This requires deep, local knowledge and may indicate a much more interconnected network than is currently known.
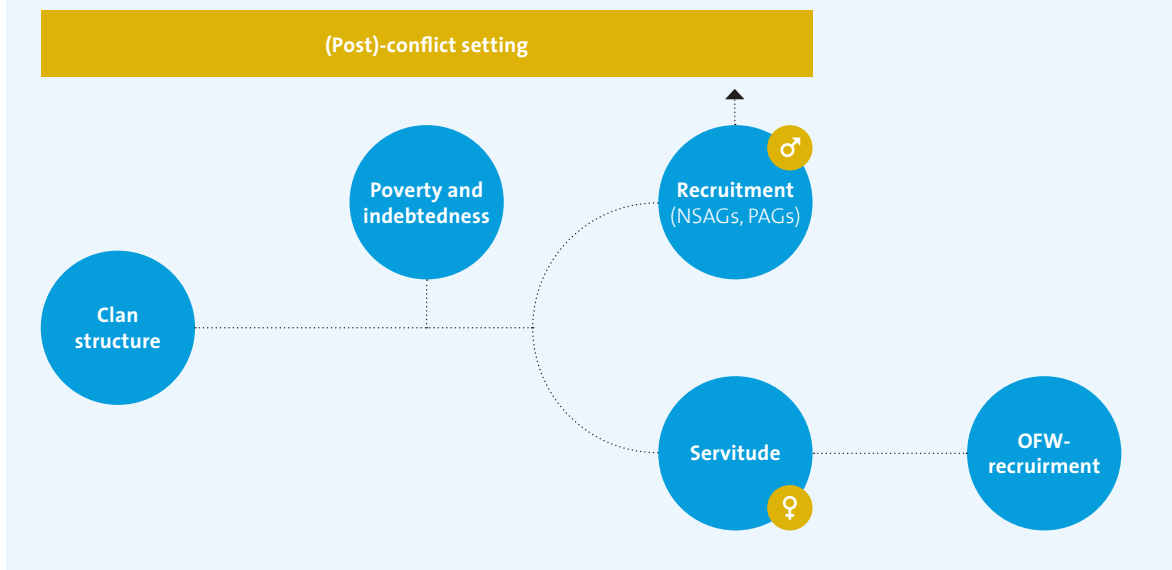
This form of debt bondage provides a steady supply of potential victims of trafficking in persons but also,

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v   Under *hawala*, which means "trust" or "transfer", individuals can make transfers via a network of brokers across the Muslim world according to an informal, honour-based system.

FIGURE 8

Debt bondage and gender-specific vulnerabilities toward recruitment

in the case of men, fighters for armed and extremist groups. Given the high debt levels and lack of employment opportunities to pay them off, armed or extremist groups provide financial incentives that often leave men no choice other than to join. In cases of *rido*, men who have ties to a powerful clan, even if only tangential, are said to have been coerced into fighting as well.

And though clan conflict is not a Mindanao-specific issue, provinces that have historically recorded the highest number of *rido*-related violence are Lanao del Norte, Lanao del Sur, Maguindanao, and Sulu.[113] The prevalence of *rido*, thus, forms one aspect of violent drivers in the southern Philippines amid the local, provincial, and regional dynamics of the struggle for self-determination.

Indeed, the practice of *rido* often connects to the larger conflict context due to the presence of powerful clans and families[114] who dominate politics and economic activities and have considerable fire-power in the form of private armed groups[vi] at their disposal to protect their families, businesses or lands. Several interviewees highlighted the propensity of *rido* to

become a catalyst for non-state armed groups to become involved, as clan members inadvertently bring in their group affiliations or units. These powerful clans and families often vie with each other for control over territories, which are sometimes linked to the shadow economies that fuel violent extremism and forced recruitment.[115]

The Maute clan is a case in point, as explained by de la Rosa and Gulane (2018): "Extremist groups were drawn into clan feuds in the scrum for resources, but evidence also shows that membership in these groups was prompted by pre-existing clan feuds. Belonging to an armed group accorded firepower and protection against other clans. Extremist groups, as in the case of Maute, instrumentalized identity-based conflicts to forge alliances that strengthened their base and widened their reach."[116]

Some interviewees argued that *rido* itself is a form of violent extremism. Conceptually, *rido* does not qualify as violent extremism. However, going to great lengths to protect family and businesses through the *rido* practice has normalized violence across Muslim Mindanao. According to some interviewees,

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vi   The Philippine security forces use PAG as a denomination. In the field, these private armies, especially when they collude with family-run or family-owned corporations, were also referenced as SCAA – special CAFGU active auxiliary. CAFGU (Civil Armed Force Geographic Units) are local paramilitary groups which are trained and paid by the Philippine Armed Forces. Historically, these CAFGU were used to prevent the re-infiltration of insurgents in communities already cleared by the Armed Forces.

the Maranao culture in Lanao del Sur is particularly known for taking maratabat (honour and pride) very seriously. Though not intrinsically violent in nature, maratabat[117] provides a fertile ground to condone or justify the use of force, especially in the context of protracted conflict. It is thus a fine line between maratabat and violent extremism. This fact also indicates the very localized nature of conflict and its links to trafficking in persons, as communities caught in the crossfire of rido are at risk of displacement and vulnerable to trafficking in persons.

This is particularly troubling for women, because those displaced by rido are not accorded the same rights and services as women displaced by conflict.[118] The number of women and men who are impacted by rido either through displacement or debt bondage may be small in comparison to displaced persons due to conflict. However, they are equally vulnerable to exploitation and require further attention.

3.2 Foreign influences

The Marawi City siege and the suicide attacks in the Sulu islands on January 27, 2019[119] represent an amalgamation of global jihad with local conflict dynamics and a culture that condones acts of extreme violence. Ties to foreign terrorist organizations, however, date back to the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Prominent leaders of splinter groups, such as Abdurajak Abubakar Janjalani of the Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), have been shaped by the ideologies of al-Qaeda.

All major armed and extremist groups in Muslim Mindanao, the MNLF, the MILF, and the ASG, have received training and financial support from al-Qaeda. Foreign influence, thus, is not new to the Philippines.[120] What distinguishes the current foreign influence from the historical ties to foreign groups is the ability of ISIL to marry its fundamentalist ideologies to local grievances[121] and to unite militants and extremists under one banner.[122] The proliferation of negative narratives and ideologies that demonize non-Muslim culture and propagate gender norms that curtail women's rights in particular, the foreign funding and staffing of madaris, and the high number of Filipino students exposed to conservative religious views overseas are particularly worrisome under these circumstances.

One interviewee stated that there are currently 2,000 to 3,000 Filipino graduates of religious institutions in Saudi Arabia alone. The exact number is unknown, and it is unclear if or when they will return to the Philippines. It is equally unclear how many children in Muslim Mindanao attend torils (seminars on Islamic teachings). The concerns here centre on the narrow education children receive through these schools, which reportedly may elicit misconceptions around issues such as the implementation of sharia law in the BARMM; sharia law in the BARMM is designed to be in compliance with the national constitution. However, with limited knowledge of the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL), conflicts may arise in the near future with regards to feelings of control by the central government and the lack of true autonomy.

Frustration with central government, in conjunction with rising Salafism, is one of the dynamics undermining moderate politics and religious openness of Muslim Mindanao.[123] But in addition to this negative opportunity, ISIL has also been able to tap into local identities. In the current transition phase, identities are constantly being deconstructed, reconstructed, or challenged. Young people, under these circumstances, can easily be manipulated, as several young interviewees suggested. One of the most effective tools has been social media, especially YouTube, which is used by an estimated 85 percent of online users consuming video content in the Philippines.[124] In fact, YouTube has globally become a useful tool to attract recruitment not only because it is perceived as more personal and authentic,[125] but also because of the abundance of material.[126]

As mentioned above, recent research indicated that women, just like men, interact via the internet with content related to terrorism and violent extremism, although women are more likely to do in private (such as via search engines, versus social media) than men. The ability to attract men, women, boys, and girls demonstrates the sophistication of groups like ISIL to generate gender-specific messaging while also tailoring content to the specific local grievances of their target audiences. This has helped to provide a sense of identity, belonging, and purpose in the context of an ostensible global struggle for religious self-determination.

The presence of foreign fighters in Mindanao underscores this global commitment. It also creates incentives for locals to support the proclaimed establishment of

a caliphate[vii] in Muslim Mindanao as the sole representative of Moro identity, though financial rewards and high salaries in the context of poverty in Muslim Mindanao indicate religion is not always a key determinant for membership. As mentioned above, there is also anecdotal evidence of forced recruitment during the Marawi City siege of both women and men, indicating the underlying vulnerabilities associated with violent extremism beyond conflict-induced displacement and trafficking in persons.

The presence of conservative religious views is particularly evident among women. The increase of *niqabis*, previously limited to small pockets of communities in Muslim Mindanao, and the simultaneous growth of women-focused religious sermons hint to a more profound adherence to conservative interpretations of Islam such as Salafism. Indeed, the months immediately prior to the Marawi City siege saw the targeted radicalization of women in Muslim Mindanao,[127] which highlights the prominent role women and girls have played in the spread of violent extremism. Though neither Salafism nor conservative religious views give immediate rise to violent extremism, the growth in the numbers of individuals or communities observing a more puritanical or strict interpretation of Islam in a region known for moderate religious views may raise red flags, especially in light of ISIL's ability to marry local political grievances with radical religious views.

Though misogynist in nature with narrowly defined gender roles, ISIL has been able to exploit societal and cultural structures by allegedly empowering women through activism who, in turn, facilitate the recruitment of men and boys. In the volatile setting of Muslim Mindanao, the emphasis on so-called proper woman- and motherhood appeals to communities where women are forced to work in order to contribute to family income. At the same time, female university students are lured by prospects of work opportunities and the feeling of contributing to a cause. Ostensibly lending women a voice, ISIL is able to distort narratives of empowerment while simultaneously manipulating local grievances.

As has been established in other countries, such narratives easily convinced Western girls to travel to Syria and Iraq to marry fighters,[128] where they often fell victim to various forms of exploitation. Though this has not been reported for Muslim Mindanao yet, violent extremism renders women and girls vulnerable to trafficking in persons both due to continued levels of violence and through the deceptive language of recruitment.

At the same time, women have been actively fighting for the cause. The recent suicide bombings in Muslim Mindanao by women;[129] the relatively high incarceration rates of women associated with terrorism and violent extremism in the aftermath of Marawi (17 of 47 suspects are women);[130] and Filipinas married to foreign ISIL fighters and operating abroad[131], though their exact numbers are unknown; all indicate a changing tactic of violent extremism in the Philippines but also a new role for female recruits. It will remain to be seen what impact these new developments will have in the long term.

3.3 Changing narratives

Marawi City, the former financial and economic capital of the Lanao del Sur province in Western Mindanao, was also the only Muslim-majority chartered city in the Philippines, and has dubbed itself the Islamic City of the Philippines.[132] The symbolic character of the city coupled with its strategic position in the context of the peace process between the MILF and the central government provided a powerful incubator of violent extremism in the southern Philippines. It took five months to regain control over the city.

It is in this context that culture (which includes religion and ideology) was evoked to radicalize people to join extremist groups and to follow the call to arms for the Marawi City siege, as exemplified in Figure 9. Culture, here, is 'feeding off of' conflict; it is not the cause for violence.[133] Cultural aspects and ideology may fuel violence,[134] or culture can be used to make meaning of what is happening.[135]

As mentioned above, ISIL was able to harness the frustration associated with the protracted peace process to unite people under its banner,[136] and the reach of this coalition extended deeply into clans and families,[137] whereby members of the Maute family not only tapped into the complex societal and cultural structure

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vi   The declaration to establish a caliphate in the Philippines came shortly after Abu Bakar al-Baghdadi announced Mosul in Iraq as an Islamic caliphate in May 2014. As early as July 2014, pledges of allegiance came from Philippine groups such as ASG and BIFF, though in those cases it was small factions and not the entire group.

of Muslim Mindanao but also leveraged its extensive network outside the Philippines,[138] while also manipulating local grievances and gender roles. For example, women in the Maute clan followed support roles associated with their perceived position as women in Muslim Mindanao. Though the relative level of liberation generally denied to women in Muslim Mindanao may give women a distinct role in violent extremist groups, they are still confined to stereotypical notions of gender dictated by male leadership.

Since the Marawi siege, factors driving frustration with the central government and the BTA can easily morph into a new narrative or solidify the grasp of violent extremist groups. Though the Maute coalition is scattered across Lanao del Sur and Maguindanao, the fragility of peace and security in Muslim Mindanao and gaps in knowledge about the BOL despite online campaigns and distribution of information brochures (the author spotted a few at the airport in Cotabato City) can easily be exploited by other non-state actors and recruiters or brokers who prey on fear and promise financial gain. The glacial pace of reconstruction and the apparent prioritization of building a military camp in Marawi City has caused frustration among internally displaced persons.[139]

As such, the groups that united under the ISIL flag in 2014 differed from other groups in Muslim Mindanao in that their main aim centred on the control of people's attitudes and beliefs.[140] This would also explain the rise in identify-based and political violence in Muslim Mindanao in 2017.[141] That said, the Asia Foundation recently highlighted that, despite its prominence as a hub for illegal cross-border trade and trafficking, Tawi-Tawi has seen less violence than the adjacent islands of Sulu and Basilan.[142] Part of the reason could be the relative remoteness of the island and the absence of powerful clans which are more prevalent in Sulu. The presence of violent extremist groups and concomitantly counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism activities of the Philippine Armed Forces of military forces in Maguindanao, Sulu, and Basilan may disrupt the relatively smooth operations of illicit activities in Tawi-Tawi, though the lack of enforcement capacities to combat trafficking in persons will still continue to allow women to transit through Tawi-Tawi undetected.

In this context, another issue that has received little attention but warrants further examination is the maritime space. Extremist groups have used the sea to facilitate entry of foreign fighters[143] but also to transport weapons and other goods to circumvent military and law enforcement checkpoints. Prior to the Marawi City siege, one interviewee mentioned overt recruitment of coastal communities, although this was allegedly never further investigated.

Migrants also transition between the Philippines and its neighbouring countries through maritime routes. Rough seas and the presence of kidnapping-for-ransom groups can compound vulnerabilities of women and girls transiting between the islands. At the same time, the high levels of conventional cross-border trade might conceal women enough to avoid detection. This equally applies to female fighters or women in supportive roles who transition between the Philippines and neighbouring countries. However, instead of decoupling trafficking in persons from violent extremism, inter-agency cooperation should focus its attention on the underlying structures that facilitate both. By tackling maritime criminal activity and linking maritime-based counter-insurgencies to trafficking in persons in the maritime space, chances of proper identification and detection might increase, curtailing rates of this crime.

Given the uncertainties governing the establishment of the BARMM in addition to the control of the central government, which is predominantly Christian, coupled with poor understanding of the implementation of *sharia* law among people, the foreign influence of ISIL has taken roots in Muslim Mindanao.

The widespread acceptance of subjugating non-Muslim women to sexual exploitation during the Marawi City siege demonstrates the ability of ISIL and its affiliates to employ trafficking in persons as a main strategy. More troubling, this foreign influence openly justifies trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation. In the context of the patriarchy and unequal gender relations prevalent in Muslim Mindanao, this aspect of ISIL ideology may spread, even beyond territories controlled by violent extremist groups. In the absence of clear identification mechanisms and the stigma associated with sexual violence against women and girls, law enforcement and policy makers alike will not only have to increase their efforts in implementing, enforcing, and monitoring their strategies and policies that aim at curbing trafficking in persons and violent extremism. They also have to start identifying entry points of collaboration to break the mould of siloed approaches that currently mark efforts to combat trafficking in persons and to counter and prevent violent extremism.

OPPORTUNITIES AND WAYS FORWARD

At the time of writing, the BTA is working on establishing governance structures and ensuring that the gender stipulations set forth in the BOL are properly addressed and implemented. The BTA is seeking to build a functioning administrative apparatus and to attract investment and development into the BARMM in less than three years.

At the same time, the ongoing conflict between the armed forces and the BIFF, as one interviewee stated, may further the BIFF's narrative of political exclusion and, thus, widen the gap to the BARMM. As a form of self-preservation, the BIFF may eventually latch onto language previously used by the MILF and other splinter groups to claim the role of being the true fighters for Moro self-determination. The Marawi City siege demonstrates how ISIL-affiliated actors were able to exploit these sentiments successfully.

In this context, identity will remain a dominant feature in the ongoing struggle in Muslim Mindanao, which will become even stronger if local political and socio-economic conditions do not change. Moreover, as one interviewee highlighted, violent extremism is always politically charged, but the attempt to resolve the problem by violent means will, in turn, only produce violent responses.

Several initiatives and programmes exist in the Philippines that address the issues of violent extremism and trafficking in persons at the local and provincial levels. The inclusion of civil society organizations, especially women's rights groups, has ensured that the gendered dynamics of violent extremism and trafficking in persons are not only recognized but that women's participation is critical to comprehensively address the differential impact of violent extremism and trafficking in persons. Lastly, cooperation between civil society actors and the government aims to ensure gender is mainstreamed across activities.

The NAP P/CVE is a good example that demonstrates governmental commitment to avoid a gender-blind approach toward addressing violent extremism.

Localization in the Philippines has been institutionalized for decades. However, it takes a very nuanced approach to understand how people in Muslim Mindanao are caught between very local grievances and conflict dynamics and the regional struggle for self-determination, and how these in turn contribute to violent extremism and trafficking in persons as interconnected and inherently gendered issues. Currently, counter-terrorism and prevention programmes and initiatives are not aligned with those addressing trafficking in persons, although conditions that enable violent extremism to grow mirror the ones that facilitate trafficking in persons. Of course, there are distinct features that require delicate approaches, especially where gender is concerned, as needs and risks vary for women, men, boys, and girls. But efforts could easily be tailored to address both at the same time.

Though there is also already latent inter-agency cooperation and multi-sectoral approaches by the international community in Muslim Mindanao, these efforts could be strengthened and deepened moving forward. In particular, existing efforts should be re-examined for their potential of addressing the intersecting nature of trafficking in persons and violent extremism by keeping in mind the connectors and the gendered dynamics that inform this intersection:

SUPPORT TO WOMEN AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

1. **Strengthen women's economic empowerment**

   a. Because gender inequality and low economic opportunities drive both violent extremism and trafficking, it is essential to strengthen women's economic empowerment in prevention and response efforts. When women are provided with livelihood opportunities, in particular the most marginalized women, it makes them less at risk of trafficking. Initiatives to alleviate women's poverty reduces the risks of women turning to alternative economic sources and has been proven to decrease tensions within the family and community, thereby contributing to more peaceful and resilient societies.

2. **Support women's leadership**

   b. In order to effectively respond to the gendered dynamics of violent extremism and trafficking, it is critical that prevention and response efforts promote women's leadership. Strategies to build resilience to violent extremism and trafficking can only be gender-sensitive and resonant when women are supported to lead in these processes. Women and women-led organizations are well placed to monitor shifts towards extremism in local communities. Therefore, the empowerment of women can have a powerful effect in dismantling transnational criminal activity. Enhancing the role of women as community leaders will mitigate cycles of extremism and increase the effectiveness and sustainability of efforts aimed at preventing human trafficking.

SUPPORT TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT UNITS

1. **Strengthen early-warning systems by identifying and assessing risk and protective factors for violent extremism and trafficking in persons**

   a. Understanding the multiple and intersecting factors that render women, men, boys and girls vulnerable to recruitment by violent extremist groups and/or increase their risk of being trafficked can inform early warning systems and prevention responses designed to protect people from exploitation by violent extremist groups, as well as disrupt financial flows to those groups. In addition, local government units and community actors are familiar with individuals who contribute to violent extremism and trafficking in persons. Supporting existing initiatives while strengthening gender capacity through trainings that address changing narratives and roles of women will help identify populations vulnerable to trafficking in persons and violent extremism.

2. **Support efforts to sensitize communities on non-violent conflict resolution**

   a. In the context of *rido* and its propensity to fuel violence, non-government actors could convene activities to support social cohesion and non-violent conflict resolution, including by connecting women-led civil society organizations and government agencies at the local level. This would not only give broader legitimacy and government support to efforts to address violent conflict resolution, it would also influence policy through engagement and exchange of information.

3. **Support initiatives that address sexual reproductive health rights, e.g. birth spacing, where applicable and culturally appropriate**

   a. On average, families in the BARMM have around four children. In the context of violence and displacement, the shortage of viable economic opportunities renders boys and girls vulnerable to recruitment into extremist groups and trafficking in persons. Further education on the issue might contribute to changing attitudes toward family planning and reduce vulnerabilities in the long-term.

SUPPORT TO LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT

1. **Support law enforcement by building gender capacity and increasing women's participation**

   a. Not all migration in the Philippines is involuntary. However, labour migrants outside the highly regulated OFW framework navigate legal grey zones and can fall victim to unlawful treatment at different stages of their journeys. This makes investigating these cases very challenging. Most cases are investigated as a violation of Republic Act 9775. As pointed out by many interviewees, the burden of providing enough evidence coupled with the victims' reluctance to implicate family members and stigma associated with sexual violence result in few cases treated as trafficking cases under Republic Act 9208. In this regard, training on the differences of the laws governing migration, trafficking in persons and violence against women would support gender-sensitive and responsive law enforcement.

   b. Additional training should aim at sensitizing law enforcement actors to the distinct, gendered drivers that enable undocumented migration and risks toward trafficking in persons. Enhanced community engagement, especially with women in respective communities, could lead to early detection of trafficking networks and the protection of potential trafficking victims. This, in turn, would alleviate what a group of experts in Manila called "compassion fatigue" among foreign service officers in so-called hardship posts in the Middle East who are evidently overburdened with the sheer number of victims. As their main duty is to ensure the safe return of OFWs to the Philippines, there is little room to investigate properly or to apply all necessary protection protocols.

   c. Gender trainings in this context should also focus on the issue of debt bondage as a clear example of the intersecting and gendered nature of trafficking in persons and violent extremism.

2. **Strengthen links between law enforcement and communities**

   a. Community-based engagement by police is key to successfully identifying risk factors associated with trafficking and violent extremism. In addition, community engagement enhances ownership of and trust in law enforcement. Improved understandings of gender dynamics by all law enforcement agents, and support to women law-enforcement agents to undertake community engagement, could help alleviate risk factors and mitigate the risks associated with radicalization.

SUPPORT TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS – FOCUS ON YOUTH AND RELIGION

1. **Strengthen knowledge management and information sharing among partners**

   a. There are several actors in Muslim Mindanao who address trafficking in persons and violent extremism. Most of the activities, due to funding and focus, treat these two in isolation. However, cooperation and collaboration based on information that links violent extremism and trafficking in persons could strengthen civil society organizations' presence while also pooling available funding.

2. **Expand work with youth and faith-based organizations**

   a. Community engagement approaches that work with religious actors and faith-based organizations should be targeted to strengthen gender equality awareness among young women in Muslim Mindanao. Strengthened intergenerational dialogue among women can also promote resilience to the risks of recruitment to violent extremism. Youth organizations similarly demand support to build targeted approaches for preventing vulnerability to engagement with violent extremism, whilst promoting gender equality to young men and women.

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