

IOM IRAQ



GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM: OPPORTUNITIES IN IRAQ AND BEYOND



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gender roles and relations are a central but often invisible part of how violent extremism (VE) functions. They are factors in different communities' and individuals' vulnerability to VE, and often exploited by VE organisations (VEOs) as part of recruitment strategies. Similarly, understanding gender roles and inequalities, and using gender as an analytical tool, is a vital part of the effort to counter and prevent violent extremism (C/PVE), though PVE efforts to date have not always taken gender into account. Gender-blind approaches to VE and PVE are increasingly being challenged in recent years, as researchers and practitioners develop better knowledge and tools to both understand the role of gender in VE and its organisations, and how gender mainstreaming¹ practices can open up new avenues of work in PVE.²

The key messages of this report on gender mainstreaming in PVE are the following:

- **First:** Gender cannot only mean women, though in practice this assumption is common. While gender refers broadly to gendered roles that all people play in society, community, family and so on, in practice it is often used interchangeably with women. However, there are gender roles and hierarchies (and gendered violence) that are operationalised in very specific ways for men and women in VE groups. Similarly, there are ways to engage men and women differently (and together) in PVE. In fact, PVE policies and programmes should work to engage not only on issues of women's rights, but also on men's roles in society, masculinities, and how these ideas shape issues of violence, militarism, extremism and ways to prevent it. As such, the concept of masculinities represents a key entry point for PVE interventions, and a way to engage men in PVE work that addresses gender inequalities and insecurities as a root cause of VE.
- **Second:** It is essential not to desecuritize and depoliticize women's inclusion in PVE; rely solely on women's traditional roles; or locate women's participation only at the 'local' level interventions. VE drivers present a complex problem that encompasses many factors, and the political issues or disempowerment underpinning these drivers is often silenced in the few women's participation programmes that exist, in part due to the sensitivity of this work and potential backlash. In the little literature

on gender-focused PVE projects that concretely assess programme impact, examples of women's participation in PVE (in case studies external to Iraq and outside of "Western" contexts) are discussed in terms relating primarily to their economic empowerment or empowerment within the family, which does the following: depoliticizes women's participation, situating it entirely within the family, and depoliticizes the PVE approach overall. 'Political' here is meant to encompass issues like: self- and community advocacy; trust in institutions; trust in governance structures and feelings of self-efficacy. This also means that women's involvement in PVE initiatives should not be framed only as beneficiaries of programmes focused on 'economic empowerment' and livelihoods/cash-for-work terms, or as mothers/wives. While economic empowerment/livelihoods work can be important entry points for participation in a broad sense (because this approach desecurizes the engagement with communities and provides a material benefit to participants or beneficiaries and their families), it should not be the only way women are engaged or invited to participate in PVE projects.

- **Third:** Cutting-edge research highlights the link between 'violent misogyny', violence against women and violent extremism, which presents another entry point for PVE work, especially in conducting further research. Different forms of gendered violence are connected, and gender-based violence (in a general sense; against specific ethnoreligious minority groups; and also those who are perceived to be LGBTI+ individuals) is frequently wielded by VE groups as a tool to assert control and communicate their ideologies and social norms. These links are important to understand for practitioners working on PVE, but they also need to be factored in when designing programmes that address root causes.
- **Fourth:** There are entry points to gender mainstreaming in PVE at every level of work, from knowledge production to central- or national-level policymaking, to security sector reform, protection work and programming work at the local level. While it is important to think through these entry points and their appropriateness and availability in context-specific ways, this report highlights some common entry points identified by the existing research on gender mainstreaming in PVE.

¹ See key terms. Gender mainstreaming briefly is a process through which each stage of a project is designed to support the broader goal of gender equality.

² Giscard d'Estaing, S. (2017). "Engaging women in countering violent extremism," avoiding instrumentalisation and furthering agency. *Gender and Development*. 25(1), 103–118. White, J. (2020). "Gender in Countering Violent Extremism Program Design, Implementation and Evaluation," *Beyond Instrumentalism. Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 1–24. Winterbotham, E. (2020). "[What Can Work \(And What Has Not Worked\) in Women-Centric P/CVE Initiatives.](#)" [Assessing the Evidence Base for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism](#). RUSI Occasional Paper. Henty, P., & Eggleston, B. (2018). Mothers, "Mercenaries and Mediators: Women Providing Answers to the Questions We Forgot to Ask," *Security Challenges* 14(2), 106–123.

- **Fifth:** There is an opportunity to incorporate Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) and PVE strategies, policies and implementation in national and local settings. Frequently, WPS National Action Plans (NAPs) do not explicitly discuss PVE and women's participation in it (though Iraq's second NAP does engage with the topic directly). PVE work can also run the risk of not acknowledging or incorporating gender-equality strategies. There is an opportunity to build cohesion and momentum across the two strategy spaces, while also using progress in one area to push for change in another.
- **Six:** Progress on women's rights in Iraq and the implementation of frameworks and agendas related to women's inclusion are often siloed and piece-meal, but there are many intersections between the PVE Strategy and women's rights and inclusion agendas in Iraq. The siloes exist, in part, due to the way such efforts are funded and resourced (project-driven and discrete), but also because many actors simultaneously work on the same issues without coordination. Organizations working on PVE and gender mainstreaming can focus on supporting momentum-building when it comes to women's participation in decision-making processes, security processes and PVE more generally by both tracking and supporting gender equality policy agendas that have intersections with PVE work (this includes the WPS NAP in Iraq, the Yezidi [Female] Survivors Law and efforts to adopt a domestic violence bill, amongst other policy agendas).
- **Seven:** PVE focus in policy funding and programming can create risks for gender equality activists and for a women's rights and gender equality agenda. Practitioners and policymakers need to be mindful of the ways this could exacerbate risks of increased VE activity (or vulnerability of a community to VEOs) as well as risks to progress made on gender equality. PVE work is not apolitical, nor does it come without risks to both the practitioners and activists that carry it out. There is also risk that this work instrumentalizes, securitizes or displaces gender equality work already being done in a given context. Ways to mitigate this include focusing on protecting activists and practitioners, ensuring specific (and longer-term) funding for women's groups and giving space for those same groups to shape PVE work in ways that supports their broader gender equality advocacy.



Figure 1 : Anjam Rasool/IOM Iraq

KEYWORDS



Gender refers to the socially constructed ideas that exist about how different people, including men and women, should act, what roles they should have in society and so on. Gender is understood to be socially constructed because it is different to biological sex and is shaped by things like culture, history, and other social ideas.



Gender Mainstreaming is a strategy that works toward achieving gender equality by embedding this effort and attentiveness at every stage of a project, programme or organisation. It is discussed in greater detail in Part Two of this report.



Gender-Sensitive can be used as a descriptor for a project, indicator or programme to highlight attentiveness to gender, gender relations and norms. This approach is often considered an important first step away from a 'gender-blind' approach, which does not take gender issues into account at all. Adopting a gender-sensitive approach is a method of gender mainstreaming. Gender sensitivity is a 'sensitivity' to the power dynamics, impacts and issues that gender identities raise in a given context. This means often asking questions beyond the typical assessments relating to security, which historically take a mainstream (and therefore masculine) perspective.



Violent Extremism (VE) is a contested concept often wrongly equated with insurgency. IOM defines violent extremism as a phenomenon aimed at advancing an exclusivist ideological agenda by advocating, committing or supporting acts of violence, typically based on racial, religious or ethnic supremacy or opposition to democratic principles. It is not specific to any religion, ethnicity, ideology or group. IOM recognizes that countering and preventing violent extremism use different approaches to address the drivers of violent extremism. IOM's programming to address violent extremism falls within the category of PVE.³



Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) refers to non-coercive measures to address the drivers of violent extremism, create resilience among potentially vulnerable populations and prevent recruitment or mobilization to extremist violence. PVE programming typically focuses on structural drivers of violent extremism. It aims to identify the type or characteristics of people who are at risk of influence, exploitation or recruitment by extremist groups in such a context, but does not target individuals on a personal basis. PVE programming does not include efforts to confront, discredit or undermine the ideas or methods of the extremist groups themselves.



Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) refers to programmes that employ a broad range of non-coercive measures to address the drivers of violent extremism. CVE programmes include activities that target individuals who are potentially at higher risk of being engaged in violent extremist groups, to the extent that it is feasible in each location.⁴ It also includes activities to confront, discredit or undermine the ideas or methods of the extremist groups themselves.

³ Definitions for violent extremism, PVE and CVE are taken from IOM Iraq's PVE Strategy.

⁴ Definition from Khalil, J. and Zeuthen, M. (2016). "[Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction](#)," [A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation](#). RUSI Whitehall Report 2-16, p4.

INTRODUCTION

This report highlights opportunities for gender mainstreaming in PVE programmes and strategies, with specific reference to Iraq. The report is made up of three sections. The first section presents a literature review highlighting recent research on gender and PVE, the role of gender-based violence in violent extremism activities and organisations, as well as the role of masculinities in VE and PVE. The second section defines gender mainstreaming and explores its operationalization in the context of PVE. The third section focuses on the Iraqi context and highlights opportunities for policy engagement across the National PVE Strategy; the WPS Action Plan; and work on supporting survivors of sexual violence after violent extremist rule. The report draws on desk research of academic and open-source (grey) literature on gender mainstreaming in PVE globally, as well as analysis of policy opportunities within the Iraqi context.

Iraq's experiences with violent extremism have been long-lived, and its history of conflict and militarism also predates 2003 and the VE groups that. Most recently and most visibly, violent extremism in Iraq has taken the shape of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, though otherwise referred to as ISIS, IS and Daesh). The group carried out terrorist attacks in parts of Iraq, but also held a vast swath of territory across parts of Iraq (in Ninewa Governorate in particular) and Syria during 2014 – 2017, and enacted extreme violence, including extreme gendered violence. The crisis in Ninewa and elsewhere resulted in a large-scale displacement of Iraqis. One report by Minority Rights International placed the estimated number of IDPs at the height of ISIL activity in 2014 at 3.2 million people.⁵ ISIL relied on gender-based violence (GBV), but also gender norms and roles, to support its governance and security apparatus; recruit membership locally and internationally; and uphold the political economy of the group and its territory. It cannot be forgotten that this also involved a widescale campaign of genocide against minority communities, and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) against (including sexual enslavement of) Yazidi and other minority women.

In the aftermath of ISIL rule/presence, there are both short- and long-term needs in the parts of Iraq where it held territory or where displaced persons are seeking to navigate return, and all of these have gendered issues to consider. As an example, female-headed households, of which there are many, face specific issues as they seek return. However, there are also ongoing risks as ISIL re-engages in remote parts of the country today, and as other forms of violent extremist organizing develops. While ISIL could be one case study of VE in Iraq, the group's ideologies, practices and communications highlight the centrality of gender relations, norms, roles and violence in the function and ideological underpinnings of violent extremism. It is therefore vital that gender is considered carefully and seriously in any response to VE in the country, and in work that attempts to prevent future vulnerabilities to violent extremism in all its forms as Iraq continues to face old and new challenges related to security and governance.



Figure 2 : Raber Aziz/IOM Iraq

5 See Minority Rights International report by Higel, L. (2016) "[Iraq's Displacement Crisis](#)," [Security and Protection](#).

PART ONE: WHY IS GENDER RELEVANT TO HOW WE

UNDERSTAND VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND ITS PREVENTION IN IRAQ?

There are many arguments for why gender is an important part of understanding why violent extremism exists and how to prevent it. Within PVE programming and policy interventions, arguments for the necessity of including gender perspectives at times rely on issues around justice, human rights, equality and, therefore, everyone's (including women's) right to participation and inclusion across all policy areas. Other arguments are more instrumental and focus on the contributions that people of all genders can make to PVE policy and programming. Still others focus on the centrality of gender relations and inequalities as part of the underlying drivers for VE that can manifest in structural and individual ways. In summary, incorporating a gender perspective into how VE drivers are understood, and how PVE is programmed and operationalized, acts in a manner that both addresses gender inequalities and strengthens PVE work itself. PVE work that does not take gender roles, norms and power relations into account will fail to address the holistic structural and individual drivers of VE.

In recent years, the issue of gender is becoming increasingly central to how VE is understood, and how its prevention is carried out. This takes the shape of two – at times separate – threads of research and programming. The first focuses on understanding gender dynamics within VEOs and the way that violent extremism is a 'highly gendered activity',⁶ meaning that women and men experience participation in VE groups and are impacted by VE differently. They may be recruited differently based on gender roles and norms (meaning that the push/pull factors that draw people

into VEOs are gendered), and VEOs understand and take advantage of these differences.⁷ VEOs (including and very notably ISIL) also rely on gender-based violence to threaten and coerce different people.⁸ All of these dynamics are visible in the Iraqi context, and therefore a gender-sensitive approach to PVE inside Iraq is all the more vital. The second thread of research and programming focuses more explicitly on the role of women in PVE and the opportunities for gender mainstreaming within work that focuses on countering and preventing violent extremism. This report explores both threads with reference to the Iraqi context, and opportunities to gender mainstream PVE in Iraq.

GENDER ROLES INSIDE VE GROUPS

While it is often assumed that gender roles mean that men are largely instigators of violent extremism, and women are passive victims, the reality globally and in Iraq tells a different story. In Iraq, this analysis is relevant in understanding the function of VE and organizations that engage in VE acts, but also in an ongoing sense as society recovers and confronts future security challenges. In 2018, a study found that women made up 13% of the foreign fighters or affiliates that travelled to join ISIL in Syria or Iraq.⁹ While women largely played domestic roles as mothers and wives after travelling to join ISIL, they also played a role in instigating or enacting violence and maintaining the social and political order ISIL aimed to impose – something visible in camps that hold ISIL-affiliated women today: Women play a much wider role than victim in the context of VEOs, and the group actively communicated this wider role

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- 6 Ndung'u and Shadung (2017), cited in Iffat, I. (2019) "[Preventing/countering violent extremism programming on men, women, boys and girls.](#)" [K4D Report.](#)
 - 7 As noted by research highlighting VE recruitment dynamics in the Lake Chad Basin region, women's reasons for joining VEOs, or their vulnerability to VEO messaging, can also be connected to gender inequalities. Further research is needed that is relevant to the Iraq context to explore if and how similar dynamics could have contributed to women's uptake of roles within ISIL. For discussion on the Lake Chad Basin see report by IOM (2021) "[Gendered Dimensions of Disengagement, Disassociation, Reintegration and Reconciliation in the Lake Chad Basin Region](#)"
 - 8 Revkin, M. R., & Wood, E. J. (2021). "The Islamic State's Pattern of Sexual Violence: Ideology and Institutions, Policies and Practices." *Journal of Global Security Studies.* 6(2).
 - 9 OSCE Report (2019) "[Understanding the Role of Gender in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism.](#)" [Good Practices for Law Enforcement.](#)

as part of its recruitment strategy.¹⁰ The primary role of women inside ISIL was seen through the lens of extreme gender segregation, situating women as wives of fighters and inside the home or private sphere. However, this segregation also required women to take up roles in the security apparatus of the organization, and women were therefore called upon to work as intelligence gatherers, fundraisers, care-workers, recruiters (of men or women), perpetrators of violence (in general, or specifically against other women) and to enforce laws, norms and behaviours that were in line with the organization's ideologies.¹¹ Women are also called upon to become mothers of children who grow up to be supporters of the VEO. The example of ISIL is a clear display of how central gender is for the ideology, governance and security of VEOs, relying on men and women to play specific roles, and seeing these roles as a key part of the group's function and sustainability.

A gender-sensitive approach is also important in widening how victimization by VE and VEOs is also understood. Just as both men and women can support or enact violence, men and women can both be victimized, through targeted attacks, gender-based violence and forced and coerced recruitment (making some people simultaneously victims and perpetrators).¹² Understanding the ways men and boys can be victimized is also central in gender rehabilitation, reconciliation and peacebuilding processes in the aftermath of VE activity, or in the case of Iraq, recovery and reconstruction in the aftermath of VE rule. Without such a lens, there is risk of allowing to remain invisible how men, young men and boys can be vulnerable to recruitment, and PVE programming will miss the mark in its work with different members of a community.

MASCULINITIES AND VE / PVE

Violent extremism is often associated with or assumed to be linked to male violence. However, the reality of how men and women contribute to and are affected by VE is much more complex. One helpful way to see this is to discuss masculinities – an area of emerging PVE research and policymaking.¹³ At first, introducing something like a masculinities perspective seems abstract, particularly in the context of donor-funded projects where indicators often centre on ensuring an increase in women's quantitative presence. In part, this is related to a common tendency to equate gender to women and women's perspectives. However, speaking to a room or meeting full of predominantly men participants still constitutes gender work, and the perspectives that men discuss in these settings still constitute a gender perspective, just one that is focused on issues of masculinity or men's experiences.

Gender identities and prescribed roles for both men and women can be factors that VE groups prey upon in their recruitment strategies. UN Women research based in Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines confirms this idea, showing how norms around breadwinner masculinities (relating to the idea that men need to be the economic providers for their family), as well as femininities within traditional marriage contexts, were used in recruitment messages to men and women differently.¹⁴ There were similar differences across social classes, where men and women from different socioeconomic backgrounds were recruited differently. UN Women research based in Libya also highlighted how these gender identities can be exploited by VE groups in their recruitment, using financial incentives that target men and women differently, based on gender roles and people's vulnerabilities (women's economic insecurity in unstable situations, and men's assumed roles as breadwinners, also made insecure due to the security situation in Libya).¹⁵

10 Lahour, N. (2018) "[Empowerment or Subjugation: An Analysis of ISIL's Gender Messaging](#)," UN Women Report.

11 For example see report by Gina Vale (2019) "[Women in Islamic State: From Caliphate to Camps](#)," ICCT Policy Brief.

12 Some reports use the terminology of a three-pillar role in VE: victims, perpetrators and supporting roles. Of course, an individual can fall under multiple categories at once. See Idris, I. (2020) "[Gender and CVE in the Kenya-Mozambique region](#)," K4D Helpdesk Report

13 For example, see: UN Women report by Brown, K.E., Duriesmith, D., Rahman, F., and True, J. (2020). "[Conflicting identities: The nexus between masculinities, femininities, and violent extremism in Asia](#)," or, Promundo report by Fried, A., Lauro, G., and Barker, G. (2020). "[Masculinities and Preventing Violent Extremism](#)," [Making the Connections](#). Promundo-US

14 See UN Women Report: Johnston, M., True, J., Gordon, E., Chilmeran, Y., and Riveros-Morales, Y. (2020). "[Building a Stronger Evidence Base: The Impact of Gender Identities, Norms and Relations on Violent Extremism](#)," (a case study of Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines). UN Women Asia Pacific.

15 UN Women/Monash GPS Report: Johnston, M., True, J., and Benalla, Z. (2019). "[Gender Equality and Violent Extremism: A Research Agenda for Libya](#)," UN Women Arab States and Monash GPS.

Masculinities, Toxic Masculinities and Hostile Sexism



Masculinities simply refer to the norms, roles and ideals related to being a man, often shaped by cultural and social ideals. An example of this is how society prescribes the role of a father within a household, for instance that men should be breadwinners and support their families financially. There is a range here, meaning that some men will have power and privilege over other men (and over women). The norms of masculinity can come from many sources, including cultural and societal ideas and customs, moral and religious teachings, media, politics and elsewhere. These ideas can be exploited by VE groups in their recruitment messaging. They can also be positive and meaningful entry points for engaging individuals and communities in PVE efforts, peacebuilding efforts and many other positive processes. For example, norms around fatherhood and leadership can be used to positively discuss how men might be champions for gender equality or violence prevention in their family and community.



Toxic Masculinities are understood to be norms around masculinity that are harmful (to men and more broadly), for example, linking ideas like aggression or violence to 'being a man'. Militarised masculinities can also have a role to play in normalising violence in society and in private spaces too; this is an important point in Iraq due to the sustained nature of conflict and insecurity. Militarised masculinities can translate into norms for men that emphasise being a 'warrior' or 'protector', but also normalize the use of violence, including arms, in dispute resolution or other matters. Women's rights organisations Asuda and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom have also worked on [documenting the link between the presence of small arms and violence against women in Iraq](#).



Hostile Sexism comprises sexist ideas that can be held by anyone. That means that both men and women can have sexist ideas and can enforce these ideas with violence at times. Not all women are going to be supportive of gender equality, and indeed men can also uphold gender equality ideals in their personal and political actions and beliefs.

On the other hand, gender identities for both men and women in their local community or in broader society can be an entry point to meaningful participation and engagement in many contexts, ensuring that men too are included in conversations on gender perspectives in PVE. There is also growing research in Iraq and elsewhere toward supporting men to develop healthier norms relating

to masculinities in society, using this as an entry point to the prevention of GBV and peacebuilding, and there are lessons to be drawn from these efforts for PVE engagement, too. If ideas related to masculinity shape how men engage with VEOs, then unpacking these ideas and working through them in policy and with the community needs to be part of the strategy to prevent VE in the future.

EMERGING RESEARCH ON THE LINK BETWEEN VIOLENT MISOGYNY AND VE

An emerging area of research has focused on the link between permissiveness of gender-based violence (discussed here as violent misogyny) and VE. The term 'violent misogyny' is used in this report in specific reference to Johnston and True's (2019) research on the links between hostile sexism (misogyny) and support for violence against women – hence the term violent misogyny.

This link operates on several levels, some of which are captured in this research, and some requiring much more research and analysis before it is operationalized or used in the field. While GBV is understood as part of a wider pattern of gender inequality and the way gendered behaviour is enforced, in VEOs, GBV can also be a tool for recruitment, as well as a tool for control.

For women, experiences of insecurity and violence that are a direct result of their gender could also play into recruitment for VEOs. On an individual level, this can be discussed as a driver towards VE for both men and women perpetrators, but further research is needed to focus on the *political* and *structural aspects* of this link. Here, it is important to remember that violence committed in private spaces (like domestic violence) and public and political violence are linked and are not mutually exclusive acts. Anecdotally, and at the individual level, many 'lone wolf' perpetrators of terrorist acts often are known to law enforcement as a result of their previous acts of violence against women.¹⁶

A large part of how these types of violence(s) are connected and can be understood is by seeing them as sitting on a continuum. The 'continuum of violence' is a useful concept developed by feminist scholars that shows how different forms of gendered violence are linked together.¹⁷ One form makes women as a whole vulnerable to other forms. This means that something like domestic violence committed in a private home is

not seen as divorced from the public targeting of women activists or politicians, nor from the kinds of structural inequalities that mean women are more at risk of poverty. Gendered violence and insecurity are connected. This also means that early warning systems linked to VE (or conflict) can and should take into account a rise in GBV in relation to other drivers of VE, though more empirical research is needed to model how this can be operationalised.

Research by Monash University and UN Women, conducted in Libya, Bangladesh, Indonesia and the Philippines, showed the following:

1. That support for violence against women, combined with hostile sexism, were strongly associated with support for VE
2. Misogyny is a central part of the ideology and practice of VE groups, meaning that attacks on women's political and human rights could be used as a warning sign for engagement in VE or extremism violence
3. The correlation between violence against women and engagement in VE was stronger than the correlation between VE and low socio-economic status – a correlation previously assumed to be a driving factor in recruitment success.

Source: Johnston, M., & True, J. (2019). [Misogyny & Violent Extremism: Implications for Preventing Violent Extremism.](#)

¹⁶ See [op-ed on The Conversation](#), that speaks to the Australian context in particular.

¹⁷ For examples in a broad sense see: Cockburn, C. (2004). "The continuum of violence," A gender perspective on war and peace. In J. Hyndman & W. Giles (Eds.), *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones* (pp. 24–44). University of California Press. True, J. (2012). "The political economy of violence against women," New York: Oxford University Press. For Iraq specific analysis see: al-Ali, N. (2018). "Sexual violence in Iraq: Challenges for transnational feminist politics," *European Journal of Women's Studies*. 25(1), 10–27. Chilmeran, Y., and True, J. (2019). "The political economy of women's peacebuilding," In N. Lemay-Hebert (Ed.), *The handbook on intervention and statebuilding*, (pp. 323–338). Edward Elgar.

Violent misogyny and hostile sexism are also often part of the ideological framework of VEOs,¹⁸ regardless of whether they would classify as Far Right/neo-Nazi groups, or VEOs with an extremist religious ideological basis. Often, this link is most visible in the way VEOs enact control over women's bodies, behaviour and dress – doling out violence as punishment for those who do not abide by their strict moral (and gendered) codes.

It is important to note that this is an emerging field of research, with growing but limited empirical evidence, particularly in terms of how this idea can be operationalized. In one sense, an important takeaway from this research is the need to understand GBV and gendered control as part of, first certain VEOs' ideology and recruitment strategies, and second, as something that can be addressed through GBV services offered to communities who have experienced violent extremist acts or are beneficiaries of PVE programming. More research is needed, however, to operationalize this in an early warning mechanism function.

UNDERSTANDING THE POTENTIAL NEGATIVE GENDERED IMPACTS OF CVE AND PVE WORK

The incorporation of gender perspectives in PVE programming and interventions does not always equate to a transformative correction of gender inequality, nor is it always happily received by those advocating for women's rights and implementation of gender equality agendas. Therefore, it is important to think through the potential gendered impacts of how responses to VE are legislated and enacted in policy agendas and PVE interventions, including the potential negative impacts that this could have on broader efforts to address gender inequalities. The risks are multiple and can be thought about as coming in three different forms. First, there are risks of PVE programmes exploiting gender stereotypes in their design, and reinforcing harmful stereotypes about men and women and their roles in society. Second, PVE is risky work, meaning people who lead or engage in it may face insecurity, threats or other risks as a result of their work. Lastly, PVE brings a security lens to efforts related to gender equality, and this risks securitizing or displacing other gender equality projects, programmes and efforts. This section explores these three risks in more detail.

Gender-sensitive programming can have multiple outcomes. This includes being 'gender-exploitative' or utilizing existing inequalities and stereotypes to achieve outcomes; 'gender-accommodating', meaning working around gender

inequalities rather than addressing or tackling them and lastly, gender-transformative, which is the ideal and refers to a transformation of gender inequalities and power relations.¹⁹ PVE programming can be designed in ways that reinforce one of these outcomes, or result in other knock-on effects that eventually reinforce gender inequalities, or harm women and women's work. In fact, PVE programmes in particular run the risk of being 'gender exploitative', because they rely so much on women's traditional roles as mothers or victims, which is why it is important to be critical at all times about how a PVE project relies on stereotypes about women and men and find ways to challenge those stereotypes.

A transformative approach to gender is one that tackles longer-term and root causes of gender inequality. At times, it can be used interchangeably with gender-sensitive or mainstreaming approaches, but some reports or literature also uses it specifically to discuss a goal of transforming gender relations, women and girls' status in society and men and boys' relationship to masculinities.

In terms of risks for both individuals carrying out PVE work, as well as risks to the broader gender equality agenda, these are highlighted in the table below. These risks should be carefully considered and mitigated in all PVE efforts.



Figure 3 : Yad Andulqadir/IOM Iraq

¹⁸ See specifically on ISIL: Revkin, M. R., & Wood, E. J. (2021). "The Islamic State's Pattern of Sexual Violence: Ideology and Institutions, Policies and Practices," *Journal of Global Security Studies*. 6(2).

¹⁹ See breakdown of these terms on page 21 of "[Promundo's Masculinities in PVE Report](#)."

Summary of possible adverse gendered impacts of Counter Terrorism (CT) and PVE policies, laws and interventions

Shrinking Space for CSOs and WROs

Shrinking space for the work civil society organizations (CSOs) and women's rights organizations (WROs) can occur for a number of different reasons in the context of an increasing focus on VE and its prevention.

- The primary reason relates to the creation of a hostile legal environment for CSOs and WROs to work in, where surveillance and increased securitization of work can mean that activists working on gender equality issues can no longer do their work safely.
- Funding priorities can similarly shift towards focusing more on PVE programming, rather than supporting broader aims related to peacebuilding, gender inequalities and political empowerment.

PVE work and its risks to women

An important factor to note here is that working to address the root causes of VE is dangerous work, because it often is work that intersects with political interests, resource access, armed groups and their territorial control, as well as foundational gender-equality issues.

This risk operates on a number of different levels at different points in PVE interventions; VEOs may target women specifically who work and advocate against their interests using gendered forms of violence; women human rights defenders and activists can also advocate on issues specifically related to gender inequality, which poses a direct challenge to some VEOs and their ideology (like demands for legal rights); and lastly, PVE strategies can also instrumentalize women as key actors, which places a target on those same women (more on this below in the section 'Instrumentalization of women's labour'). Some of these dynamics are well captured by research conducted in Libya.²⁰

Many contexts in which VE groups are active are contexts that are at risk of violence and conflict, and that threat has specific gendered implications for men and women. This means that PVE interventions need to keep the security/conflict context in mind when designing programming and policies, so as not to exacerbate already existing gendered insecurities.

²⁰ See UN Women/Monash GPS Report: Johnston, M., True, J., and Benalla, Z. (2019). "[Gender Equality and Violent Extremism: A Research Agenda for Libya](#)." UN Women Arab States and Monash GPS.

<p>Essentialization of women's (and men's) contributions and roles</p>	<p>PVE work that seeks to involve women can run the risk of using essentialized ideas about the roles men and women. This means that there is an assumption that women will be peaceful, mothering, caring and nurturing, while men will be assumed to be tough, protectors, breadwinners and leaders within the family, community, tribe or country.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A key criticism of gender in PVE programming is how it relies on operationalizing specific gendered roles for women, often associated with the private sphere and family life, and uses those roles in the service of PVE goals. An example is an assumption that mothers or wives are specially placed to see early warning signs of radicalization in their children or other male family members. There may be a special role for women to play in PVE in such a way, but it is important not to make this the only role women can play in the PVE, as this is extremely limited. It also shifts the responsibility on to women, when VE and its drivers are a complex political problem that requires complex political answers.²¹
<p>Instrumentalization of women's labour, contributions and their organising²²</p>	<p>In conflict-affected contexts, WROs and CSOs do a lot of work that fills in the gaps that cannot be met by the state and large international organizations – often this is vital and informal front-line service delivery work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As an example, women can be assumed to have access to and knowledge about their community and its members. This can be instrumentalized in PVE work as an 'intelligence gathering role', which not only places an added burden onto women in their community, but also undermines their leadership and instrumentalizes that leadership in the service of PVE/CT efforts. This places those women at risk of being assumed to be untrustworthy informants, and also undermines the gains in capacity, leadership, trust and social status that they worked hard to achieve in their community. • An increasing PVE focus for funders also risks instrumentalizing the role women's CSOs can play in their communities. CSOs often have to adjust their focus to appeal to funders and tenders, and an explicit and narrow focus on PVE by funders risks displacing longer-term gender equality and peacebuilding goals that typically are not as well funded.
<p>Securitization of peace-building and empowerment programming</p>	<p>Given how similar PVE and social cohesion and peacebuilding work can look, it is important to be clear about what PVE programming aims to achieve, the reasons for engagement with specific communities, and the logics that underpin this programming, even if programming needs to use language that softens its PVE focus (for reasons of security or sensitivity). It is important that women's rights and gender equality efforts do not become a 'security instrument' in the service of PVE work, and that this work does not become militarized or securitized. Building such an association in policy, but also in people's minds, puts women's rights activists at greater personal risk of violence and retaliation, and undermines their very cause.</p> <p>In Western contexts like the UK and Australia, such efforts also run the risk of alienating migrant communities who are assumed to be at risk of radicalization, treating them with suspicion and undermining cohesion and integration efforts. Similar risks do exist, though they may look different, in contexts like Iraq.</p>

21 See article by Giscard d'Estaing (2017) "Engaging women in countering violent extremism: avoiding instrumentalisation and furthering agency," *Gender and Development*, 25(1), 103–118.

22 For more in-depth discussion/feminist analysis of this, see PeaceWomen discussion: "[The countering violent extremism agenda risks undermining women who need greater support.](#)"

PART TWO: WHY INCORPORATE GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN PVE? WHAT IS THE BENEFIT? HOW DO WE DO IT?

Mainstreaming gender in PVE strategies, programmes and policies is important for a number of reasons. Gender mainstreaming works towards a broader aim of gender equality and provides tools to ensure that men and women have equal access to decision-making processes related to their lives and security, and the security of their communities. Societies that are extremely gender unequal are more vulnerable to VE or recruitment by VEOs, meaning that addressing gender inequalities is a central part of addressing the root causes of VE. Beyond this, the reasons for ensuring gender is part of the considerations made within PVE policies and programmes (and legal frameworks) are that men and women (and young men and women) can provide different perspectives and entry points to this work, due to the different roles and spaces they occupy within society.

WHAT DOES ‘GENDER MAINSTREAMING’ MEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF PVE WORK?

Gender Mainstreaming is a concept that has been in action since the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995, and can be operationalized in many different ways. It typically refers to a strategy to implement or achieve gender equality. Different organizations will approach the issue of gender mainstreaming and how it is both defined and operationalized differently. They can and should also create different tools to achieve this that are specific to their organization and its mandate, their staff, goals and projects.

As an example, UNIDO produced a gender mainstreaming in projects checklist that provides entry points for gender mainstreaming across all stages of a project, from justification, budgeting, stakeholder engagement, staff capacities, to monitoring and evaluation. UN Women also has a wealth of documents about gender mainstreaming and its meaning, examples of policy agendas and other relevant toolkits. Gender mainstreaming in PVE is a little more challenging and under-researched due to PVE being a relatively new space of work, and one that is incorporating gender perspectives only in recent years. Within the context of PVE interventions, gender mainstreaming can and should achieve the following:

1. Identify the root causes of VE, including how gender norms, violence and inequalities shape VE as a whole, and VEOs and their presence/recruitment. This also means ensuring that this gendered understanding is reflected in programme design and the theory of change underpinning projects.
2. Create opportunities for a diverse set of actors to contribute to and shape a comprehensive PVE approach/programme, across all stages and levels.
3. Identify and work to meet the needs of the community at large in PVE interventions (including the specific needs of women, youth, men and so on).
4. Analyse, take account of and prevent adverse gendered impacts of both VE and PVE programming, including and especially risks to women human rights defenders and gender equality activists.



Figure 4 : Yad Andulqadir/IOM Iraq

WHAT HAS GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN PVE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE LOOKED LIKE SO FAR?

Analysis of programmes that specifically focus on gender (or women's inclusion) are limited.²³ A majority of research, and particularly academic research, has focused its efforts on challenging assumptions about women and their 'peaceful' nature, asserting that a more gender-sensitive and inclusive approach to PVE was and is needed, and one that does not just rely on essentialized roles for women as peace-makers or mothers.²⁴ As this report has highlighted already, evidence from Iraq already shows the many roles men and women play in VE groups and in broader society; not all women can be assumed to be peaceful or victimized; and men too can be champions of peace and can indeed be victimized by VEOs.

It is also likely that programmes focusing on both CVE and PVE (referred to as C/PVE) and gender are understood to be extremely sensitive, and so positive examples may exist but are not available publicly. As Emily Winterbotham highlights in her review of existing literature on C/PVE projects, projects that focus on women's participation in particular (so not a broader gender perspective or including men in PVE) fall into four categories: efforts that rely on women's roles as mothers and upskilling them to spot radicalization in the family or community; efforts that focus on the empowerment of women in a broad sense so that their participation in P/CVE initiatives can be strengthened; efforts that focus on the consultation of women in the design of P/CVE efforts or policy frameworks; and lastly, efforts that focus on how women are recruited in VEOs.²⁵

WHAT ARE OTHER OPPORTUNITIES TO ENSURE THAT GENDER ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES ARE USED IN DIFFERENT PVE EFFORTS?

The table below outlines some examples from literature on PVE work across the globe, where gender mainstreaming interventions can be made.²⁶ This is not exhaustive, however, as PVE is an emerging field and new methods of doing this work continue to develop, as does the ethics and human rights focus of this work. PVE work is also difficult to

capture in that it can encompass both rehabilitation as well as purely preventative efforts that may look like peacebuilding and social cohesion. As always, applying a gender-sensitive approach can and should be done at all levels. It is also important to remember that PVE is a structural issue as well as an individual one (and so is gender inequality), meaning that work across these entry points is necessary to address the root causes of why VE might occur.

Gender and PVE in action: Indonesia and Peace Villages

Indonesia is often thought of as a leader in incorporating gender perspectives in its PVE and CT efforts, particularly in terms of rehabilitation of return fighters. For context, the threat of VE and recruitment is transnational in Indonesia, – VE groups are active within its territory, and the country is the source of a significant number of foreign fighters who travel to join ISIL.

In response to this increased threat, UN Women and Wahid Organisation in Indonesia worked on Peace Villages, a women-led initiative in which women were empowered to take on social cohesion and leadership positions. The programme operationalizes the theory that women's unequal status is linked to a community's vulnerability to VE recruitment. The programme combines economic and political empowerment and is considered by the Indonesian Government as part of the implementation of the National Action Plan on P/CVE.

To read more, UN Women's Report on Peace Villages provides further detail on the programme.

23 A full literature review of women-centred PVE work and its analysis is best captured in Winterbotham, E. (2020). ["What Can Work \(And What Has Not Worked\) in Women-Centric P/CVE Initiatives," Assessing the Evidence Base for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism](#). RUSI. A variety of case studies are also provided in Brown, K. (2019). [Guidance Note "Gender Mainstreaming Principles, Dimensions and Priorities for PVE,"](#) UN Women.

24 Giscard d'Estaing, S. (2017). "Engaging women in countering violent extremism: avoiding instrumentalisation and furthering agency," *Gender and Development*. 25(1), 103–118.

25 Winterbotham (2020), pg. 3

26 In particular, the following provides helpful and broad advice: ICAN and UNDP (2019) ["Invisible Women: Gendered Dimensions of Return, Rehabilitation and Reintegration from Violent Extremism,"](#) Brown, K. (2019). [Guidance Note "Gender Mainstreaming Principles, Dimensions and Priorities for PVE,"](#) UN Women. DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR and UN Women (2019) ["Gender, Preventing Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism,"](#) in [Gender and Security Toolkit](#). DCAF, OSCE/ODIHR, UN Women. West Asia-North Africa Institute. (2021). ["Best Practice Reflections on PVE in the Context of the National Action Plans on UNSCR 1325," Comparative Study.](#)

Gender Mainstreaming opportunities summarised by policy space

<p>Research and Knowledge Production</p>	<p>Despite the discussion above, PVE is still a developing area of programming and policy making, and is extremely context specific. It therefore requires greater knowledge and data on the different gendered roles in both VE itself and in its prevention. In particular, very little is documented about the role of Iraqis (and Iraqi women) in joining or resisting VE groups, as previous research has focused so much on foreign fighters and brides joining ISIL.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct gender analysis as part of all baselines. • Support larger research projects that document and report on different dynamics that feed into VE. • Support research that documents PVE strategies, particularly at the local level or led by local activists (including highlighting the work led by women locally) – there are likely best practice lessons to be learned in such initiatives.
<p>Legal Frameworks and Rights</p>	<p>States that face the threat of VE may run the risk of implementing laws that are antithetical to addressing the root causes of VE, can securitize the way the state, security apparatus and other entities work with communities, and perhaps also shrink the space for CSOs to do their work. Legal frameworks are also a vital part of ensuring that VE is addressed appropriately and in a way that respects human rights and especially children's rights. Therefore, it is important to pose the following questions about the legal frameworks in a given context where PVE work is being considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What laws exist that speak to issues of returnees, reconciliation and justice mechanisms? • Are laws and legal frameworks transparent and clear, and understood by those working with communities vulnerable to, or recovering from, VE? • Do CT laws curb space for CSOs to work on both advocacy as well as service delivery/programming work, and how can legal space be protected for activist work? • Is legal aid part of what is offered to vulnerable communities? • What other laws intersect with issues relating to PVE? For example, how do civil status laws and other laws that have gendered impacts shape potential impacts of PVE programming? • It is important to also be mindful of the possibility that human rights violations in CT and/or C/PVE work can in fact make a community more vulnerable to VE recruitment (with men especially so, given their roles as protectors of families and communities).²⁷ Rule of law, due process and justice driven VE interventions are thus vital in not producing a cycle of violence.

27 Fried, A., Lauro, G., and Barker, G. (2020). "Masculinities and Preventing Violent Extremism: Making the Connections," Promundo-US

<p>Analysis (Baseline assessments, conflict analysis and so on)</p>	<p>Gender analysis can and should be done at all stages of PVE policy and programming (so that the two processes can go hand in hand).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has a gender analysis been conducted on CT and PVE policies, and what does this tell us about the gaps and potential gendered impacts of these policies? • Is gender well integrated into baseline assessments? • Is gender inequality part of how conflict analysis is conducted and understood?
<p>C/PVE Work and Strategies</p>	<p>Some of the literature consulted also speaks to the ways gendered insecurities can be addressed in PVE work. Below are some examples:</p> <p>Centrally:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raising awareness amongst policy makers, practitioners, activists and the general public about the links between violence against women and conflict/VE, especially in drawing links between the private forms of violence that many women experience, and how this shapes and is shaped by more public forms of violence that can take the shape of VE • Find synergies between WPS work and work on PVE on this theme specifically. <p>Locally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address stigma around returnees and rehabilitation participants in gender-sensitive ways. • Support the uplifting of women mentors and leaders who can play a positive role both in the community informally, and in the decision-making processes that are part of PVE work at the local level. • Engage male as well as female religious readers and authorities in PVE work. • Incorporate reproductive health into other forms of support provided to vulnerable communities. • Mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) work is also a vital part of PVE efforts that are raised in multiple reports and recommendations on the issue – all of which can and should be provided in a gender specific way, and with the potential of drawing on local customs and ways of providing psychosocial support.

<p>Security Sector Engagement and Reform</p>	<p>While PVE programming can take on many forms, engagement with security sector actors remains an important part of a) the harder end of this policy space and b) a central way of addressing some of the root causes of VE, including trust in government and political and security processes, and respect for rule of law.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security sector reform should be gender responsive, and is a vital part of addressing the root causes of VE. • Engagement with the security sector on gender issues when it comes to processes for different groups of women (including returnee women), as well as capacity building and upskilling about legal frameworks, ethical frameworks and services. • Community policing as an entry point for this kind of work.²⁸ • Increase collaboration between civil society and different security sector actors. • Work with security sector actors on the issue of protection of activists who may be the target of gendered violence as a result of their activism and PVE work.
<p>Peacebuilding and Dialogue</p>	<p>Addressing the root causes of VE can look a lot like peacebuilding, social cohesion, dialogue and conflict resolution processes. This can problematically blur the boundaries between different programmes at times, but peacebuilding methodologies can also be used to address root causes for the vulnerability to VE.</p> <p>Peacebuilding should also go hand in hand with gender-sensitive reconstruction efforts that ensure women also have access to economic and infrastructure resources in reconstruction programmes.</p>
<p>Protection for Women and Girls</p>	<p>The issue of protection against potential gendered harms due to both VE and in prevention work needs to occur on two levels; in a broad sense for all members of the community; and in a targeted sense, keeping in mind that activists working in this area may be specifically targeted with GBV.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with the understanding that if a community is at risk of VE, it is also at risk of heightened GBV, and especially so against women and girls. Violence against women and girls is a tool of VE groups to exert control, and is frequently weaponised by them. • Women and girls are also especially at risk of GBV in situations where their other insecurities are heightened (economic insecurity, when they are displaced or returnees). • The above needs to be part of how security forces work with communities and individuals in a PVE context. Can there be women security officers and staff members who provide specific support? Can security staff be trained in protection methods that are gender sensitive?

28 Both ICAN and the OSCE have done some work on this topic. See: Holmes, M., Anderlini, S.N., and Fransen, R. (2017) ["Preventing Violent Extremism, Protecting Rights and Community Policing."](#) *Why Civil Society and Security Sector Partnerships Matter*. ICAN and WASL OSCE (2014) ["Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism," A Community-Policing Approach.](#)

<p>Broad empowerment that addresses social, political and economic rights</p>	<p>A variety of empowerment programmes and approaches can and should be used in unison to address root causes of VE, and these should always be gender and conflict-sensitive in their design and implementation. It should be noted too that economic empowerment and other forms of empowerment (political, leadership and so on) go hand in hand and cannot be done singularly if they are to be effective.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Economic empowerment of communities in general is important and works differently in its prevention logics for men and women. • Economic empowerment of women addresses specific gendered vulnerabilities to VE that are important to address – women’s lack of economic independence can make them especially vulnerable to recruitment or coercion (and especially so for women who are widows, divorced, heads of households or survivors of violence). • VE and people’s vulnerability to it is a political issue at heart, and so political empowerment, perhaps at a local or community level, needs to be part of how empowerment programming is administered and designed.
<p>Civil Society Participation (Central and Local)</p>	<p>Civil society organisations are often referred to in reports and recommendations as a vital part of making PVE programming functional and appropriate for the context it is in. As such, local civil society groups (be they formal or informal) can and should have a role to play in a consultative and information sharing sense, as well as implementing partners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women’s civil society groups, volunteer associations or other grassroots entities are especially important here in understanding the gendered security situation in a specific context. • Such groups are also vital for understanding the feasibility of PVE programmes, and how a gendered approach might need to be tailored for the roles and customs of a specific location. • A diversity of groups should be consulted too – for example, youth groups or student volunteer groups will provide specific insights into how young people are experiencing a security situation, but will also give insight into the generational differences and developments of gender roles in a particular community.

<p>Education</p>	<p>Educational institutions and governance entities are an important entry point for PVE work. While this can be problematically used as a reporting mechanism, the potential for PVE work here lies in the transformative capacity of education for youth and children, and how this may be used to address root causes of VE.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to education for all children is vital. This addresses issues related to girls’ access to education and also the interruptions to education that frequently happen in conflict-affected settings, but it is also a vital part of supporting social cohesion in communities where there may be returnees, host communities, IDPs and potentially ISIL-affiliated families with children. • Are there formal and informal barriers to children’s access to schooling that can be addressed, and that are undermining social cohesion efforts in the community (like ID cards)? • Training with teachers, social workers and educators is also a vital entry point in supporting PVE programming and broader social cohesion efforts. Are teachers well equipped to handle the varied needs of students who may have different experiences of conflict, exclusion or violence? • A gender analysis of the curriculum is also an important entry point. What messaging is present in formal curricula that supports positive reinforcement of social cohesion, peacemaking and tolerance ideals? • Civic education could also play an important role here. Do students understand the political system of their country, their rights, and the ways they could participate and contribute meaningfully both locally and nationally? • Religious madrassas are often an important entry way to both VE and to teaching religious tolerance in many contexts.
<p>Communication, Recruitment and Media Literacy</p>	<p>A common theme in studies on recruitment into VE focuses on online recruitment. For this reason, there are multiple entry points for incorporating such issues into PVE programming.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing literacy and critical thinking when it comes to recruitment messaging and propaganda, which includes literacy regarding the sharing of fake news, conspiracy theories and false information that fuels distrust in communities and of the state. • Traditional media could also play into this by airing extremism views or being permissive of this (including the romanticization of violence and militarism, and gendered roles related to this) • Are there reporting mechanisms to be able to report extremism activities online (on social media or elsewhere)? • Can media or media campaigns have a positive role to play in providing counter-narratives, public education and therefore addressing PVE needs in specific communities (similarly can be used to reduce stigma, retell positive stories of identity-making and belonging, and reinforce social cohesion efforts)

PART THREE: WHAT ARE THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN IRAQ'S PVE SPACES?

This section of the report covers opportunities for gender mainstreaming within PVE work inside Iraq, focusing largely on policy agendas that bring gender work and PVE work together. These include Iraq's National Strategy to Counter and Prevent Violent Extremism, the second Iraqi Women, Peace and Security National Action Plan (WPS INAP2), and lastly, work related to the Yezidi [Female] Survivors Law.

THE IRAQI NATIONAL STRATEGY TO COUNTER AND PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The Iraqi National Strategy to Counter and Prevent Violent Extremism, adopted in 2019 by the Government of Iraq, has a few mentions of gender issues related to the root causes of VE and does not mention gender specifically in the actions laid out in the plan. As a result, it is fair to conclude that the strategy itself is not a gender-sensitive document, though there are gaps in public-facing knowledge about progress in its implementation and the gender-sensitive nature of that implementation (which may be occurring across different ministries that have adopted specific measures to support women's inclusion, for example). Regardless, this does not mean that there are not opportunities for gender mainstreaming in the plan itself and its implementation, and there is also opportunity to work with both the National Security Advisory / the National Committee on the implementation of the Strategy for Combating and Preventing Violent Extremism (referred to as ONSA), and with specific ministries to communicate what gender-sensitive PVE programming is occurring currently.

There is specific mention of a couple of gendered identity issues in the section on 'Factors and Reason Yielding Violent Extremism'. Under 'Economic' issues, widows are mentioned (page 15 English version, page 16 Arabic version) as part of a group of 'vulnerable people' for whom their economic insecurity (and a lessened allocation of resources/economic programmes) made them 'targets for organised VE groups'. The second mention of gender/women is in the same section, under 'Legal' issues and vulnerabilities (page 17 English version, page 19 Arabic version). Here, a lack of legal protection and implementation of such protection is specifically named, as is the need for laws to provide protection for children and women in the context of domestic violence. There is a significant focus on youth in the National Strategy too, and this provides an additional entry point for gender mainstreaming in outward facing services that target young men and young women differently.

UN Women has specific advice on how to create gender-sensitive PVE NAPs,²⁹ and while the opportunity might be missed for Iraq in the current iteration of the National Strategy, there are many opportunities across a number of levels for engaging in gender-sensitive and potentially gender-transformative work on the strategy at the central and local level. These can encompass drafting processes and consultations related to policy writing and design, working on resourcing (or creating gender-responsive budgets for the implementation of the strategy), as well as in the monitoring and evaluation that will follow.

Key Pillars of Iraq's National Strategy to Combat

- Educational Teaching and Cultural Institutions
- Youth and Social Institutions
- Media Institutions
- Presidential and Political Institutes, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Security, Justice and Judicial Institutions
- Economic, Financial and Service Institutions
- Religious Institutions

PVE AND THE WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY (WPS) AGENDA

The need to incorporate gender equality into PVE agendas is well established in global UN PVE frameworks. In the Plan of Action to Prevent VE presented by the UN Secretary General in January 2016, gender equality and women's empowerment made up one of the seven key areas of recommendations.³⁰ The plan also discusses a number of frameworks that work in harmony with gender equality efforts, which includes the empowerment of youth (and by extension the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda) and the Sustainable Development Goals. The Plan reiterates that higher indicators for gender equality within a society makes that society less vulnerable to VEOs. The plan, as well as UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2242, also emphasises the need to both protect and empower women in the context of CT and PVE programming and strategies.

29 Silbert, C., and Davidian, A. (2018) "Gender-Sensitive National Action Plans on Preventing Violent Extremism," *Lessons from Asia and the Pacific*, UN Women

30 See the UNSG's (2016) "Plan of Action/Recommendations on Preventing Violent Extremism."

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda (adopted with UNSCR 1325 in 2000) emphasizes women's contributions and the gendered impacts of conflict and its aftermath. In recent years, with the adoption of new UNSC resolutions to the agenda, the issue of PVE has come to be part of the WPS agenda. This is especially the case after the adoption of UNSCR 2242 in 2015.³¹ However, rather than a binding treaty with legal obligations for signatories, the agenda provides policy tools, political momentum and frameworks for supporting the increase of women's participation in its different pillars: participation, protection, prevention and relief and recovery.

The global effort to bring together these two agendas or frameworks of work represents the need to move away from gender-blind security policies and strategies. This encompasses many points, including recognizing the different roles played by men and women, young people and other identity groups in violent extremism; recognizing the different roles played by different people in prevention; addressing some of the root causes and drivers of violent extremism (which can include gender inequalities and insecurities); and lastly, recognizing the different gendered impacts of current and historical CT strategies.

Given that the WPS agenda is primarily implemented domestically through National Action Plans (and Iraq is currently on its second iteration), there is opportunity to write into the NAPs specific actions and strategies related to PVE, which can include both increasing women's participation in the policy work on PVE, as well as creating specific interventions that focus on gender in PVE programming. On the other hand, PVE Action Plans (and Local Plans) also represent an opportunity to integrate WPS strategies (Lebanon's PVE strategy being a good example of this), as well as create synergies between the WPS and PVE agendas in a given context.

PVE IN IRAQ'S SECOND WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY NAP

Iraq now has a well-developed history of engagement and implementation of the WPS agenda, and is currently on its second National Action Plan (2021-2024). However, there is difficulty in seeing a coherent and cohesive implementation effort, as the uses of the WPS agenda by various Iraqi actors are multiple and often siloed.³² There is opportunity to build synergy within PVE work in general in Iraq, and on specific objectives and activities on PVE in the Iraqi NAP.

The Second Iraqi NAP does make mention of PVE-focused activities and objectives, under the Participation, Protection and Prevention pillars (with specific objectives and outcomes listed in the table below). These actions are listed for both Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). However, PVE-related activities also form a common thread that runs across the different pillars and objectives of the 2nd NAP, as different parts of the NAP discuss security sector reform, issues around co-existence, the need to support returnee communities, the need to support victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) who are in the process of returning to areas of origin/reunited with families (See Protection Pillar, Objective 3, Outcome 1).³³

PVE in WPS Action Plans in the MENA Region: Jordan

The Jordanian WPS NAP (2018-2021) speaks to current security issues and priorities in Jordan, and thus addresses UNSCR 2242 and issues around VE. PVE is mentioned explicitly as part of one of the four strategic goals in the NAP's log frame: 'Goal 2: Achieve the meaningful participation of women in preventing radicalization and violent extremism, as well as in national and regional peace building'.

The language in the NAP is informed by in-depth research conducted by the Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) and UN Women on the gender dimensions of VE in Jordan, ensuring that the NAP's engagements on PVE were informed by context-specific data.

The JNAP log frame addresses the need for women's increased participation in PVE policies and programming, broadly mentioning the need to engage women in government, civil society and communities. The log frame also mentions needing to address gender roles and inequalities in Jordanian society.

31 See United Nations Security Council Resolution 2242 On critical engagement with the issues surrounding UNSCR2242 see Lorentzen, J. (2021). "Women as 'new security actors' in preventing and countering violent extremism in Mali," *International Affairs*. 97(3), 721–738. Heathcote, G. (2018). "Security Council Resolution 2242 on Women, Peace and Security: Progressive Gains or Dangerous Development?," *Global Society*. 32(4), 374–394.

32 Chilmeran, Y. (2022) "Women Peace and Security Across Scales: Exclusions and opportunities in Iraq's WPS engagements," *International Affairs*. 98(2), pp. 747-765

33 This is a small part of the discussion on SGBV however.

Table: Summary of PVE action points in Iraqi WPS NAP 2021-2024

Pillar	Objective	Specific mention of PVE in the activities listed in the WPS NAP
Participation	Objective One: The active participation of women in achieving and sustaining peace	Outcome 2, Activity 3: Involving women in implementing the strategy for combating extremism and related security strategies
		Outcome 4, Activity 1: The participation of women activists in designing and promoting strategies to counter VE in their societies
	Objective Two: Integrating women in relief efforts and reconstruction stages on both the national and local levels	No mention of PVE
	Objective Three: increasing the percentage of women in executive committees (Kurdistan Region)	No mention of PVE
Protection	Objective One: Ensuring the protection of women and girls, especially in the camps, sites of displacement and areas of return	Outcome 2, Activity 8 (Kurdistan Region): Rehabilitation of male and female recruits (children and adults) by ISIL and other extremist groups
	Objective Two: Achieving accountability and justice	No mention of PVE
	Objective Three: Protection of conflict-affected women and girls from sexual violence as one of the tools of war, and their reintegration into society	No mention of PVE
Prevention	Objective One: Create a safe environment for women and girls and a supportive society based on coexistence and the rejection of violence	Outcome 1, Activity 1: Organizing awareness and operational campaigns to combat extremist ideology with community-based women leaders at the local level, with the participation of other relevant women leaders
		Outcome 1, Activity 3: Activating the role of national religious leaders in order to reject extremist religious discourse and fight extremist ideology through consultative meetings
		Same as above, Kurdistan region: Activating the role of educational personnel in schools and universities in spreading a culture of tolerance and rejecting extremist thought
		Outcome 3, Activity 2 (in Kurdistan Region): Organizing awareness and educational campaigns to combat extremist ideology with community-based women leaders at the local level, with the participation of other relevant leaders
	Objective Two: Including the concept of prevention in conflict conditions within the formal institutional frameworks	No mention of PVE
	Objective Three: Increasing the resilience of women affected by conflict through livelihood opportunities and access to services in their communities	No mention of PVE

THE YEZIDI [FEMALE] SURVIVOR'S LAW³⁴ / ADDRESSING THE AFTERMATH OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN PVE

There is a growing understanding of the links between SGBV and the function, recruitment strategy and norms of control and governance by ISIL and other VEOs. In the aftermath of its rule, and its deployment of sexual violence against minority women (and boys, though this is an under-reported issue), there are important opportunities to support survivors, and incorporate their experiences and voices in PVE strategies. Equally important is to embed a survivor-focused understanding of GBV in PVE efforts in a broader sense, especially when working with different communities on PVE related activities.

The passing of the Yezidi [Female] Survivor's Law in March 2021 is a significant point of progress in Iraq in the recognition of the needs of survivors as part of its transitional justice process after ISIL. While the bill's drafting process was initially criticised for lacking the voices of a wide array of actors (including survivors), the Gol responded to criticisms by amending both its processes and the final version of the text.³⁵ Here, there are lessons to be learned about how best to advocate for policy-making that is inclusive, how civil society coalitions can lead or take a role in this engagement (like the Coalition for Just Reparations in this case), as well as what methods were used to ensure a more inclusive process and a more inclusive end result. The law itself focuses on providing reparations for survivors of CRSV, and includes Yezidi women, women from other targeted minority communities (Turkemen, Shabaks and Christians), Yezidi children who were kidnapped by ISIL and lastly, members of minority communities who survived mass killings by ISIL. The bill also formally recognises the genocide of Yezidis in Iraq.

However, there is still considerable need in terms of implementation and awareness-raising within communities.³⁶ Additionally, stigma for survivors remains and shapes their ability to reintegrate into the communi-

ties where they now live. An organization or institution working on PVE programming or policies in post-ISIL areas of Iraq need to be cognizant of the needs of survivors in these communities, and incorporate these needs into programmes and action plans.

Research on Yezidi communities and their understanding of their targeting for CRSV highlights the feeling of insecurity for minority communities in particular, and how that insecurity translates into GBV.³⁷ This is an apt reminder that GBV is an often-silent and yet underlying part of the insecurities that shape community relations in post-ISIL parts of Iraq (where PVE strategies are largely focused), meaning it needs to be part of the considerations for PVE practitioners.³⁸

There are a number of opportunities to engage with the Yezidi [Female] Survivors Law as a complimentary area of work in relation to gender-sensitive PVE. This includes exploring intersections with policy areas relevant to PVE in Iraq, including returnee rights and experiences, reconciliation and transitional justice. One important and related area of work for different organizations (and for government) is to focus on the remaining legal frameworks that render women more vulnerable to GBV in conflict-affected regions in Iraq, and where these legal frameworks create a significant hinderance to rehabilitation, reintegration and return for all women, but especially survivors of CRSV. These barriers both prolong their victimization and undermine PVE efforts in the same communities. Such frameworks include personal status laws and identification processes (especially those that mean children cannot be registered or reintegrated back into their community), as well as domestic violence laws that do not provide adequate protection for women.³⁹

As for operationalizing a GBV focus in PVE in a broader sense, there are three primary areas to consider carefully, though some require much more research and analysis. The first is that when PVE programming or projects are carried out, there is effort to mainstream a protection approach throughout. This also means that GBV

34 See report for background on the bill: Bor, G. (2021) "[Yazidi survivors in Germany and Iraq's Reparation Programme: 'I want for us to have a share in Iraq.'](#)" IOM.

35 Bor, G. (2021) "Yazidi survivors in Germany and Iraq's Reparation Programme"

36 Some issues with implementation and access are highlighted by Yazda's 2021 report: "[Interim Relief Program for CRSV in Iraq, Survivors' Grant Scheme in practice and recommendations for its improvement.](#)"

37 See Kaya, Z. (Nov 2019) "[Iraq's Yazidis and ISIS, The Causes and Consequences of Sexual Violence in Conflict.](#)" LSE Middle East Centre Report.

38 GBV is used here as opposed to CRSV to capture a wider breadth of gendered-inequalities and insecurities that shape community and gender relations.

39 A recent success that directly affected returnee families and especially ISIL-affiliated families is the announcement in Feb 2022 that all children in Ninewa and Salah-al-Din will be allowed to attend school, regardless of whether they hold documentation or not.

services, referral pathways and other protection mechanisms are made available to the target communities, and that staff have training in handling GBV-related issues that may arise. Communities that have experienced VE in some form, particularly as a ruling structure, are going to have either experienced first-hand or witnessed extreme forms of violence, including and especially GBV. Furthermore, it is well established that domestic violence in the home rises after conflict.⁴⁰ This needs to be incorporated into PVE intervention design.⁴¹

Second, GBV in all forms should be understood as part of the general security landscape and taken into account when baseline assessments and conflict analysis is conducted. Things like women's mobility in communities, early marriage and other forms of 'protective' control over women can be indicative of broader

insecurities in the community, as do rises in experiences of GBV and/or domestic violence. In addition to sex-disaggregated data, qualitative and quantitative data on gendered experiences of insecurity are an important part of understanding a community's experiences and needs in the context of preventing VE.

Lastly, the structural barriers that different people face in communities where prevention work is being carried out should be taken into account. As an example, if women have unequal access to things like identification documents, legal processes to obtain these, or are not protected against violence and discrimination in law and practice, this may create specific gendered vulnerabilities to violent extremism recruitment as well as barriers to reintegration and/or social cohesion in a broader sense.



Figure 5 : Anjam Rasool/IOM Iraq

40 True, J. (2018). "The political economy of post-conflict violence against women," In J. Elias & A. Roberts (Eds.), "Handbook on the International Political Economy of Gender," (pp. 184–195). Edward Elgar.

41 While not all locations where PVE programming is implemented in Iraq will have been ISIL held territory, it is likely that such locations are going to be a primary focus for prevention work in the coming years.

CONCLUSIONS AND KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

While it has been widely recognised that PVE can and should be informed by gender-sensitive approaches (and that gender mainstreaming needs to be adopted in PVE programme design), in reality this has had limited implementation globally as well as inside Iraq. In many ways, Iraq is well placed to implement and provide lessons globally on adopting gender-sensitive approaches to PVE across central as well as local contexts. There is opportunity to better incorporate gender perspectives in strategic and policy decisions (and strengthen women's inclusion in these processes), ensure gender-sensitive service delivery, but also use this as an opportunity to strengthen knowledge products about what works and what doesn't in gender mainstreaming of PVE. This report has provided a number of opportunities for gender-sensitive work (see Parts Two and Three in particular).

Below is a summary of key recommendations for organizations and government institutions interested in gender mainstreaming their approach to PVE work inside Iraq.

ENGAGEMENT WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF IRAQ ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN PVE

While the National Strategy is already written, there are numerous opportunities to re-engage, and to make that re-engagement and ongoing implementation as gender-sensitive and inclusive as possible.

- The GoI can be encouraged to gather data or report on what gender-focused efforts are currently being undertaken through ONSA's current reporting processes (including sex-disaggregated data on PVE programmes). It is possible that there are specific policies and implementation measures that work with young men or young women, or with women, across certain ministries.
- It is important to encourage and support the development of gender expertise within the Government, with focus on gender sensitivity and gender issues in PVE. Some of this will be addressed through training offered to Government partners, and some will involve more in-depth research about gender equality champions that may exist in specific ministries or other Government entities, potentially including the Women's Empowerment Directorate.
- Policy areas like Education and Youth Affairs are talked about in the National Strategy as points of entry for PVE work, and they are very important sites of policymaking for effective PVE interventions that are likely to have more women as bureaucrats or at the service delivery end (as teachers, for example). This is one specific entry point for engaging with relevant ministries on the roles of men and women in PVE, but this should not be the sum total of women's participation in PVE. There can and should be further participation of women in policymaking as well as service delivery of PVE strategies and programmes.
- Further, there is also the risk of securitizing vital services that all community members need to access, violating human rights and exacerbating tensions and conflicts that already exist.⁴² This is not to say that such work cannot be a part of a prevention strategy, but it needs to be done carefully, sensitively, with careful risks analysis and in ways that do not stigmatize different communities. Technical support and training can and should be provided to policymakers in relevant ministries and bodies on these risks, how to analyse them, and ways to navigate them.
- There is similarly opportunity to widen consultation processes as the National Strategy is updated, or as its implementation continues. This can involve consultations with a variety of civil society actors, but also with a variety of members of the wider population. There is also opportunity to support civil society groups, and especially women's civil society groups, in monitoring and/or supporting implementation of the National Strategy, so that the National Strategy can be implemented in a more inclusive manner.
- Resourcing and budgeting are a key entry point for gender mainstreaming. Gender-responsive budgeting is a clear and effective way of assessing gender mainstreaming opportunities and commitments, and there is opportunity to provide technical support, capacity building or engagement with GoI on this issue, depending on the need of different ministries or ONSA itself.

⁴² For an example of analysis of a similar policy space, it is possible to read about criticism of UK's Prevent strategy, which did include CVE strategies implemented in health and education sectors, See: Open Society Justice Initiative (2016) "[Eroding Trust: The UK's Prevent Counter-Extremism Strategy in Health and Education](#)".

- As highlighted in the summary, it is very easy for ‘gender’ to equal women, and for ‘youth’ to equal working only with young men. Work with the GoI should also focus on encouraging programming that focuses on youth to be done in a gender-inclusive way, so that youth does not autonomically mean young men, as well as on having youth engagements built on ideals of gender equality, social cohesion and alternatives to violence.

LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION OF PVE PROGRAMMES

As localization of the National Strategy occurs, there is a renewed opportunity for gender mainstreaming, which can include more inclusive drafting and consultation processes that engage a wide range of community members in gender-inclusive ways, as well as efforts to gender mainstream in all aspects of implementation and community engagement.

- Use the process of drafting local plans or strategies to engage a wider range of actors who are active in the community that the plan is to be implemented in. This should include women’s CSOs and a range of community members, including youth, women community leaders and others.
- Any mechanisms that are tasked with implementing local-level plans or initiatives should also strive to be gender inclusive and representative of the community in which implementation is occurring.
- At the local level, actors engaging in programming need to ensure practical steps are taken to create safe spaces for women and girls to participate in a given programme.
- At this level is also an opportunity to engage with men and boys on the creation of programmes that address masculinities and gender roles in the family, community and country more broadly, on both issues of gender equality as well as the prevention of violent extremism.

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

- There are likely to be smaller-scale women-led projects, efforts or informal networks that work either explicitly or inadvertently on PVE issues. Baseline assessments and analysis can and should include mapping of efforts/projects that focus on PVE, but also take into account projects that focus on women’s rights, gender inclusion, co-existence, youth empowerment and so on. Activists, volunteers and community members who are involved in such activities could be stakeholders in PVE programmes, and can be involved in projects, consultations and other activities.

- Earmarked funds for women’s CSOs working on PVE can be one mechanism to ensure that women-led initiatives and organizations have a specific role to play in PVE programmes.
- Conduct careful risk-assessments when it comes to CSO engagement, ensuring that new PVE engagement does not place CSOs and activists at risk, nor disrupt their current gender equality efforts.

CROSS-OVER WITH OTHER WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND PARTICIPATION AGENDAS

- As highlighted in the report, there is significant cross-over between PVE and other women’s participation/transitional justice frameworks in Iraq that focus on CRSV, which includes Iraq’s Second National Action Plan to implement the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (UNSCR 1325).
- Organizations should create and support communication channels with different actors (CSOs, women’s networks, GoI/KRG and INGOs) who have a focus on implementing the WPS NAP, to ensure consistent knowledge of if and how the PVE objectives are being implemented; resource availability and allocation; and who is taking ownership over these specific issues.
- A potential event or project would be to involve the women who worked on both NAPs in a consultation or conference to discuss the PVE strategy, and make recommendations for how it can be made more gender-sensitive at several intervention levels (policy, implementation, etc). This would provide an opportunity for Iraqi women working on the NAP and its implementation to also create some strategies that focus specifically on the PVE National Strategy.
- GoI should also be encouraged to coordinate the implementation of the WPS NAP with the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the PVE National Strategy, to ensure that both processes are connected.

ADDRESSING THE LINKS BETWEEN GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND PVE WORK

GBV in its many forms is a central part of how VEOs are run and how they maintain control. Therefore, GBV needs to be part of how programming for PVE is considered, planned and implemented.

- Changes in rates of or experiences around GBV (understood in the broadest sense as domestic violence, gender inequalities, limitations to mobility and freedom) need to be part of a baseline analysis of communities or locations where PVE efforts are planned.

- Any PVE programme or project needs to mainstream protection approaches and offer referrals to GBV services, and staff need to have awareness of GBV issues and needs in the communities they are working in.
- Consultations with local women's groups or women's CSOs about their perceptions and experiences of GBV are an important part of understanding the security landscape in a particular location. The history of SGBV/CRSV in the areas where PVE interventions are planned is likely to be a barrier to women's participation, particularly from minority communities.
- GBV is exacerbated through legal frameworks or practices that reinforce women's inequality relative to men. As such, PVE strategies need to consider these vulnerabilities and how they might create barriers to effective rehabilitation and return of women, but especially survivors of CRSV.
- More research is needed on context-specific drivers of VE, including the role that GBV plays in VE in Iraq.

MEASURING IMPACT

As this report has shown, open-source analysis on gender and VE and/or PVE is limited, and there is great opportunity to better understand these dynamics in a context like Iraq. For this to happen, INGOs, civil society and government institutions working on PVE with a gender component need to collect data and conduct analysis on this issue.

- Develop and share gender-specific indicators that can inform how implementation can be analysed, including the gendered impact of different PVE initiatives in different locations around Iraq.
- If an organization is carrying out a gender-specific PVE programme, efforts should be made to find ways to document and share (after a careful risk assessment) programme assessments. There are only a handful of studies that critically analyse the impact of PVE interventions specifically from a gender perspective, and especially so in a non-Western context. Information sharing about successes and challenges is thus an important contribution to developing better gender-mainstreaming practices inside Iraq and in other contexts that share similar challenges.



Figure 6 : Anjam Rasool/IOM Iraq

Gender Mainstreaming in the Prevention of Violent
Extremism: Opportunities in Iraq and Beyond

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