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Gender-specificity in practical P/CVE: Reviewing RAN Practitioners' activities in 2021

Radicalisation Awareness Network

RAN

Practitioners

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Introduction

Gendered approaches in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) have been a topic of professional debate for some time. Practitioners, academics and policymakers are increasingly aware of the need to formulate gender-specific responses. However, key concepts commonly remain elusive and difficult to put into practice. Despite the growing interest, gender-disaggregated data continues to be scarce and sorely lacking, part of a body of knowledge largely based on male perspectives and experiences. Given these challenges and blind spots, fostering high-quality gender-sensitive interventions remains a challenge.

P/CVE services and measures, especially those for tertiary prevention, appear to predominantly reach men. Based on our review of RAN Practitioner work carried out in 2021, very few programmes in secondary and tertiary prevention are currently known to specifically target – and be able to reach – female extremists. This is not least because P/CVE programmes are mostly geared towards the prevention of violence – which is more likely to be perpetrated by men. Practitioners have repeatedly pointed out that they have few female clients, especially in the criminal justice field.[1] Indeed, the programmes that are well-known for targeting a female audience (P/CVE measures to address Islamist radicalisation) have stressed the role women play as mothers and peacebuilders, and in the prevention of extremism. With a growing awareness that women take on diverse, active – and in some cases, violent – roles in extremist movements, this begs the question: are we leaving women who actively participate in violent extremist groups without support for disengagement and deradicalisation, because existing services either cannot reach them and/or are not targeted to their needs?

Is not only female extremists who will benefit from a more thorough, gendered approach to P/CVE policy and practice. A more comprehensive picture of how gendered experiences shape the actions of joining, participating and exiting extremist movements will allow programmes to offer better, more tailored support for **both men and women**. A gendered approach seeks to ensure that P/CVE programmes do not fall foul of the same assumptions around gender and violent masculinities that may have contributed to engagement with extremist groups in the first place.

Although the gender issue features increasingly in debates and events, including in those of RAN Practitioners, it remains unclear how **nuanced these debates** are and where **potential gaps** remain. This paper seeks to contribute to the debate by taking stock of the work carried out by RAN Practitioners in 2021.

The first section of the paper **briefly introduces the idea of gender specificity** in the context of P/CVE, based on current literature and academic debate, and explores how this conceptual understanding has evolved in RAN milestone papers. The second section considers how gender was discussed at a practical level in the specific activities of RAN Practitioners in 2021. It provides an **overview of the key takeaways and debates** from **RAN Practitioners'** events addressing gender-relevant aspects of P/CVE work**.** Lastly, it gives recommendations for improving on these, by identifying gaps and suggesting concrete short-, medium- and long-term ways of enhancing efforts to promote gender mainstreaming in P/CVE.

Current understanding of gender in P/CVE research

This section provides an overview of the meaning of gender specificity in P/CVE (with a focus on secondary and tertiary prevention). It also offers brief guidance on a broader understanding of gender-specific approaches, both in the wider research and practice debate, and within RAN Practitioners.

In a [specialised paper](), Katherine Brown discusses key terms and concepts such as gender and gender mainstreaming in RAN. It serves as a basis for a more differentiated and **broader conceptual understanding of gender** in RAN. The following **key definitions** build on Brown's work.[2]

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[1] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Released violent extremist or terrorist offenders*.
[2] Definitions based on Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Gender-sensitive responses to returnees from foreign terrorist organisations.*

Key terms

Gender. 'Gender refers to the social attributes, roles, relationships and opportunities associated with being male and female in a society'[3] which 'are socially constructed and are learned through socialisation processes'.[4] They thoroughly shape what is expected, what is deemed appropriate or not, and what is socially desirable or is punished in a given time and context. A common error is the conflation of biological categories (male/female/other) with socially constructed categories (men/women/other). Concepts of gender are linked to inequalities in access to power, resources, agency, opportunities and responsibilities.[5]

Gender mainstreaming. This 'is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women, as well as girls, boys and men, an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetrated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality'.[6]

Gender-sensitive responses in P/CVE. Gender-sensitive responses take into account the particularities of the lives of women, men and other genders, based on the realisation that there are no gender-neutral interventions.[7] Instead, individuals face different outcomes and conditions based on their (presumed) gender and its associated value system. Gender-sensitive responses in P/CVE, for instance, take this into account when shaping programmes and policies for returnees, their families and the communities in which rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) occurs. 'Aiming to eliminate inequalities and promote gender equality, including an equal distribution of resources, responses also address and take into account the gender dimension.'[8]

For many years, the focus of research and practice in P/CVE has been male dominated. Although female participation in extremist groups was always present and relevant, it is only relatively recently that a growing number of studies has focused on women as violent actors, considering their pathways to radicalisation and their roles in violent extremist groups, as well as their roles in P/CVE. A major catalyst for this trend was emerging evidence on how Daesh recruited and propagandised to men and women alike, and on the scale of women's support for and involvement in Daesh.[9] There is an increasing body of literature on women and gender in relation to conflict, violence and violent extremism. The trend in recent years has been to broaden the scope: not focusing exclusively on the role of women, but also on the role of masculinities, questioning binary notions of gender, victimhood and agency in political violence.[10] To further advance this analysis, gender and P/CVE experts highlight the need to reflect on stereotypes and avoid simplistic assumptions of how gender may impact an individual's roles, motivations, agency and perspectives within extremist movements.[11] Furthermore, they underline the deeply gendered nature of radicalisation, extremism and violence.

While most of the research on gender in VE initially focused predominantly on Islamist extremism, other areas are increasingly being explored: gender perspectives in violent right-wing extremism (VRWE)[12] including the role of gender stereotypes, masculinity and femininity in vulnerabilities and recruitment; the role

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[3] Ibid.
[4] Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, 2001, *Gender mainstreaming*.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Economic and Social Council. 1997. Agreed conclusions. Section 2., as cited in Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Gender-sensitive responses to returnees from foreign terrorist organisations*.
[7] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Gender-sensitive responses to returnees from foreign terrorist organisations*.
[8] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Gender-sensitive responses to returnees from foreign terrorist organisations*.
[9] Cook & Vale, 2018, *From Daesh to 'Diaspora'*.
[10] Eggert, 2018, *The roles of women in counter-radicalisation and disengagement (CRaD) processes*.
[11] For example, White, 2020, Gender in countering violent extremism program design, implementation and evaluation, pp. 14-15.
[12] A notable exception in the European context is the comparatively long tradition of studying Gender and VRWE among German-speaking academics, offering a nuanced analysis along the historical continuities from the Third Reich to current right-wing groups. See, for instance, the work of Renate Bitzan, Michaela Köttig and Esther Lehnert, among many others; as well as the work of the topical experts at Amadeu Antonio Stiftung (the Fachstelle Gender, gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit und Rechtsextremismus works specifically on questions around gender and right-wing extremism) and dissens – Institut für Bildung und Forschung.

of anti-gender, anti-feminist ideologies;[13] and phenomena such as misogyny and toxic masculinity in VE.[14] Researchers have also stressed the importance of taking a gendered approach to understanding extremist internet use.[15] More recently, the gendered dynamics and gender specificity of deradicalisation programmes have been receiving growing attention from both research and practice.[16]

Katherine Brown (of UN Women) stresses that 'efforts to include a gender perspective in PVE – including by engaging women and women's organisations – have thus far been ad hoc and silo-ed; they are often seen as "women-centred", one-off, discrete activities and commitments that are secondary to, and separate from, mainstream PVE efforts'.[17] While research on the issue is advancing, most P/CVE research, implementation and policy remains gender blind, meaning it is mainly focused on men's security needs and priorities, and is insufficiently grounded in a gender- and human rights-based framework, potentially exacerbating adverse gender dynamics and outcomes. Likewise, efforts and calls for gender mainstreaming struggle to fulfil their potential when the measures targeting women are simply added to existing P/CVE frameworks predominantly designed for and shaped by men and male needs.[18]

Research shows that P/CVE programmes (which seek to engage Muslim women) in Europe continue to be based on problematic assumptions, including the notions that all Muslim women are oppressed and in need of empowerment, and that the primary role for women in P/CVE is as mothers.[19] The authors are not aware of similar programmes, i.e. that 'empower' or 'educate' mothers in an effort to use them in the prevention of extremism, for instance in fighting right-wing extremism. Similarly, there appears to be little evidence of the effectiveness of such approaches.[20] Further criticism includes the box-ticking nature of P/CVE programming, which has often been linked to a lack of awareness around the complexities of the issues at hand.[21]

'Women and children associated with foreign terrorist fighters returning or relocating to and from conflict may have served in many different roles, including as supporters, facilitators, or perpetrators of terrorist acts, and require special focus when developing tailored prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration.'[22]

UN Security Council, Resolution 2396 (2017)

Pearson, Winterbotham and Brown[23] take comprehensive stock of the current state of research and the gaps in policy and practice in their 2020 book on making gender matter in CVE, which was based on extensive primary research on 250 participants in Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. The authors advance the following **four key arguments** that help frame a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of gender in VE and CVE. These also serve as categories for the orientation of future steps towards gender mainstreaming in P/CVE,[24] further substantiated by other scholars.

- **Power matters**. Studies of gender relations critically assess power dynamics, privilege and opportunity that is attributed according to socially determined gender. 'In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities.'[25] In this process, there are some forms

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[13] See Violence Prevention Network & Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 2021, *How antifeminist and anti-gender ideologies contribute to violent extremism – and what we can do about it*; Meiering, Drizi & Foroutan, 2018, *Brückennarrative – Verbindende Elemente für die Radikalisierung von Gruppen*.

[14] Johnston & True, 2019, *Misogyny & violent extremism*; Pearson, E. (2019) Extremism and toxic masculinity.

[15] Tech against Terrorism, 2020, *Summary of the Tech Against Terrorism Podcast on 'A gender approach to women's role in the online extremist sphere'*.

[16] Turkington & Christien, 2018, *Women, deradicalization, and rehabilitation*; Gielen, 2018, Exit programmes for female jihadists.

[17] Brown, 2019, *Gender mainstreaming principles, dimensions and priorities for PVE*, p. 7.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Winterbotham, 2018, *Do mothers know best?*

[20] Winterbotham, 2018, *Do mothers know best?*

[21] Ibid.

[22] United Nations Security Council, 2017, *Resolution S/RES/2396.*

[23] Pearson, Winterbotham & Brown, 2021, *Countering violent extremism.*

[24] Pearson, n.d., *The role of gender in P/CVE.*

[25] Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and the Advancement of Women, 2001, *Gender mainstreaming.*

of masculinities and femininities that are privileged,[26] meaning they are considered more desirable in a given society and may therefore be attached to greater power and access. Black and postcolonial feminists have long highlighted that gender is not the only form of identity that matters when seeking to better understand discrimination, inequality and power imbalances. In fact, gender intersects with other identities such as class, race and faith in complex ways, impacting the discrimination faced by an individual. We see this dynamic play out, for instance, in the different responses towards right-wing extremism and Islamist extremism, with the latter being much more likely to result in a security-led intervention. Similarly, women targeted by P/CVE programmes focusing on Islamist extremism are much more likely to be considered in need of 'empowerment' in their role as mothers.[27]

- **Ideologies matter**. Different authors have highlighted extremist actors' commonality around misogyny, as well as the central role of certain masculinities: 'Misogyny is the explicit ideological backbone of new movements, including the "involuntary celibate", or incel scene, the alt-right or the Proud Boys.'[28] Pearson et al. stress that despite this shared element, different ideological challenges require different responses, meaning there is a need to revisit and contextualise interventions and responses as new challenges arise.[29] Gender roles and norms also play a key role in strengthening group cohesion, recruitment and group ability to form alliances.[30]

- **Communities matter**. What holds true for P/CVE interventions generally should also be applied as good practice when designing gendered P/CVE interventions. Interventions have to engage with their target audience, adapt to the specific context, respond to their needs and issues (including beyond P/CVE) and ensure the safety and security of participants, following a 'do no harm' principle. Pearson et al., for instance, did this by adopting a milieu approach.[31]

  Evidence matters. Various scholars, including Pearson, Winterbotham and Brown, have repeatedly highlighted the lack of gender-disaggregated data that affects the available evidence base used to judge the success of gender-specific interventions.[32] Monitoring and evaluation of gendered programmes remains key to building successful interventions in future, and is vital to ensuring gender is included in a meaningful and effective way. Gender expertise should play a key role in shaping and assessing interventions, ensuring the necessary expertise is included in P/CVE indicators and evaluations. Policymakers can encourage expansion of the evidence base by including gendered indicators in programme design requirements.

There are two significant aspects in advancing gender mainstreaming, as explained below.

- Understanding (toxic) masculinities. Because gender is almost always associated with women in theory and policy on VE and P/CVE, how gender factors in men's radicalisation is neglected,[33] including how violent extremist groups employ masculinities. Different forms of religiously motivated and right-wing extremism display a strong nostalgia for an imagined 'golden age of male entitlement' and 'natural order', and an aggravated sense of masculinity in which violence is used to restore power and influence.[34]

- Reflecting on gender stereotypes. In line with the tendency to reproduce existing gender stereotypes in other sectors and professional groups, P/CVE practitioners are still prone to subscribing to stereotypes around gender. For example, some prison managers continue to believe that women extremists do not 'pose the same challenges' as men, and do not place them in high-security units.[35] At the same time, male detainees may be denied leniency despite a willingness to disengage or deradicalise, with less focus on trauma-informed care, psychological support and access to family networks/childcare, further lowering their chances of reintegration.

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[26] White, 2020, Gender in countering violent extremism program design, implementation and evaluation, p. 63.
[27] Winterbotham, 2018, *Do mothers know best?*
[28] Pearson, n.d., *The role of gender in P/CVE*.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Meiering, Drizi & Foroutan, 2018, *Brückennarrative – Verbindende Elemente für die Radikalisierung von Gruppen.*
[31] Pearson, n.d., *The role of gender in P/CVE*.
[32] Pearson, Winterbotham & Brown, 2021, *Countering violent extremism.*
[33] Pearson, 2018, *Why men fight and women don't.*
[34] Violence Prevention Network & Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 2021, *How antifeminist and anti-gender ideologies contribute to violent extremism.*
[35] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Released violent extremist or terrorist offenders.*

To advance gender mainstreaming in P/CVE, research recommends continued critical engagement with assumptions on gender roles in radicalisation, as well as with the desired outcomes of P/CVE policies and programmes, for example in relation to women's empowerment. The latter often ignore 'the wider structural conditions that limit women's agency',[36] in addition to other power imbalances and discrimination that women and men may face. It is necessary to reflect other potential stereotypes and judgments, including factors such as race, religion and social class.

Conceptual understanding of gender within RAN Practitioners

Amongst RAN Practitioners, the understanding of gender and gender-sensitive P/CVE has also evolved in recent years, in line with the trend of 'gender mainstreaming' in P/CVE,[37] not without some of the pitfalls inherent to this process, as described earlier. Here we review how gender features in some key RAN specialised papers, to demonstrate how the theoretical understanding of the concept has evolved within the network over the past few years. The next section analyses how gender was addressed, both at meetings and in papers, in relation to specific topics in 2021.

Expert input through RAN specialised papers and milestone publications has contributed to the gradual take-up of gender as a cross-cutting issue in the RAN professional community. This trend has been most visible in areas such as rehabilitation, exit work and the management of returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs). Earlier RAN activities (prior to 2021) in this field aimed mainly at raising awareness of the tendency to underestimate women's role in VE groups as well as oversimplify their role in P/CVE, and to identify gaps in gender-sensitive P/CVE approaches and practices.

There are **two key RAN specialised papers on gender** which helped frame the early understanding of the topic within RAN, alongside other milestone publications that incorporate a gender-specific aspect. One of the first RAN issue papers (2015) specifically addresses the role of gender in VE and examines push-and-pull factors in the Islamist recruitment of women and girls.[38] The role of gender in prevention is discussed mainly as a means to more effectively address these vulnerabilities. A RAN YF&C ex post paper on the same topic (2018) further differentiates between the **different roles men and women play in extremist groups** and in different types of VE or extremist ideologies, with an extended focus on right-wing extremism.[39] It further unpacks themes such as the role of masculinity, misleading assumptions regarding gender roles, women's empowerment in extremism and P/CVE, gender (in)equality in extremist groups, and similarities and differences in drivers for men and women.

Table 1. Drivers for men and women to join extremist groups[40]

Drivers for men and women to join extremist groups		
Different drivers	**Men**	**Women**
Cultural/Social Status	• Lack of perspective (getting a job) • Lack of belonging (isolation) • Lack of resilience • Feeling emasculated	More recognition by men
Cultural/Social Locations	Being approached in public environments	Being approached in private spaces and online environment

[36] Pearson, Winterbotham & Brown, 2021, *Countering violent extremism,* p. 298.
[37] Pearson, Winterbotham & Brown, 2021, *Countering violent extremism*; Brown, 2019, *Gender mainstreaming principles, dimensions and priorities for PVE.*
[38] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2015, *The role of gender in violent extremism.*
[39] Radicalisation Awareness Network Youth, Families and Communities, 2018, *The role of gender in extremism and P/CVE.*
[40] Radicalisation Awareness Network Youth, Families and Communities, 2018, *The role of gender in extremism and P/CVE.*

Ideological and organisational	Fighters, heroes	Supporting/internal role, wife, mother, teacher
Personal	• Less idealistic • Power, domination • Being a war hero • Friendship and comradeship • Excitement/adventure	• More ideologically driven: learning about the ideology at a deeper level • Humanitarian reasons • Earning independency and freedom • Romance • Female empowerment
Similar drivers	• Compliancy and continuity • Childhood trauma and abuse • Belonging	

Two more recent RAN **specialised papers focus on the role of gender and gender-sensitive responses** in relation to **exit work** and **returnees,** as described below.

- An ex post paper (2019) on **gender-specific approaches in exit work**[41] provides a detailed guide on the questions practitioners need to ask about specific factors in disengagement for **both men and women**, as well as key considerations for gender-reflective practice. It highlights the need to consider how gender intersects with class, age, religion and sexuality, and how ideas about masculinity and femininity inform the narratives of the self that 'formers' relied on for understanding men and women's past and future lives.

- A specialised paper (2021) on **gender-sensitive responses to returnees from foreign terrorist organisations**[42] sheds further light on the gendered experiences of women in Daesh, and outlines the **short-, medium- and long-term gender needs of women returnees** in terms of beliefs, behaviours and belonging. This paper offers practical advice for practitioners addressing women's short-term needs such as processing trauma, reconfiguring motherhood and finding support networks. In the medium-to-long term, practitioners working with women in R&R are advised to support them in developing transferable skills, overcoming double stigmatisation, establishing a new sense of meaning and significance, setting achievable goals and building trust with case workers and local communities. The paper further maps existing R&R approaches in the EU, their gender responsiveness, the roles of different actors and agencies in these, and key lessons learned; it provides recommendations on practitioner training, adapting existing indicators and risk assessment tools, early engagement with communities and measuring success.

The following RAN expert papers, albeit not focused on gender specifically, integrate gender-specific themes, mostly around women's roles in VE, and identify gaps and suggest general guidelines on how to better address their needs in P/CVE.

- The role of women in different VE ideologies and groups is discussed in the **RAN factbooks** on Islamist extremism[43] and Far-right extremism.[44] The latter also touches upon some of the anti-gender aspects of VRWE ideologies.

- A RAN P&P Practitioners' working paper (2019) outlines the specificities of **dealing with female and male offenders in prison and probation** and stresses the incompatibility of available rehabilitation programmes with the treatment needs of female violent extremist or terrorist offenders (VETOs).[45]

- The original, 2017 RAN returnee manual as well as its updated version (2022) and the 2020 *Rehabilitation Manual* view the gender dimension as a cross-cutting issue and outline some guiding principles for practitioners. In particular, the 2017 RAN returnee manual stresses the importance of

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[41] Radicalisation Awareness Network EXIT, 2019, Gender-specific approaches in exit work.
[42] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Gender-sensitive responses to returnees from foreign terrorist organisations.*
[43] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2019, *Islamist extremism.*
[44] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2019, *Far-right extremism.*
[45] Radicalisation Awareness Network Prison & Probation, 2019, *Approaches to countering radicalisation and dealing with violent extremist and terrorist offenders in prisons and probation.*

complementing reintegration responses to male returnees with ones for female returnees, recognising the wide array of roles women have played in VE.[46] It also calls for an acknowledgement of the role of motherhood in reintegration. The 2020 RAN Rehabilitation Manual calls for ongoing and continual processes of reviewing and reconsidering gender-based assumptions about offenders.[47] It cautions against underestimating or stereotyping female radicalised or terrorist offenders as 'jihadi brides'. Further, the manual recognises that gender sensitivity in prisons as well as gender-based discrimination remain a major challenge owing to the predominantly male staff in these institutions.

The implications for applying this emerging understanding of gender in VE in practice was then further explored under the different thematic RAN Practitioners strands, most notably in relation to exit and rehabilitation, but also in relation to youth and the digital space, and communications and narratives (as is discussed in the following section). However, this trend is yet to be translated into P/CVE practice across the different prevent dimensions in the EU, as is evident from discussions within the network. The discussions were linked to the wider Women in Peace and Security agenda and the wealth of knowledge in adjacent disciplines such as gender studies. RAN Practitioners identified challenges, insights and lessons learned in relation to the gender dimension in P/CVE from 2021. These are presented in the next section, as a basis for identifying specific areas and enhancing existing efforts to promote gender mainstreaming in P/CVE.

Gender sensitivity in practical P/CVE: a review of RAN Practitioners' activities in 2021

In 2021, RAN Practitioners focused attention on gender-relevant aspects in prevention, intervention and disengagement practice, building on accumulated discussions and expert input from previous years. This section reviews the current situation for gender-sensitive approaches in the EU, as discussed during RAN Practitioners' meetings in 2021.

Practitioners consistently stress that although gender has become a buzzword in P/CVE policy, it is not being addressed on the ground.[48] The lack of gender-sensitive approaches in practice has become particularly visible in **prison management and rehabilitation,** concurrent with the growing number of VETOs as well as **returning and repatriated women** from conflict zones since 2015.[49]

Women's involvement in violent extremism has increased in the last 10 years, and women and children represent the majority of those now seeking repatriation from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq.[50] Many women will thus face a period of detention: the gap in programmes specifically designed for women in both the prison context and post-prison rehabilitation is frequently highlighted as a key challenge demanding a prompt and systematic response.[51] While data from 2020 shows that women make up only 10 % of all extremist inmates across the EU,[52] the more systematic prosecution of returning women in recent years is set to exacerbate these challenges.[53]

Gender is most often discussed in relation to the core topics of prison management, disengagement and rehabilitation of VETOs (including FTFs), as well as the reintegration of returnees. Likewise, gender is increasingly considered in the context of youth and family work, digital spaces, online recruitment and emerging forms of extremism.

Management of returned FTFs and family members

In 2021, the **management of returning FTFs and their family members** was a key topic for RAN: at least seven meetings (webinars, working group (WG) meetings, study visits, and cross-cutting and small-scale

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[46] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2017, *RAN Manual - Responses to returnees.*
[47] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020, *Rehabilitation Manual – Rehabilitation of radicalised and terrorist offenders for first-line practitioners.*
[48] Radicalisation Awareness Network EXIT, 2019, Gender-specific approaches in exit work.
[49] Radicalisation Awareness Network EXIT, 2019, Gender-specific approaches in exit work.
[50] Europol, 2017, *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2017*, p. 22; Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Released violent extremist or terrorist offenders.*
[51] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Released violent extremist or terrorist offenders.*
[52] Basra & Neumann, 2020, *Prisons and terrorism.*
[53] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Repatriated foreign terrorist fighters and their families.*

expert meetings) addressed different challenges specifically related to dealing with **returning women (and their children)**.[54] Gender-relevant aspects discussed under this topic include the need to better understand women's vulnerabilities and needs, the potential threat they pose, the difference in experiences of returned boys and girls in Daesh, the role of motherhood in rehabilitation processes, and gender-sensitive and trauma-informed approaches to (women and children) returnee management.

The following key themes and insights emerged during these meetings.

- Practitioners recognise the need to reflect on their own **gender stereotypes** in order to avoid blind spots and formulate gender-sensitive responses. In contrast to existing stereotypes, women can have ideological reasons to join extremist groups as fighters or recruiters, while men can also be manipulated and radicalised for purely emotional reasons.[55] Practitioners working with the target group need supervision and support, and stereotypical thinking has to be avoided.

- It is important to work with returned women on the **narratives and multiple identities** of wives, mothers and citizens,[56] questioning how **gender roles and motherhood were framed** in the Daesh narrative, but also considering the role of motherhood in the rehabilitation process.

- The **multiple trauma and victimisation** of women returning from Daesh needs to be taken into account in tailored approaches, as does a proper consideration of the threat they could pose.[57] The lack of trauma therapy for women remains a large gap,[58] although promising approaches do exist.[59]

- **Boys and girls** returning from Daesh have **different vulnerabilities** (and traumas) due to their different experiences in Syria and Iraq (boys of a certain age receiving military training versus girls and very young boys remaining mostly at home).[60] Older boys were also left on their own when younger children were evacuated with their mothers.

- At the basic level of **prison regimes and management**, it is not apparent how women can best be situated in normalisation or high-security systems.[61] For female FTFs in particular, the presence of children poses an additional challenge which can nevertheless also function as an incentive to participate in rehabilitation programmes.[62]

- Useful options include holding joint activities and maintaining contact between detained **mothers and their children;** there are promising practices to that end which include trauma treatment (see Relevant practices).[63] At the same time, practitioners need to closely **monitor the child's well-being** and protect against potential harm through disruptive parent-child relationships.[64]

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[54] It should be noted that the RAN meetings selected and assessed here are those that discuss the gender perspective or women. For the most part, these focus on women and children simultaneously; some meetings deal with returning and repatriated children primarily, and others with returning FTFs and their families more broadly. Radicalisation Awareness Network Families, Communities and Social Care, 2021, *Dealing with returning children and their mothers from Daesh;* Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2022, *Management of returning FTFs and their family members with a focus on returning women and children*; Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, Female and child returnees (webinar); Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2022, *Study visit to Helsinki.*

[55] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2022, *Management of returning FTFs and their family members with a focus on returning women and children.*

[56] Ibid.

[57] Ibid.

[58] See also more evidence from practice on this in Koller, 2021, *Issue Paper: Women and minors in tertiary prevention of Islamist extremism.*

[59] A RAN study visit to Helsinki on returning children held online (1 December 2021) highlighted that the overall approach towards the treatment of both repatriated women and children is grounded in trauma-informed work. However, the meeting was focused on children primarily, and women were discussed mainly in their role as mothers in the process of supporting the children with reintegration. The gender-sensitive aspects of this approach were not discussed explicitly.

[60] Radicalisation Awareness Network Families, Communities and Social Care, 2021, *Dealing with returning children and their mothers from Daesh.*

[61] Radicalisation Awareness Network Prisons, 2021, *Practitioners' questions and needs for the future, based on experiences in dealing with foreign terrorist fighters and violent extremist or terrorist offenders.*

[62] Ibid.

[63] Radicalisation Awareness Network Families, Communities and Social Care, 2021, *Dealing with returning children and their mothers from Daesh*; Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2022, *Management of returning FTFs and their family members with a focus on returning women and children.*

[64] Managing imprisoned women and the nature, form and frequency of contact with their children poses specific challenges and will be explored in more detailed by RAN Prisons in 2022.

Disengagement, deradicalisation, rehabilitation and resocialisation

While the management and treatment of detained and imprisoned women returning from Daesh was a pressing concern for practitioners in 2021, gender was also discussed more broadly in at least four RAN meetings in the context of prison exit and rehabilitation of VETOs, outside the focus of female returnees.

A cross-cutting thematic event on continuity across prison, probation and reintegration for released VETOs[65] highlights persisting gaps in gender approaches from the perspective of practice, policy and research, as well as emerging responses. Participants reiterate that rehabilitation programmes have been developed based on experience with men and targeting men. Similarly, current **risk assessment models** lack gender and youth sensitivity, due to the small number of women and child offenders.[66]

The **gender-specific barriers to reintegration** are even higher for women extremist offenders: they face twice the stigma upon release from detention (as women and extremists). Practitioners voice a clear need for **trauma-informed and gender-sensitive skills and capacity** in prisons and along the prison-exit continuum.[67]

- In RAN meetings, practitioners highlight that the **gendered roles of councillors in the exit process** should be a key consideration when working with both male and female extremist offenders. They also stress the importance of having mixed teams as well as flexibility to better meet clients' needs,[68] since gender stereotypes and norms need to be addressed in the counselling process as cross-cutting issues.

- Addressing the role of **parenthood for both men and women** in custody and in rehabilitation and reintegration was also identified as an area needing appropriate interventions.[69]

- A specialised paper on **working with imprisoned extremist parents** assesses the role of critical reflections on gender norms, images and identity through biography work, and highlights practices such as parenting coaching to help VETOs redefine their roles/identities as mothers and fathers (see also Relevant practices).[70]

Emerging gender-responsive practices in VETO management along the prison-exit continuum were also discussed in relation to prison management and risk assessments, and also in relation to gender sensitivity in disengagement counselling (see Relevant practices).

Anti-gender ideologies and violent extremism

The role of gender is central to P/CVE in relation to VRWE and other types of extremism that have a strong violent misogynist and anti-gender ideology. In 2021, gender aspects were discussed mainly in relation to **conspiracy narratives**, **VRWE** and **(violent) incels and misogynist extremism,** in several dedicated meetings and specialised papers.[71]

- A specialised paper on **conspiracy narratives** and their links to violent (right-wing) extremism highlights the **gender conspiracy theory**, widespread among right-wing extremists, which views gender studies and activism for LGBT rights as 'the visible manifestation of a secret plot by powerful groups to hurt other in-groups, such as the Catholic church, or to threaten the family unit by triggering conflict between the sexes'.[72] Similarly, the Great Replacement conspiracy theory employs **anti-feminist narratives:** by framing feminism as an invention to deliberately distract women from their 'natural' role as mothers, it can be blamed for the decreasing birth rates and for immigrants becoming the majority.[73]

[65] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Released violent extremist or terrorist offenders*.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Digital exit work*; Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2022, *Management of returning FTFs and their family members with a focus on returning women and children*.
[69] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2022, *Study Visit to Paris on 'Effective management of the prison-exit continuum'*.
[70] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Focus on children*.
[71] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Violent incels and challenges for P/CVE.*; Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Incels*; Radicalisation Awareness Network Communication & Narratives, 2021, *The incel phenomenon.*
[72] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, Conspiracy theories and right-wing extremism, p. 11.
[73] Based on Europol, 2021, European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2020.

- A [RAN mapping paper](#) of the **incel phenomenon** underlines the misogynistic ideology of today's incels, which is characterised by dehumanisation of and hostility towards women.[74] It assesses how **violence against women** is expressed at different levels (interpersonal and societal) on incel ecosystem platforms and includes a first scoping of the issue in the EU context. It maps **links to other types of extremism** such as VRWE and jihadism, and considers the challenges for practitioners in identifying incels and intervening. Key recommendations include raising their awareness of the threat of male supremacist beliefs and violent misogynistic ideologies of incel communities; and developing alternative, positive and safe spaces for men and boys to share grievances and receive emotional support (see Relevant practices).

- The incel phenomenon is also studied by [RAN Communication and Narratives (C&N)](#), as part of the online 'Manosphere', 'a collection of online spaces promoting masculinity and misogyny, and opposing feminism'.[75] Practitioners stress the need to better understand the **vulnerabilities of young boys**, including relational trauma, social skills deficits and mental health issues. **Recommended prevention tools** include demystifying sex and sexuality among young people, offering alternative representations of masculinity and positive male role models, and fostering a humanising outlook on women and their role in society and relationships.

- Another [RAN expert meeting](#) on violent incels stresses that the phenomenon should be approached from a **gender-neutral perspective**, as men are targeted by incel violence too; women cannot be ruled out as potential perpetrators, although many subforms are clearly misogynist.[76]

- A [RAN Families, Communities and Social Care (FC&S)](#) meeting focused on local manifestations of VRWE looks at cases of **violent actions against lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer (LGTBIQ+) communities** (e.g. in eastern Europe), based on a strong anti-gender narrative and the gender conspiracy theory.[77]

- A [specialised paper](#) on the **role of sports** in VRWE and P/CVE unpacks how **destructive notions of masculinity** and the idealised return to 'traditional' or 'natural' gender roles and anti-feminism are core aspects of VRWE.[78] The paper provides recommendations for gender-sensitive P/CVE approaches that critically address traditional gender roles and advance alternative interpretations of these, alongside less destructive notions of strength and masculinity (see also Relevant practices).

Digital spaces, online campaigns and youth

In 2021, gender was also discussed increasingly in relation to online extremism, digital communities and the ways young people are targeted and radicalised online. Practitioners focus predominantly on girls and young women, and more broadly on advancing the understanding of digital communities and the experiences of both boys and girls in these, including in extremist online subcultures.

- An [expert meeting](#) exploring extremist **digital recruitment tactics as well as vulnerabilities of girls and young women** highlights experiences of online and offline discrimination, a longing for an online 'sisterhood' with like-minded peers, and questions related to insecurity, (developing) sexuality and domestic violence/abuse.[79] A key highlight from this discussion is that talking about women also necessitates talking about men: 'This involves intersectional approaches and an **understanding of gender constructs.**'[80] Other subjects include the lack of targeted (online) intervention means, as well as the need to understand push-and-pull factors for young women in far-left extremism.

- **Online extremism appears to be highly gendered,** according to a [specialised paper](#): content, messages and language are characterised by gender stereotypes and/or promote **strict gender**

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[74] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Incels*.
[75] Radicalisation Awareness Network Communication & Narratives, 2021, *The incel phenomenon.*
[76] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Violent incels and challenges for P/CVE.*
[77] Radicalisation Awareness Network Families, Communities and Social Care, 2022, *Violent right-wing extremism in communities.*
[78] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *The role of sports in violent right-wing extremist radicalisation and P/CVE.*
[79] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020, *(Young) women's usage of social media and lessons for preventing violent extremism.*
[80] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020, *(Young) women's usage of social media and lessons for preventing violent extremism,* p. 2.

segregation, and they address a (gender-)specific audience.[81] The paper provides an overview of the recruitment strategies and narratives of both RWE and Islamist extremist actors, and looks at **how women and girls are targeted** on the main online platforms.

- A key recommendation is that **P/CVE online campaigns** should not necessarily be focused narrowly on gender-specific topics, as they might unintentionally reproduce stereotypes and wrongfully homogenise the target audience based on their gender.[82] Instead, practitioners should cover a wide range of offers that can cater to the needs of different target audiences.

- The 2021 RAN Plenary paper identifies the challenge of increased **'radical' transgressive sexual behaviour** on the streets, at school and online, and stresses the need to better understand the gender-specific roles in non-violent (and violent) ideologies and the implications for **prevention work focused on girls**.[83] Training programmes on resilience, social skills and shared values are to be included in educational and youth work programmes for girls, to counter this transgressive behaviour which provides fuel for radicalisation efforts.

Recommendations for further work

This review shows that the understanding of gender amongst RAN Practitioners is evolving; with regard to practical P/CVE work, substantial challenges remain in tackling the complex range of topics at the intersection of gender and P/CVE. There are knowledge gaps on whether and how to translate gender specificity into practical P/CVE work. Gender has been increasingly discussed, with practitioners seeking not only to include women, but also to more meaningfully address women's needs – and to identify how they differ from those of men and boys – in P/CVE. There has been a significant focus on women's roles in Islamist extremism (and Daesh in particular), due to the urgency of dealing with returned and repatriated women in many EU Member States. While practitioners have begun to unpack gender roles in different VE ideologies, a better understanding is needed of how masculinity, misogyny and other gendered factors feature in the recruitment of men into VE, and in women's roles in non-Islamist extremism. More recent topics of interest include how certain interpretations of gender relations are instrumentalised in anti-feminist ideologies such as the misogynist incel movement and the 'manosphere'.[84]

While expert input through RAN specialised papers has helped improve and broaden the understanding of gender at a conceptual level, there is still only a cursory discussion of gender at the majority of RAN Practitioners meetings. Exceptions are the field of tertiary prevention, and particularly in relation to the management of returnees. At the same time, gender continues to be discussed in relation to women predominantly, especially in the context of returnees. The emerging discussions around the gender aspect in online interventions and misogynist extremist groups provide a sound base for future work.

Based on discussions in RAN Practitioners meetings, the gender-sensitive P/CVE approach is still in its infancy. This review indicates that gender-sensitive and gender-responsive practices and programmes are rarely explored in depth and few concrete examples exist. While practitioners are gradually becoming more aware of the role of gender in their work, the review highlights the lack of a more comprehensive awareness as well as significant gaps in the availability of appropriate tools and approaches for incorporating the gender dimension into practice.

Some debates were started in the 2021 RAN Practitioners meetings on the key topics of gender and extremism, with practitioners pointing out a growing need for their further development. In order to incorporate the evolving debate in this area, conversations and events should display a more comprehensive picture of the issues at hand. A more in-depth understanding of the gendered dynamics of recruitment, radicalisation and exit processes on the one hand, and **the importance of gender for extremist groups on a structural, organisational and ideological level** on the other, provide some interesting starting points for a more nuanced debate.

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[81] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2022, *Extremists' targeting of young women on social media and lessons for P/CVE.*
[82] Ibid.
[83] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *RAN Plenary: '10 years of RAN – learning from the past, preparing for the future'.*
[84] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Incels.*

The following summary of the gaps and recommendations in a conceptual understanding of gender, and its relevance in specific thematic areas, can serve as a basis for future work.

*Conceptual and thematic recommendations for **future work on gender***

- *Create stronger links to existing knowledge*. The growing interest in the design and implementation of gender-sensitive P/CVE work is producing a new body of knowledge in this area. Many of these resources currently do not make sufficient use of **existing knowledge from relevant fields** like gender studies, or Women, Peace and Security (WPS) (UN Resolution 1325), or gender-specific interventions from other contexts (such as post-conflict or disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR)). To ensure the good quality of resources and knowledge available to P/CVE practitioners, meeting composition, project design and networks can help create links between actors currently working in silos. Promising and credible measures may include shared project design and implementation, which could be fostered through formal requirements for credible cooperation and thematic efforts.

- *Account individually for women and minors*. Women, children and families have often been indiscriminately grouped together as one unit during RAN Practitioners meetings on returnee management and reintegration. While it is important to consider the role and dynamics of families (and communities) in both VE and P/CVE, experience on the ground shows that women and children (of different ages and genders) have different needs and require tailored responses and considerations. Scholars recommend **accounting individually for women and minors** in these categories.[85] Similarly, young people should not be considered gender neutral.[86]

- *Implement a nuanced view of gender roles in P/CVE programming*. While progress has been made, more can be done to recognise the diversity of gender-specific roles in extremist groups and the diverse needs attached to them. **There are no gender-neutral interventions.** Different types of masculinities and femininities warrant different P/CVE responses: not all 'men' and 'women' need the same kind of intervention. Therefore, notwithstanding the comparatively lower numbers of female VEs, a gendered analysis can benefit all programmes by shedding light on their assumptions and gendered impact.

- *Create (better) programming for women.* P/CVE programmes for women are very rare. This is particularly true for women in active and/or violent roles in extremist groups. Despite some progress, this review shows that existing programmes and debates largely adhere to stereotypical notions of femininity and continue to underestimate the active roles women play in extremist groups. Existing risk and needs assessment tools do not yet appropriately include gender.[87]

- *Fostering non-violent masculinities*. When P/CVE interventions are guided by stereotypes around gender, they risk not offering the best possible interventions. While a growing sensitivity to the different roles and experiences of women in extremist groups may be emerging, we continue to see significant **gaps in a more nuanced image of men's motivations and roles**. Men's diverse roles and needs, e.g. as fathers and caretakers, are rarely considered. Similarly, their involvement in violence should not be taken for granted. The need for trauma-informed care should be discussed more in this space – conversations about trauma are often confined to debates centred around women and children. **Interventions must take care not to reinforce the link between masculinity and violence**, but instead offer alternatives.

- *Recognising the central role of gender extremist groups and ideologies*. Gender is central to extremist groups, not just in terms of individual roles, but also for the in-groups' ability to form strategic alliances, recruit, and strengthen inner group cohesion.[88] There are studies on the specific norms and roles for men and women in different extremist groups, but we lack more systematic knowledge across the different forms of extremism. Furthermore, there is a need to better understand and respond to the **growing mobilisation and alliance-building of extremist actors around anti-gender narratives and**

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[85] Cook & Vale, 2018, *From Daesh to 'Diaspora'*.

[86] This pitfall was recognised in a RAN Rehabilitation meeting (*Returning FTFs and their families: Practitioners' insights on improving the return process*).

[87] Emerging practice: The EU project icommit seeks to develop a gender-sensitive diagnostics toolkit to address this gap: see https://multiagencycooperation.eu/what-we-do/ online.

[88] Violence Prevention Network & Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 2021, *How antifeminist and anti-gender ideologies contribute to violent extremism*.

misogyny. Various attacks have specifically targeted the LGBTQI+ community and the infrastructure of women's rights organisations.[89] In order to continue to promote democratic values, more attention is needed on gender equality and the protection of LGBTQI+ people.[90]

- *Linking different forms of violence*. Experiences of and relationships to violence are deeply gendered. P/CVE research and practice continues to show gaps in its understanding of **how different forms of violence are linked or associated**. Emerging research and practitioners' experiences suggest a **prevalence of misogyny among violent extremists across different ideologies.**[91] Moreover, studies have linked support for violent extremism to support for violence against women,[92] and point to a pattern of previous engagement in intimate partner violence among perpetrators of mass violence.[93] There are no systematic studies on these relevant issues for the European context to date.

Key topics of the RAN Practitioners Plenary 2021

The RAN Practitioners Plenary 2021 highlighted gender in VE and P/CVE as a key topic for 2022. The following areas had already been identified by practitioners as requiring further attention.[94] In line with the gaps and recommendations mentioned earlier, it is important to address these ongoing and emerging topics with a more comprehensive understanding of gender.

- **Gender and the digital dimension**. This involves exploring (possible) differences in how men and women are recruited online, their differing use of digital platforms, and how interventions could reflect these gendered differences. While this aspect has already been explored to some extent in 2021, the future focus should be explicitly on interventions like online campaigns and gender-responsive primary and secondary prevention tools, including gender awareness and training for teachers and youth workers.

- **Gender-aware prison and rehabilitation programmes**, including mental health approaches to specific trauma therapy for returned females. As this is a need highlighted in multiple RAN meetings and papers, a decisive move should be made to offer practical solutions that also consider trauma-informed responses for men.

- **Regional and national differences in the role of gender in extremist ideologies**, including in conspiracy narratives. This involves exploring how gender features in narratives in different parts of the EU so as to determine whether existing practices are western-European centric, and if so, finding a way to apply regional expertise. Future activities include more comprehensively examining the central role of anti-gender narratives in different forms of extremism, and taking stock of the dynamic nature of ideologies on an ongoing basis.

- **Extremist instrumentalisation of feminism and women's empowerment.** A concerning trend, especially in right-wing groups, is to use the alleged concern for 'women's rights' and 'feminism' to promote racist, sexist and antisemitic rhetoric, which is apparently closely linked to an increased anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric. Future activities should monitor these developments, taking into account their mobilising power among women and men. Furthermore, overlaps between different forms of group-based enmity should be further explored, for instance the overlap between anti-LGBTQI+ rhetoric and antisemitism. Awareness should be raised of extremist groups' efforts to co-opt language and actions intended to promote equality as a means to further exacerbate discrimination and group-based hatred instead.

Practical recommendations for next steps: streamlining gender-sensitive P/CVE within RAN

- *Immediate*. **Include gender experts in RAN activities across WGs and topics**. For example, existing specialised papers with research input are contributing to a more nuanced and broader understanding of

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[89] Ibid.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Wolf, 2021, *Frauen- und Queerfeindlichkeit. Ideologieübergreifendes Element extremistischer Gruppierungen im Kontext der gruppenbezogenen Menschenfeindlichkeit.*

[92] Johnston & True, 2019, *Misogyny & violent extremism*; Pearson, 2019, Extremism and toxic masculinity.

[93] Smith, 2021, What do many terrorists have in common?

[94] Ibid.

gender within RAN and in specific topics. However, their findings need to be mainstreamed and made more accessible for practitioners. One way to do this is through inviting authors to present insights from relevant specialised papers on gender at RAN Practitioners meetings. Research input needs to inform both practitioners' and policymakers' work in a more systematic way.

- *Short-to-medium term*. Carry out **a mapping study on existing gender-sensitive approaches and practices** across P/CVE pillars. The study should also explore how gender-sensitive practices from other fields (e.g. domestic and sexual violence) can be adapted to P/CVE (with a focus on tertiary prevention).

- *Short-to-medium term.* P/CVE work – and security-related professions in particular – continue to be male dominated and struggle to represent all genders. Meetings should **ensure representation and inclusion of underrepresented perspectives** and could benefit from concrete directives with regard to this.

- *Medium term*. Producing a **manual on gender sensitivity in P/CVE** and the implications for the different prevent strands/thematic areas. The review of RAN activities clearly underlines the need of practitioners for a common understanding of gender, based on which their awareness, skills and capacities can be further developed. The manual should strive to provide common definitions of key terms in RAN, taking into account the body of knowledge and experiences already existing in the fields of WPS and gender studies.[95]

- *Medium-to-long term*. Based on the manual, roll out (regular) **training for practitioners** to further their understanding of gender, equip them to question widespread assumptions, and gradually integrate gender-specific and gender-sensitive P/CVE across the board. In addition, **trauma-informed (gender-sensitive) training** is to be considered across WGs.[96]

- *Long term*. Invest in repeated **training, awareness-raising programmes for practitioners** and **hands-on advice** (in terms of concrete practical tools and resources), plus a regularly updated overview of existing **approaches and good practices** for implementing gender-sensitive programmes in P/CVE. These would be first-of-a-kind resources to provide necessary practical support to practitioners and organisations. Practitioners would also benefit from **conceptual support** in designing gender-specific programmes.

- *Ongoing*. RAN activities related to **quality management and evaluation in P/CVE** should systematically address gender.[97] Professionals need to be supported with the development of **gender-specific monitoring and evaluation indicators,** and their inclusion in intervention designs should be further promoted. The collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data should be boosted.

- *Ongoing*. In accounting for the need to establish gender as a cross-cutting and relevant issue in P/CVE, further **mainstreaming in policy documents** will become necessary. For instance, gender should be given greater importance as a standalone priority item in the strategic orientations for a coordinated EU approach to the prevention of radicalisation in future.

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[95] Violence Prevention Network & Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy, 2021, *How antifeminist and anti-gender ideologies contribute to violent extremism.*
[96] This recommendation was also highlighted by mental health practitioners during the RAN Plenary 2021 discussions.
[97] For example, see Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Effective and realistic quality management and evaluation of P/CVE.*

RAN 2021: Relevant (gender-sensitive) practices

* This list is not an exhaustive catalogue of practices, but reflects examples mentioned in the reviewed RAN activities.

Online and youth interventions

1. **Alternative narratives to anti-gender extremism**. With the active participation of girls and young women, the [NISA project](#) puts out video and online campaigns to develop alternative approaches to patriarchal and extremist narratives on social media.[98]

2. **Alternative online spaces for young males**. Practitioners have identified a lack of alternative online spaces for men and boys to engage in discussions about sexual relationships, dating, rejection and shame, and masculinity. The following approaches could be adapted to address the incel ideology discussed during meetings.

   - The work conducted by Christian Mogensen of the [Center for Digital Youth Care in Denmark](#), an intervention provider who plays games online with young men in an environment where they can build a relationship through gaming and discuss their grievances and world views.[99]

   - The gaming chat platform Discord can be used for discussions around mental health and positive masculinity. [Next Gen Men](#), a Canada-based organisation working on positive masculinity, created a Discord server for boys aged 12 to 15 to share and support each other in a healthy and monitored environment, with effective safeguards in place.[100]

   - The Diamond programme of the [Dutch Foundation for Intercultural Participation and Integration](#) is aimed at 12-to-24-year-olds, experiencing identity problems. It offers room for young people to explore their identity and perspectives, including gender roles and the problem of 'loverboys'.[101]

3. **Addressing gender stereotypes through sports**. Several practices focused on sports aim to provide alternative concepts of 'traditional' gender roles and promote critical thinking around destructive notions of masculinity. For example, the German prevention project [Islam-Ist](#) promotes female role models in the context of P/CVE and martial arts, by deconstructing the clichés around Muslim women's participation in martial arts.[102]

Deradicalisation, disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration (including of returned women)

1. The gender-specific [deradicalisation project](#) in Germany, '**Intervention points for gender-sensitive deradicalization work among women and girls in the area of Salafism**'. The project seeks to achieve a better understanding of the radicalisation and exit processes of women, as well as identifying intervention points for a gender-sensitive approach to deradicalisation measures for women.[103]

2. The **attachment-based parenting intervention** (NIKA method), from Child Protection in the Netherlands, focuses on parents and their children aged between 9 months and 6 years, who are at high risk of disoriented attachment or showing signs of attachment issues. The goal is to prevent or reduce the attachment issues between parent and child. The method trains parents to mitigate/stop disrupted parenting and develop a sensitive parenting style by using video feedback, psycho-education and take-home assignments.[104]

3. [Präfix R®](#), a **coaching programme for imprisoned parents** in Germany, is one of the few projects that combines a reflection on parenting values with deradicalisation interventions. Präfix R® aims to initiate effects in the framework of early radicalisation prevention, particularly with respect to children. The approach can be classified as secondary prevention, since coaches use targeted deradicalisation

and disengagement interventions to **(gender-)critically reflect on and disrupt attitudinal and behavioural patterns** with participants.[105]

4. A bespoke **high-security prison wing** in the Netherlands for 15 women convicted of terrorism has a child-friendly visiting centre, and gender-appropriate skills training and rehabilitation activities on offer.[106]

5. Due to the growing number of extremist women detainees in France (in 2021, numbering 72, a third of whom were involved in attempted attacks) and the need to better understand their gender-specific radicalisation factors and provide tailored support, the prison administration decided to set up a new **radicalisation assessment unit in prison exclusively for women.**[107] Many grew up in dysfunctional families and/or were victims of violence, including sexual violence. These factors, as well as their experiences in Syria and Iraq, including having been one of multiple wives and losing their husbands, are sources of trauma.[108]

6. Gender stereotypes and the role of women and men in Islam (and in the Daesh narratives) are frequently discussed by **religious and cultural mediators** working with VETOs in France along the prison-exit continuum, and the councillors are both male and female.[109]

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[98] The practice is included in Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2022, *Extremists' targeting of young women on social media and lessons for P/CVE.*
[99] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2022, *Extremists' targeting of young women on social media and lessons for P/CVE.*
[100] Ibid.
[101] Discussed during the online meeting on 24 November 2020. Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2020, *(Young) women's usage of social media and lessons for preventing violent extremism.*
[102] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *The role of sports in violent right-wing extremist radicalisation and P/CVE.*
[103] More information: see https://www.unibw.de/ciss-en/projects/gender-sensitive-deradicalization-work online.
[104] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2022, *Management of returning FTFs and their family members with a focus on returning women and children.*
[105] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Focus on Children.* See also the methodological handbook of the project in German in bibliography.
[106] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Released violent extremist or terrorist offenders.*
[107] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2022, *Study Visit to Paris on 'Effective management of the prison-exit continuum'.* See also Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2021, *Repatriated foreign terrorist fighters and their families,* a paper which mentions that gender-sensitive counter-radicalisation initiatives aimed at female violent extremist prisoners have been implemented in France, citing UNODC (2019) p. 105.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2022, *Study Visit to Paris on 'Effective management of the prison-exit continuum'.*

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