



QUARTERLY RESEARCH REVIEW

Radicalised women

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Radicalisation Awareness Network

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BnH	blood and honour
CMO	context, mechanisms and outcomes (Analysis)
CVE	countering violent extremism
DDR	disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration
D&R	disengagement and reintegration
EU MS	European Union Member States
FTF	foreign terrorist fighter
GDAP	German Council of Foreign Relations
ISIL/	Islamic State in Syria and the Levant
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NCTV	National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (Netherlands)
NSU	National Socialist Underground
P/CVE	preventing and countering violent extremism
PBC	Project Based Collaborations
QRR	Quarterly Research Review
SPRR	screening, prosecution, rehabilitation and rehabilitation
USA	United States of America
VE	violent extremism
VEDR	violent extremist disengagement and reintegration
VEOs	violent extremist organisations
VFLE	violent far-left extremism
VFRE	violent far-right extremism
VIE	violent Islamic extremism

INTRODUCTION

This Quarterly Research Review summarises the current state of research in relation to the topic of radicalised women. The aim of this review is to provide policymakers with a compilation of the most relevant publications and their key messages concerning the radicalisation processes of women, the roles they play in extremist groups (of all types) and the mechanisms available to deal with radicalised women. The literature draws primarily on European women’s experiences of radicalisation. In a European context, this means focusing on women over 18.

This Quarterly Research Review centres on the following subtopics and is structured as follows:

- **Methodology:** This section outlines the research methods, specifically the criteria for the inclusion of publications and limits of the review.
- **Strategic summary:** This section highlights the key takeaways from the literature review.
- **Pathways into radicalisation and roles:** The first section includes papers addressing the radicalisation of women and the roles they assume in violent extremist groups. This includes themes such as:
 - the differences between processes of women’s radicalisation as opposed to male radicalisation;
 - the reasons why women join extremist groups and the roles they subsequently play in different types of extremist organisations, including jihadist, far right and left wing, among others, as well as the roles they play in the family;
 - the role that factors such as a lack of equal opportunities and search for empowerment, gender-based violence and concepts of femininity or masculinity play in radicalisation processes and in framing women’s roles in groups.
- **Mechanisms and processes for dealing with radicalised women:** The second section includes literature on the available mechanisms and processes to deal with radicalised women both inside and outside a prison context. The primary body of literature focuses on dealing with women who have joined the Islamic State in Syria (ISIL) and draws on the experience from the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) field. This includes the following topics:
 - Reflections on the European screening, prosecution, rehabilitation and rehabilitation (SPRR) system of violent extremists from a gender perspective;
 - Current approaches to disengage and deradicalise women in prisons, including gendered approaches for the management and rehabilitation of female extremist offenders;
 - The potential role of the family or children in women’s deradicalisation;
 - Good practice from adjacent fields, namely DDR, in relation to disengagement and reintegration outside prisons. This literature draws on conflict zones outside Europe.
- **Conclusion:** This section provides an overview of key findings stemming from a cross-cutting analysis of evidence and insights from all the papers reviewed.

This Quality Research Review (QRR) is linked to the consolidated overview on successful practices to disengage radicalised women and counter the intergenerational transmission of radicalisation/extremist ideologies (RAN PS Global Agenda, p. 22).

METHODOLOGY

Researchers for this paper conducted targeted searches in English and Spanish to identify relevant literature with a view to include:

- sources published since 2018;
- sources that are accessible either as open-source publications through *inter alia* academic journals or as a grey literature publication (i.e. research published outside traditional commercial or academic publishing and distribution channels). Due to the limited amount of literature that focuses on non-Islamist violent extremism, we have included two papers (Gasztold and Koehler) that are behind a paywall due to their relevance to the QRR.

Relevant search terms applied include women and terrorism; women and radicalisation; women and violent extremism; gender and radicalisation; women and jihad; women and Islamist extremism; women and the far right; foreign terrorist fighters; women and exit programmes; women and disengagement; women and deradicalisation; women and reintegration; women and DDR.

The searches identified 12 relevant sources. The study team extracted the core findings of each paper, focusing on the subtopics selected for this review:

- Pathways into radicalisation and the roles radicalised women play in extremist groups, including any differences between Islamist extremism, the far right, the far left and other types of extremism.
- Mechanisms and processes for dealing with radicalised women, both inside and outside the prison setting.

This review spans a significant range of relevant and contemporary sources relevant to the general topic 'Radicalised women, including returned women' and proposed subtopics. However this is not an exhaustive review of the literature, and a few limitations faced by the authors should be considered:

- Considering the final audience of the paper, the authors prioritised the search on the European Union (EU) and Western Balkans' experiences (as a priority area of interest for the European Commission) in relation to Islamist and far right extremism. Therefore, this review does not reflect the whole range of literature recently published on the topic/subtopics. Some of the countries in the papers chosen include, but are not limited to: The Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, France, Ireland, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, the United Kingdom and the Western Balkans.
- The exception to this is the paper by Mary Beth Altier (2021) on DDR, which is based on experiences from conflict zones and is therefore outside the European experience. It is deemed important to the section on disengagement and deradicalisation to provide learning on handling radicalised women in adjacent fields to the field of terrorism, which still has a weak evidence base.
- Some of the topics are more comprehensively covered than others. As noted above, the field of disengagement and reintegration (D&R) inside and outside prisons is poorly documented, particularly from the perspective of women. This reflects the fact that this type of programming in Europe tends to be individualised rather than gendered. This work is also deemed sensitive from a security perspective and public information is limited.
- Finally, the overview drew on the findings of the following past RAN PS deliverables in the design of the QRR and has been considered in the conclusions.
 - PCB on Child Returnees (2021), which also addressed women returnees and lessons learnt from adjacent fields;

- RAN PS 2021 Consolidated Ov. No 5 (Research) on the needs and risks of women returnees;
- RAN PS 2021 Consolidated Ov. No 11 (Prevent) on the reintegration and security risks of women returned from Syria and Iraq.

STRATEGIC SUMMARY

This Quarterly Research Summary (QRR) investigates the topic of radicalised women. Despite the growing volume of research on violent extremism (VE), there is a gap in understanding the specificities related to women's radicalisation vis-à-vis men. This QRR examines recent literature on women across four subtopics, including the process of radicalisation, the roles of women in VE groups, management of women in prisons and the mechanisms for dealing with radicalised women outside prison. The focus is on the European experience and includes analysis of women who have joined Islamist, far right and far left VE groups.

Key takeaways identified by this review include the following:

- Women joining VE groups are **not passive actors with little agency or choice**. Even in Islamist or far right groups, which position women in traditional family roles, women facilitate or support the violent operations of others, make original contributions to ideology, shape discourses, champion causes, engage in recruitment and propaganda, and adopt leadership roles (more often in the far left). The **perception of women as brainwashed victims restricts women's access to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) and D&R programmes**, which are often focused on male combatants.
- **European and western countries often lack rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for women VEs**. The management of extremist women in prison is challenging because there is **less experience in dealing with female VEs than with men**. This can have serious implications in the prosecution, risk assessment and management of women VEs in prison (e.g. more lenient sentences for female returnees or insufficient facilities in prisons for women, especially for mothers).
- There is some evidence that women's radicalisation can involve more **personal and emotional elements**, including narratives that romanticise VE groups or position women as the key to racial salvation or inseparable to a group's ideology. Yet, others join for political reasons or are forced to join. And, while personal factors are also involved in male radicalisation, there is a different perception of male and female radicalisation.
- **In reality, complex push-and-pull factors are involved in women's radicalisation**, including feelings of marginalisation and injustice in western society, poor access to the labour market / unemployment, low education levels (namely for women joining far right and Islamist VE groups), influence of social networks including the family, shameful experiences of sexual violence and the role of patriarchy in pushing women (husband's influence) or in pulling women towards VE in an attempt to resist patriarchy (most relevant to the far left).
- **Social networks and relationships, online and offline, are particularly significant for women's radicalisation across all ideologies. Women are good online recruiters and are more likely to be radicalised online than men**. Women play a vital role in the family, as the educators of their children, and therefore carry forward radical ideologies.
- Future counter-radicalisation approaches for women should focus on **addressing the socio-economic conditions** that are exploited to recruit women. Lessons from DDR highlight that **more obstacles exist for women than men**. Women face different, and at times greater, socio-economic discrimination, less opportunities for vocational training (which in turn limits their labour integration) and receive less psychosocial support. Women also face more stigmatisation from their involvement in violence, experience of sexual violence or being perceived as bad mothers.
- Families and communities should also be involved in rehabilitation and reintegration efforts (to avoid further stigmatisation), as well as engaging youth welfare services

to deal with children and minors. A better understanding of online radicalisation from a gendered perspective is also needed to limit the exploitation of online ecosystems/networks for VE purposes.

- **Criminal legal frameworks have evolved to allow for more effective sentencing of women involved in VE or female foreign terrorism fighter (FTF) returnees.** In the case of female FTFs who joined ISIL, western countries have gradually diverged from stereotyped notions of women, such as the 'jihadi bride,' to a better understanding of women's roles as perpetrators or facilitators of violence. Yet, **'positive security biases' are still observed.** The perceived lesser threat posed by women, especially regarding female ISIL members, can lead to differential treatment from government institutions and, at times, more lenient criminal prosecution and sentencing. It is recommended that EU Member States do not underestimate the threat posed by VE women.

SELECTED PAPERS

WOMEN'S PATHWAYS INTO RADICALISATION AND THE ROLES THEY PLAY

Campion, Kristy (2020), 'Women in the Extreme and Radical Right: Forms of Participation and Their Implications', *Social Sciences*, 9:9. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9090149>

KEY MESSAGE:

- Women in far right groups are not passive actors but engage in 6 forms of participation that range from violent to non-violent and public to private.
- Women engage as kinetic actors, facilitate the violent operations of others, make original contributions to ideology, shape discourses, champion causes and exemplify gendered and idealised identity.
- Women in the far right are positioned as key to racial salvation or endangered womanhood.

This study refutes historical understandings of women as passive actors in far right groups by studying women already prominent in the literature, in addition to select media reports. The author proposes a framework based on 6 forms of participation: **violent actors, thinkers, facilitators, promoters, activists and exemplars**. Some individuals engage in multiple forms of participation.

Women are **rarely lone violent actors and instead are part of formal groups** such as blood and honour (BnH) and the National Socialist Underground (NSU) in Germany **or act as a pair of individuals**. Women also facilitate the violent actions of others (e.g. providing safe houses, accommodation, obtaining weapons and supplies). Women can work below the threat detection threshold because they may not be physically present at meetings. This makes some women violent threats and others a valuable source of intelligence, as they tend to span multiple networks and strata. This may also explain how far right movements and networks are supported and sustained.

The author argues that while there are misogynist elements in the far right, there are also women who are active contributors to the **ideological environment**. **Thinkers, promoters and exemplars** construct ideas and theories on traditional femininity, gender interactions and behavioural aspirations and shape the ideological space. **Activists, the largest area of female participation**, have public profiles, which they use to normalise attitudes and behaviours. **Exemplars have the highest ideological significance**. Women, such as those in the **Tradwife movement**, have been turned into **symbols and heroines** by epitomising a desired, gendered and idealised identity. **Racial purity and motherhood are inseparable**, intertwined as the salvation of the race. **Interaction between these women is key**, and interdependency is common.

The author concludes that **women in far right groups can be wives, warriors and more**. This challenges common assumptions that women on the extreme right lack agency and choice and are relegated to passive forms of participation.

Gasztold, Aleksandra (2020), 'The Specificity of Female Terrorism', in: *Feminist Perspectives on Terrorism* (Springer, Cham, 2020), pp. 83-121. Paywall access [here](#) or request access from author [here](#).

KEY MESSAGES:

- The participation of women in terrorism is no different than men's but the perception of it is.
- Women are increasingly active in support, sabotage, military and leadership roles in all VE groups.
- Religious terrorist groups – far right and Islamist – have been slower to include women in armed operations and in leadership roles.

The author brings a **feminist approach to analysing the radicalisation process** and explores the **complex factors involved in a woman's decision** to take part in VE. She examines the literature on VE groups historically and contemporarily and across all types of extremism.

The author finds that there is **no peculiarity in women's radicalisation**. Regardless of the motives and factors leading to it, such behaviour involves the **pursuit of the goal and the means to attain it** (including committing crimes). Despite this, women's participation in violence is perceived to be associated with **selflessness and suffering** or seen as **irrational**. When a woman takes part in a terrorist attack, this is often accompanied by efforts to identify **emotional or personal factors** – the experience of death in the family, infertility, unmarried status or sexual violence. The author acknowledges some truth in this and refers to Bloom's work on **women suicide terrorists and the concept of the 'Four R's plus One' (revenge, redemption, respect, relationship + rape)**. ISIL is also known to have recruited young women and girls in Europe by facilitating illicit sexual contact.

The author acknowledges that **women appear to radicalise more in a group** and that social network interactions, especially those involving family and partners, represent a greater danger for women.

The roles of women in terrorist groups are increasingly visible in all forms of VE and in different geographical locations. The functions and tasks carried out by women can be divided into: **(a) support** (recruiters and proselytisers, basic logistics, fundraising, information (intelligence and counter-espionage), **(b) sabotage** (entrapment role), **military** and **(c) political leadership**.

This, however, **differs (sometimes, significantly) among various ideological milieus**. **Women's participation in violence is more common in left wing groups**, in national, secular liberation organisations and in anarchic, revolutionary and eco-terrorist currents. In some contexts, (the Lord's Resistance Army, LRA or Boko Haram), **women's violence might be forced**.

Far right movements, especially religious ones, and Islamist religious terrorist groups' approach to women is **patriarchal**, which leads to **differences in the roles they fill**. In these groups, women more frequently tend to carry **out logistical tasks or act as recruiters and propaganda** facilitators. Even in these groups, women have **increasing access to roles and tasks previously reserved for men** (military training, armed operations). Women attackers have tactical advantages: women can hide explosives-filled vests and 'shahid belts' under traditional clothing, making detection more difficult. Despite these changes, women are still rarely involved in setting the directions of the organisation's development and its ideological makeup.

The author concludes that given the functions women play in extremist and terrorist groups, gender needs to be prioritised in counterterrorism strategies. Whilst most terrorist organisation members are men, **applying the gender category can be misleading in profiling terrorist threats and estimating risk**.

Koehler, Daniel (2021), “**The Fighting Made Me Feel Alive:” Women’s Motivations for Engaging in Left-wing Terrorism: A Thematic Analysis**’, *Terrorism and Political Violence*. Paywall access [here](#) and request through academia [here](#).

KEY MESSAGES:

- There are 4 key motivational themes behind women’s activity in far left terrorism: consequentialism, internationalism, moral superiority of the cause, and responding to intolerable prison conditions caused by illegitimate governmental force or police brutality.
- This highlights the importance of understanding women’s involvement in terrorism through their own complex decisions and agency.

Research on women’s engagement in far left terrorism is underdeveloped, even though **women generally have a stronger position** (in terms of hierarchy and in membership numbers) within these organisations compared to other ideological milieus, especially the far right and Islamist. The author addresses this gap by exploring the autobiographies of 13 German and American women who were active in far left terrorist groups from the 1970s to the early 1990s to identify motivational themes that drew women to terrorism.

The author’s analysis identified 4 motivational themes: 1) One of the strongest and widely shared is **consequentialism**, which means acting living a completely authentic life as **political warriors**. The women in the research sample very strongly express their desire to **act, not talk, to bear arms and ‘fight like men’**. 2) **Internationalism** and the **desire to be part of a global movement**. This includes concerns about injustice, suffering, poverty or conflicts around the world. 3) **Moral superiority**, which entails a quasi-religious belief in the **higher moral values**, including fighting on behalf of the oppressed of the revolution’s cause and goals. 4) **Fighting back against governmental repression**. This stemmed from concerns about **perceived inhumane conditions in prisons**, a major pull factor for the women. Imprisonment came to be seen as a form of **modern slavery** and a symptom of capitalist societies.

Though the 4 themes are not complete, the author asserts that they reflect the fact that women in far left terrorist groups are driven by a complex and intertwined set of motives, which are both **political and deeply personal** to the women in his analysis. In fact, the **injustice and oppression of others** was a much stronger motivating force than their personal experiences. The author highlights that although the far right is concerned about the liberation of a national or racial collective, there are similarities and factors such as **fighting for the liberation or protection of specific groups of victims** that could be an important common motivating force for women in terrorism across ideological milieus.

Interestingly, the **4 core themes identified downplay gender-specific** (anti-sexism, feminism) themes. They are not unimportant, but they are subordinate to other themes. This provides weight to other research, which concludes that the **majority of far-left female militants do not identify as feminists**. In explanation, the author suggests that the experience of the transition to political violence is a much more significant process for women than men, which fundamentally alters the women’s concept of self.

Finally, the question of **exit processes for women** involved in far left terrorism is largely unexplored. The author recommends that since most women in the sample expressed continued belief in the overall motivational themes, the development and shifts of female commitment to left-wing political violence over time should be explored in subsequent research.

Mondani, Hernan, Amir Rostami, Tine Askanius, Jerzy Sarnecki & Christofer Edling (2021), 'Women in Violent Extremism in Sweden', *Proceedings* 77:1. <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1544201/FULLTEXT05.pdf>

KEY MESSAGES:

- There are similarities and differences between ideological milieus.
- Women in violent far-left extremism have more stable and socially robust conditions when it comes to education and labour market attachment.
- When it comes to education, women in Islamist VE have similar levels to those on the violent far right but have the least resources overall.

Based on register data from the Swedish Police and Swedish Security Service (in 2017) and other governmental agencies (data from 2007-2016), this report provides a quantitative assessment of women belonging to 3 categories of VE: violent Islamist extremism (VIE), violent far-right extremism (VFRE), and violent far-left extremism (VFLE). The datasets were dissected to **focus on demographic data factors** including the socio-economic conditions, education and mental health, crime types and co-offending patterns of these women. The authors use descriptive statistics and network analysis to **compare women in VE to 3 reference groups**: 1) biological sisters, 2) men that belong to the 3 violent extremist milieus, and 3) women that belong to other antagonistic milieus.

The dataset comprised of 182 women. While women constitute a small minority in all 3 milieus, **the largest share of women is among VFLE (18.1 %)**, in comparison to 13.5 % among VIE and 10.7 %, VFRE. Key demographic findings include:

- **age**: There are **no dramatic differences** for women across the 3 milieus. Women in VFLE are slightly younger than in other types of extremism. In VIE, women tend to be significantly younger than men.
- **family**: Patterns among biological sisters showed that **women in VIE tend to be the eldest sister**. Something could therefore be gained from interventions in families where the older sibling turns to extremism to safeguard the other siblings.
- **birth**: Women in VFRE were nearly all born in Sweden (97 %); likewise, women in VFLE were largely Swedish born (87 %) and the rest elsewhere in Europe. In VIE, only 43 % of women were Swedish born, followed by European and north and sub-Saharan African.
- **education and labour resources**: Women in VFLE rank the highest in terms of education and employment. Women in the two other violent extremist milieus have lower education, suggesting higher exposure to social vulnerabilities. Women in VFRE have the lowest levels of education but more resources than women in VIE. Women in VIE also had the lowest employment rates, thus, a much greater dependence on social services.
- **mental health**: Women in VIE had no registered records of major mental disorders. VFLE women had the highest prevalence of in-patient major mental disorders, but the same in-patient other (non-major) mental disorders rate as VFRE women.
- **criminality**: Most women in VE do not have a criminal record, which is particularly striking when compared to men. But there is a marked difference among the milieus: 60 % of women in VFLE were suspected of at least one crime, compared to 44 % among VFRE and 37 % among VIE. Co-offending, including the links associated with it, also ranks highest among women in VFLE, demonstrating the degrees to which co-offending networks play an important role for future (potential) crimes. Women in VIE are the most isolated. This suggests that women in VFLE participate more often in political actions where violence is common because their ideology allows for greater equality.

German, Kathleen & Rosemary Pennington (2019), 'Sisters of The Caliphate: Media and The Women of ISIS', *Journal of Vincentian Social Action*, 4:2.
<https://scholar.stjohns.edu/jovsa/vol4/iss2/7>

KEY MESSAGES:

- The process of recruitment and radicalisation to violent Islamist extremism tends to be a more personal process for women than men.
- Forming intimate connections, particularly online, has been an effective ISIL recruitment tactic for female recruits.

This paper addresses how radicalisation to ISIL among western women differed from men, and the roles women played. It argues that there is **still a tendency to neglect the role of women as agents, perpetrators or even active participants in terrorism**. The authors draw on the literature on female fighters to contextualise the women of ISIL and examine internet recruitment material to understand how the group has recruited women online.

Social media and the internet played an important role in radicalising western women to join ISIL in Syria and Iraq. ISIL targeted women through **personal and emotive imagery and messages**. This included presenting a utopian political vision that resonated with **feelings of injustice and grievances** that are relatable to the experiences of (primarily) Muslim women in the West. **Gendered narratives and roles** were prominent in ISIL's propaganda targeting men and women. While men were targeted as the soldiers of war, **messages for women focused on their role as mothers, sisters and lovers**. Although women did assume these roles, once radicalised, women can and did change to more active armed roles.

Women were often recruited through other women on the internet. The strategy is effective as it is based on the 'sisterhood' attraction of ISIL and appeals to the traditional role women have as supporters of the group – one sold as **incremental to the success of male fighters** (namely their husbands and sons). Material targeting women, as opposed to men, primarily focused on personal appeal, whilst the **process of radicalisation often occurred by building intimate connections**, both between women and between women and the movement itself. They engaged in one-to-one conversations with recruiters from the same country who were similar in age and interests.

Women are more vulnerable to radicalisation through **romanticised imagery and narratives about ISIL**. Images and messages often illustrated ISIL and male fighters as not only righteous, in defence of Islam and Muslims, but also as compassionate, using material of male fighters with kittens and playing with children. **Popular romantic traditions were exploited to recruit younger women**, offering them a story of exciting and chaste romance. ISIL media also produced messages **romanticising the role of women as jihadi fighters**, defenders of their family and religion, as well as the saviours of the sisters from western imperialism.

The early tactical use of soft personal messages targeting women **evolved over time to more frequently emphasise the framing of women as foreign fighters**. Featuring female fighters served as a **tool for empowering women** within ISIL propaganda, as well as other extremist groups including al-Qaeda. These female fighter narratives were also understood to be a way of hiding the inherently patriarchal norms of ISIL, selling women alternative ideas about their role in extremist groups and **suggesting they have agency in their own life and choices** (their lives are not entirely decided by men, as patriarchal norms entail). These targeted messages also helped **obscure the many ways women can and do become the victims of violence**.

In the future, it is important to analyse the technologies of netwar to fully understand the shifting contexts of conflicts and how recruiters are targeting women and girls.

Kelmendi, Vesë (2019), '**Not Just Victims: Women in Terrorism from the Western Balkans**', in A. Alexander, *Perspectives on the future of women, gender and violent extremism*, George Washington University. Access [here](#).

KEY MESSAGES:

- The process and factors of radicalisation for women from the Western Balkans is different to women from most of Europe. Not all women were radicalised prior to migrating to Syria and Iraq; some women forcibly migrated (namely to join their husbands and family). Some women also willingly joined ISIL.
- The role of patriarchy and masculine cultures influences the push-and-pull factors involved in women's radicalisation, whilst other factors, including socio-economic conditions, trauma and violence, identity crises, etc., are also relevant.

This paper focuses on the radicalisation and role of Western Balkan women to violent Islamist extremism, namely ISIL. The author **contextualises the Western Balkan landscape** and how the specificities of the society and norms influence the radicalisation of women, as well as **how these differ from women in other parts of Europe**, particularly western Europe.

The paper suggests that the inherently **patriarchal social norms in Western Balkan states**, like Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Albania, **play an important role in why women radicalise and join violent extremist movements**. Patriarchal norms in the Western Balkans include the idea that husbands and men are authoritative figures that women are meant to obey. However, women in such societies also **play important roles as mothers who raise and educate children**, including in favour of a masculine culture and patriarchal ideas.

There are a **variety of push-and-pull factors** involved in women's participation in VE in the Western Balkans. This includes socio-economic conditions, ideological views, family and friend relations, identity crises and trauma. Additionally, the migration to Syria and Iraq to join ISIL was not always a personal decision for women. **Some women were forced to migrate with their husband and family**. This reflects how patriarchal social norms and forced familial migration to ISIL intertwined in the Western Balkan context.

The role Western Balkan women played in ISIL was **often supportive and focused on educating their children**, as well as other children, and motivating their husbands to fight. By portraying their husbands as heroes, **wives of foreign fighters played a role in radicalisation and indoctrination, particularly of the younger generation of boys** (groomed to become ISIL fighters). Given the territorial defeat of ISIL, **carrying forward the legacy and ideology** of the group became the 'means of survival' for ISIL and **women reportedly play a key role in this**.

Roles occupied by women involved in ISIL changed overtime. While patriarchal social norms and the influence of husbands were important factors for some, once women were in conflict zone(s) and radicalised, their roles expanded beyond traditional family roles, including becoming **active participants in plotting and carrying out attacks**.

The online activity of Balkan women primarily pertained to **establishing social networks and acting as the recruiters for ISIL**. This included using social media platforms like Facebook and Telegram to fuel propaganda in their home country and across the Balkans more generally (relying on regional social norms to draw in other women), as well as **provide instructions and guidance to new recruits** on how to avoid being tracked or monitored by the authorities.

The author outlines how **women returning to the Balkans are still confronted by the patriarchal social norms** and conditions that **serve as radicalising pathways**. Returnee women face **social prejudice from family and friends, and stigmatisation from their community**. Lastly, women are often the ones that continue to **carry extremist ideologies forward**, especially in more traditional societies, due to their role as mothers and educators.

MECHANISMS AND PROCESSES FOR DEALING WITH RADICALISED WOMEN

Davis, Jessica. (2020), 'The Future of the Islamic State's Women: Assessing their Potential Threat', *ICCT Policy Brief*, June 2020. <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2020/06/The-future-of-the-Islamic-State%E2%80%99s-Women-assessing-their-potential-threat.pdf>

KEY MESSAGES:

- The security risks posed by female ISIL supporters have long been underestimated, even if their roles in the so-called 'Caliphate' went beyond the private sphere.
- It is important to mitigate the consequences of this positive security bias on prosecution and exit work.

The aim of this policy brief is to analyse the negative implications that gender bias has on threat assessment and counterterrorism practices, and provide recommendations to mitigate this challenge. It argues that a better understanding of women's roles within ISIL in Syria and Iraq will help policymakers and practitioners to overcome gender stereotypes, and more accurately assess the potential risk posed by female returnees, as well as to design exit programmes adapted to their specific needs.

Gender stereotypes fuel a positive security bias towards women members of VE organisations. This results in the underestimation of female involvement in roles beyond the private sphere. Women living in the so-called 'Caliphate' have acquired/strengthened a set of skills and knowledge that could make them valuable additions to terrorist activities in their countries of origin.

The gender bias when dealing with female returnees is fuelled by the way the media portrays women and terrorism, in combination with limited academic outputs on the topic. Expressions such as 'jihadi brides', 'ISIL widows', 'ISIL wives', along with the recurrent grouping of 'women and children', suggest that women only have relevant roles in the private sphere as caregivers and baby-makers. This infantilises women within the terrorist organisation (in terms of skills and mental capacity) and edulcorates their motivations. In addition to this, scholarly work on the issue is in its infancy. **Often, in datasets that count political violence events, attackers are assumed to be male, or no gender variable is included.**

While it is true that female ISIL members have primarily had domestic roles, practitioners cannot base their assessment regarding an individual's risk on assumptions. Understanding the capabilities developed while in the group and the current intent of a person is more critical than understanding how individuals came to join ISIL. **The perceived lesser threat posed by female ISIL members can lead to a differential treatment from government institutions in comparison to their male counterparts.** Another consequence of the positive security bias is the prioritisation of collecting evidence and intelligence concerning male activity in the ISIL in detriment to that of female, which in turn has implications for prosecution. Given the significant re-engagement rate of individuals that involuntarily and collectively disengaged from terrorist activity, medium to long-term monitoring is essential.

The authors list a series of policy **recommendations**:

- P/CVE practitioners (ranging from case managers, intelligence collectors and analysts to professionals in charge of risk assessment) should receive gender-awareness training with a specific focus on the role of women in VE groups. This will allow them to better anticipate women's involvement in future terrorist groups.
- Supporting the development of media training and guidelines on gender in terrorism would promote accurate and neutral reporting about female FTFs /returnees, and ultimately contribute to mitigate the security bias.

- Ensuring the collection of evidence and intelligence about the activities of both genders in ISIL would mitigate the tendency to fall into a positive security bias and assist the prosecution of female returnees.
- Organisations working in conflict zones that collect evidence of crimes, law enforcement and security services should reflect on how gender shapes their work, particularly women's roles in violence, to reduce the risk of underestimating the potential threat posed by women.
- Standardisation of threat assessment tools across jurisdictions with similar legal frameworks to deal with terrorism is recommended to mitigate the risk that a woman may 'slip through the cracks' or do 'jurisdiction shopping', choosing the jurisdiction that will be more beneficial for her case.
- Women and children must be treated as separate entities.

Kumar, Riza (2021), *'Female foreign terrorist fighters: challenges in repatriation, prosecution, and rehabilitation'*, Counter Extremism Project. Access [here](#).

KEY MESSAGES:

- Evaluation of existing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes is challenging.
- There are challenges specific to female returnees when it comes to rehabilitation and reintegration, but states do not have programmes targeting female returnees.

This paper constitutes a comprehensive overview of approaches guiding the management of female FTFs in France, Germany, Ireland, Belgium, Sweden, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States of America (USA) and Australia. Following a brief description of the roles of women in ISIL, the author maps policies and practices concerning their repatriation, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration. Relevant case studies of female ISIL supporters tried in western countries are also presented. The paper includes a brief discussion about the extent to which assumptions (rather than evidence) about the notion of recidivism among terrorist convicts lead to policies (or the lack thereof).

Authorities face many **repatriation challenges**: the crimes committed by returnees in Syria and Iraq are uncertain and the Kurdish administration that is detaining them in many cases is not internationally recognised. However, if governments delay the repatriation of foreign fighters, rehabilitation programmes may struggle to reverse the extremist beliefs and grievances that pushed them to travel to conflict zones in the first place. Repatriation approaches vary among the examined countries. The USA is the most favourable to repatriation. France, Belgium and the Netherlands are hesitant; Sweden and Australia more explicitly against it.

To counter the growing influx of ISIL supporters travelling to Syria and Iraq, **legal frameworks have steadily evolved to allow an effective sentencing of FTFs**. Initially, western countries handed out more lenient sentences for female returnees, but progressively the preconceived notion of the 'jihadi bride' has been countered with evidence that women have also been perpetrators or facilitators of violence. Western states have so far chosen between prosecuting female returnees themselves or 'outsourcing' the prosecution to other states like Iraq (e.g. France). When tried at home, the most commonly used charges against female FTFs have been membership of a terrorist organisation, war crimes, travel to a conflict/war zone, financing terrorism, recruitment for a terrorist group, hate speech or incitement of violence. It is noteworthy that **even if sentences for female FTFs have been inconsistent with their actions in comparison to their male counterparts, the USA has repatriated and subsequently prosecuted female FTFs**. The legal precedence set forth by the USA can constitute an inspiring example for other western states to acknowledge and standardise the methods by which female FTFs return and are rehabilitated back into society.

There are challenges specific to the rehabilitation and reintegration of female returnees. The stigmatisation stemming from the association to a terrorist organisation can be more difficult emotionally and socially for women. When female returnees are mothers, their actions not only reflect on themselves but also suggest their inability to take care of their families adequately. This stigma can lead to renewed isolation, which is a classic factor leading to radicalisation. Financial dependence on their male partner can also constitute an obstacle for reintegration. However, **the rehabilitation of female returnees is a relatively new phenomenon and there is not enough reliable data to determine the differences in their repatriation and rehabilitation processes compared with men**. The examined states do not have rehabilitation and reintegration programmes specific for female returnees; some lack the necessary infrastructure in female penitentiary institutions to handle and monitor existing female FTFs. The examined states use very different approaches when it comes to the management of female returnees, but the common denominator is that the evaluation of existing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes remains very challenging.

Gielen, Amy-Jane (2018), 'Exit programmes for female jihadists: A proposal for conducting realistic evaluation of the Dutch approach', *International Sociology*, 33:4, pp. 454-472.

KEY MESSAGES:

- Successful exit programmes must have a holistic approach, which looks at relevant contextual conditions and combines multiple interventions and mechanisms to activate different push-and-pull factors required to leave the VE group.

This article proposes applying the method of realistic evaluation to exit programmes targeted at female jihadists in the Netherlands (secondary and tertiary prevention). This method traces the contextual factors and mechanisms that underlie interventions to answer the research question 'what works, for whom, how and in which circumstances'. The aim is to provide insight into relevant contextual conditions and mechanisms for exit programmes, and not to make general statements along the lines of 'X works, but Y doesn't'. The article examines one case study through a context, mechanisms and outcomes (CMO) analysis.

In the Netherlands, municipalities are responsible for their own programmes to counter violent extremism (CVE). The municipality works with the police, the public prosecution office, child protection services, the probation services, mental healthcare services and the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV) to do a risk assessment and decide on the best course of action. Initially, only large cities (e.g. Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Utrecht) developed CVE programmes and multi-agency protocols. Notable progress has been made, but in 2017 64 % of small and 30 % of mid-sized municipalities still did not have a CVE programme in place.

For the effective design of a tailor-made exit programme, it is essential to understand the **contextual conditions that lead a person to engage in a VE organisation**. The author examines push-and-pull factors that have played a role in the radicalisation process of female jihadists in the Netherlands: isolation, search for identity, a feeling that the Muslim community worldwide is oppressed, frustration when faced with the perceived inaction of the international community, psycho-sociological problems (e.g. violence), *hijra* (religious duty to move to a Muslim country) or the romanticisation of life in the 'Caliphate'.

Push-and-pull factors can also be applied to motivations for leaving VE organisations. Push factors involved in a decision to exit groups can be classified in 3 categories: ideological, such as disillusionment with the ideology (e.g. realisation that the so-called 'Caliphate' is not sustainable); social, such as dissatisfaction with extremist peers or the group in general; and practical, such as feeling isolated, stigmatised or pressured to participate in the extremist group. Pull factors consist of positive (professional, personal or social) alternatives.

Conducting a **realistic evaluation of several Dutch case studies of female jihadis was helpful to develop the following hypotheses to be tested empirically:**

- Exit requires a long-term, tailor-made and holistic approach (normative, affective and practical) that combines multiple interventions to activate different push-and-pull factors to leave the VE group. While a 'soft' approach seems more promising, legal and administrative instruments can be helpful in creating the right conditions for exit.
- Creating a safe and stable family environment is an important precondition for a successful exit programme. Also, an alternative social network is essential to compensate for loss of friends and sisterhood (*takfir*).
- The success of an exit programme does not seem dependent on the size or experience of a municipality. An important factor is the extent to which the intervention provider can establish a trust-based relationship with the individual and her family, while operating in a multi-agency setting.

Altier, Mary Beth (2021), '*Violent Extremist Disengagement and Reintegration: Lessons from Over 30 Years of DDR*', Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network.
<https://doi.org/10.37805/vedr2021.1>

KEY MESSAGES:

- Research on DDR demonstrates that gender considerations are essential for success.
- Programming for the D&R of violent extremists must be inclusive and age-sensitive, considering the specific skills, needs and desires of those women and girls.

This paper discusses how the experience regarding ex-combatant DDR processes in conflict and non-conflict zones could inform advances on the understandings of disengagement and reintegration (D&R) of violent extremist (VEDR) through a review of existing literature in DDR, which tends to focus more on a 'whole society' approach than the individual approach seen in VERD. Thus, DDR literature helps to understand how systemic factors (social, communal and political processes) could facilitate rehabilitation and reintegration.

DDR literature demonstrates that the D&R of combatant women and girls have **failed in some contexts by not considering an age-sensitive approach in neither rehabilitation nor reintegration**. The failure to do so leads to ineffective programming and may fuel **perceptions of injustice that contribute to engagement with violent extremism**.

Existing gender stereotypes have prevented female combatants from being eligible to participate in DDR programmes because **they have been seen just as victims**, considered as 'exploited' or 'brainwashed' but rarely referred to as 'soldiers' or 'combatants'. **The women's agency as ideological actors who voluntarily join violent groups for a variety of personal, social, and political reasons has been neglected**. The diversity of roles they have played within violent groups has been often reduced to 'domestic or sex slaves'. Existing **risk assessment tools do not capture the complexity of involvement in violent groups**, which has an impact in programming.

A major gap has been found in reintegration, where women have been shown to suffer **greater economic discrimination than men**. Those who have been mothers do not return to educational programmes and the available vocational training is either gender stereotyped or 'infantilised', which limits their labour integration. In the social realm, **women suffer an additional layer of stigma when reintegrating in local communities** due to their involvement in violence or because they have been objects of sexual abuse, forced marriage or for having children while in the violent group. They lack healthcare and psychosocial support adapted to their needs and for addressing trauma. Despite this, there is evidence (North Uganda) that women only faced minor setbacks reintegrating, especially those who had social support and had not been exposed to extensive violence during the conflict.

Beyond formal programmes, the **DDR literature shows that the support of cooperatives or networks of female ex-combatants and education often play an important role in women's reintegration**. Community-based projects contribute to eradicating stigma and discrimination, helping women in economic and social integration in their specific context. **Empowering women as agents of change is a good practice**. But such approaches should be applied with caution, and not include high-risk profiles.

Koller, Sofia (2021), '*Women and Minors in Tertiary Prevention of Islamist Extremism*', DGAP Report, German Council on Foreign Relations, November 2021.

KEY MESSAGES:

- Consider the differences and similarities between men and women regarding radicalisation and deradicalisation factors, narratives for mobilisation and roles within extremist jihadi groups for effective tertiary prevention.
- Consider working in (pre-trial) detention in exit work.
- Improve penitentiary facilities and services for women and their children.

This paper discusses the challenges and existing good practices regarding the reintegration of women and children who have returned (or not) from Syria and Iraq after having joined jihadi groups, mainly ISIL. The paper is based on the experience of actors involved in tertiary prevention of Islamist extremism (including practitioners, researchers and public officials) from 3 western European countries (Germany, the United Kingdom and Sweden) and 1 Western Balkan country (Kosovo), presented at a workshop held in April 2021, organised by the German Council of Foreign Relations (DGAP).

The paper highlights the differences and similarities between men and women regarding radicalisation and deradicalisation factors, narratives for mobilisation and roles within extremist jihadi groups. Unhappiness with the status quo in combination with personal grievances are identified as radicalisation factors for both men and women. But narratives for mobilisation reinforce gender specificities and clichés: messages around motherhood or emancipation from the West are recurrent in the propaganda, while recruitment happens more in online settings than in face-to-face environments than is the case for men. It is also important to look at recent developments in women's involvement in jihadi groups, distinguishing between those with active roles vs. passive ones (followers). **These particularities should inform approaches to women in tertiary prevention to make them effective.**

The reintegration of female extremists upon their return is shaped by their **prosecution process**. The usual length of this process **prevents professionals from starting to work with them as soon as they return**. This complicates the emotional stability of the recently returned woman and leads to practical issues such as the provision of documents to regularise the status of children born in the conflict zone and the generation of trust between counsellor and client. Identified good practice recommends prioritising the stabilisation of the individual, as well as developing a realistic future perspective to manage expectations. Professionals also recommend establishing contact with women and/or their families before return to have a clear idea of their personal situation. In some cases, a male counsellor proved beneficial.

Additional challenges are posed by women with children. They need to be counselled in their role as mothers to help them to manage the potential separation from their children. Many women suffer trauma and depression and need psychotherapeutic support. Frequently they express 'disillusionment' with and 'remorse' because of extremism, but professionals warn of 'false compliance'. Some are well informed about legal issues and can ensure they are not prosecuted for child abduction or failure to fulfil duty of care. Good practice recommends working with the whole family, involving youth welfare services in the case of minors, and approaching the management of the returnee as a learning system.

The management in prison of extremist women has proven to be challenging, as there is less **experience in dealing with female violent extremist organisations (VEOs) than with their male counterparts**. Prisons often lack facilities for dealing with female extremist offenders (especially if they have children), as well as therapeutic services adapted to women's needs or religious support. Identified good practices include starting counselling during (pre-trial) detention, focusing on practical questions first, enlisting the help of prevention and integration officials to establish contact with clients, establishing networks to ensure continuous access to relevant expertise, and bringing together social work and psychotherapeutic expertise.

Brown, Katherine E. & F. Nubla Mohamed (2021), 'Logics of care and control: governing European "returnees" from Iraq and Syria', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2021.2016092>

KEY MESSAGES:

- In the case of returnees, the dilemma for practitioners and professionals is the tension between rights-based and security-based traditions of governance.
- European security governance in practice is incomplete, contested and resilient to competing narratives and traditions generated in the aftermath of 9/11.

This article is a **critical approach to the European process of screening, prosecution, reintegration and rehabilitation (SPRR) in relation to the management of returnees from Syria and Iraq** linked to ISIL. The authors delve into the question of how existing competing – and often contradictory – narratives that refer to these returnees as both 'victims' and 'perpetrators' are managed in practice by European professionals, and how this influences the gendered experiences of, and approaches to, returnees. For the authors, the European security governance system, of which the SPRR is a subset, still responds to a securitised logic of control seen in the post 9/11 context. **The authors find that underpinning SPRR practices dealing with European women returnees is a gendered logic that enables security systems to operate in the face of other normative principles, such as care.**

The methodology consists of (1) participant observation in 8 relevant activities carried out by professionals, practitioners and policy officials, and (2) the triangulation of data collected against formal documents and recordings produced to support these activities.

The approach to returnees has been greatly influenced by the post-9/11 securitised world politics. In this context, returnees from Syria and Iraq are seen as threats to national security regardless of their level of engagement in violence. **This approach is gender-blind, relying primarily on the experience of men, applying existing models of radicalisation and terrorism.** This approach is empirically inaccurate according to the authors. To begin with, in the Syrian context most returnees are women and children. **Most women have assumed a non-combatant if not family-oriented role in conflict (97.4 % of women included in one study stated that their role was that of mother and wife). The diversity of experiences among women advocates for a broader awareness of threat whilst also considering the logic of care.** In the case of returnees, the dilemma for practitioners and professionals is the tension between rights-based and security-based traditions of governance.

In practice, the need for states to gather information on potential returnees throughout the screening, repatriation and prosecution process increases the vulnerability of women, as hierarchies are established in repatriation (the 'children first' principle, based on the premise that they are innocent). Additionally, the prosecution of female returnees is more challenging given the difficulties in obtaining evidence of their activities in the conflict zone. **Not being convicted for terrorist offences has an impact on future rehabilitation and reintegration, as this makes them ineligible to benefit from existing programmes and assistance.** The tension between security and care also arises when assuming local communities have a relevant role in the rehabilitation and reintegration of these women, given that at the same time these local environments are considered 'hotspots' of radicalisation and there is uncertainty about how returnees could contribute positively to their communities.

The 'logic of care' has been addressed by feminist authors who seek an approach based on caring that is based on ethics, relationality and a practical concern for 'improving life rather than merely finding solutions'. In this body of literature, we find 3 meanings or types of 'caring': (1) the hands-on application of caring services ('caring for', a physical labour), (2) the state of being whereby one nurtures caring ideas or intentions ('caring about', that in this context is considered emotional labour), and (3) 'take care of', which means assert control over it. In this context, the authors point out how 'care' might operate in different ways for

different professionals and with different effects for the women returning. In general, authors find that **European practitioners and professionals have adopted approaches more often based on the first and second definitions of care (*caring about* and *caring for*)** when it comes to the management of returnees, perceiving them as ‘vulnerable’ individuals or ‘individuals at risk’ rather than directly as threats. However, ***taking care of the returnees* reveals that security actors still have control over determining who is returned and the conditions of their eventual ‘release’ from state surveillance.**

The authors’ main conclusion is that although the logics of care allow for consideration of the returnees’ welfare, power hierarchies inherent in global security governance structures still exist in the European SPRR system.

CONCLUSIONS

Under each subsection of this Quarterly Research Review, key findings relevant to the subtopic of focus have been drawn for each paper. Some of the papers reviewed also include relevant insights from cross-cutting themes. This conclusion therefore draws on a cross-cutting analysis of their evidence and insights, and draws in key findings from a few previous RAN PS deliverables.

WOMEN'S PATHWAYS INTO RADICALISATION AND THE ROLES THEY PLAY

A - Women's radicalisation and recruitment

1. Women's decisions to join terrorist and violent extremist groups are based on the same complex reasons as men. The studies all challenge common assumptions that women lack agency and choice.¹ Similar conclusions were drawn in the Consolidated Overview (Prevent) No 11 on 'Reintegration of Female FTFs', which argued that examining radicalisation through the prism of *jihadi brides* can divert attention away from the multitude of push-and-pull factors that drive women to radicalise. However, women's participation is more often associated with emotional and personal factors or seen as more irrational than men's.² Despite this, injustice, grievance and political motivations are common factors in women's radicalisation.³ Similar findings are found in the field of DDR where women's agency as ideological actors who voluntarily join violent groups for a variety of personal, social, and political reasons has been neglected.
2. Social relationships and intimate recruitment of women by women are important to radicalisation across all ideologies. Women appear to radicalise more in groups and through social network interactions, especially involving their family and partners. Many women who travelled to Syria and Iraq to join ISIL did so to marry a jihadist or to follow their husbands though, in some cases, were forced due to patriarchal social norms. This aligns with findings in Cons. Ov. (Research) No 5 on 'Needs and Risks of Women Returnees'.
3. There are misogynist elements to far-right and violent Islamist groups with concepts of motherhood, traditional femininity, gender roles, expectations and behaviours inseparable to both a group's ideology and recruitment narratives. Left-wing VE groups espouse racial and gender equality, and joining a far-left group may be a way to escape traditional gender roles.

B - The roles women play in different types of extremist organisations

1. Despite perceptions, women in all extremist groups are not passive but active participants, and their roles, even in VE groups where traditional family and patriarchal norms are prevalent, can change over time to become more active participants in violence. Similarly, the Cons. Ov. (Prevent) No 11 noted that although ISIL recruited and advocated for women to maintain traditional family roles, the physical fall of the Caliphate dramatically changed the role of women to more active participants, including plotting and carrying out attacks themselves. Women can also support and facilitate the violent operations of others, make original contributions to ideology, shape discourses, champion causes, engage in recruitment and propaganda, and adopt leadership roles.

¹ German & Pennington, *Sisters of The Caliphate: Media and The Women of ISIS*.

² Ibid.

³ Altier, *Violent Extremist Disengagement and Reintegration*; and German & Pennington, op. cit.

1. After the physical fall of ISIL, women became a key component of carrying forward the legacy and ideology of ISIL, namely to teach (or more accurately indoctrinate) children born to ISIL families and raise them to be the next generation of fighters.
2. There are distinct differences between the ideologies. Religious terrorist groups – far-right and Islamist – have a patriarchal approach to women and have been slower to include women in armed operations and leadership roles. Because their ideology allows for greater equality, women’s participation in violence is more common in left-wing VE groups and women tend to hold stronger positions (in terms of hierarchy and in membership numbers).

MECHANISMS AND PROCESSES FOR DEALING WITH RADICALISED WOMEN

C - Repatriation and prosecution

In the security sector, some key gaps still exist in approaches and programmes to deal with women in VE groups. Some of these include the following:

1. Gender stereotypes and the ‘positive security bias’ they generate often cloud the judgement of actors involved in P/CVE when it comes to female returnees. For example, the SPRR process in EU MS is generally gender-blind and imbued with a strong security bias, resulting from policies developed in the aftermath of 9/11. This can have serious implications in prosecution, risk assessment and management in prison (e.g. more lenient sentences for female returnees or insufficient facilities in female prisons to deal with VEOs).
2. Ensuring the collection of evidence and intelligence for the activities of all genders in ISIL could help to mitigate the tendency to fall into a positive security bias and assist the prosecution of female returnees.
3. Legal frameworks throughout western states have evolved to allow an effective sentencing of FTFs. The most used charges against women who travelled to Syria and Iraq are membership of a terrorist organisation, war crimes, travel to a conflict/war zone, financing of terrorism, recruitment for a terrorist group, hate speech or incitement of violence.

D - Prison management, rehabilitation and reintegration

The focus on prison management relates to women returnees from Syria and Iraq. Key conclusions include:

1. As noted across Cons. Ov. Nos 5 and 11, as well as the Project Based Collaborations (PBCs) on child returnees, there is less empirical research and evidence in dealing with women in VE groups compared to their male counterparts. This results in fewer resources and facilities for female extremist offenders (especially mothers) in the prison setting. This is despite the fact that there are challenges specific to the rehabilitation and reintegration of female returnees.
2. Evidence gathered by DDR studies demonstrates that there are more obstacles to the reintegration of women than men. This aligns with findings noted in Cons. Ov. Nos 5 and 11, which stress that women are impacted by greater economic discrimination and gendered vocational training (which in turn limits the labour integration of females), as well as additional stigma due to involvement in violence, being survivors of sexual violence, or being perceived as bad mothers. If not properly addressed, negative stigmas not only undermine rehabilitation and reintegration programmes but can also lead to renewed isolation and re-radicalisation.
3. EU MS lack rehabilitation and reintegration programmes targeting female returnees, which was also mentioned in the PBC on child returnees. Both this QRR and that paper revealed that more could be done to counter stigmatisation of returning

women and children by supporting local communities.⁴ Moreover, when dealing with female returnees with children, building on findings in Cons. Ov. No 11 and the PBCs on child returnees, good practice recommends working with the whole family, involving youth welfare services in cases with minors, and approaching the management of the returnee as a learning system.

4. Understanding the capabilities developed while in the group and the current intent of a person is more critical than understanding how individuals came to join ISIL. The perceived lesser threat posed by female ISIL members can lead to differential treatment from government institutions in comparison to their male counterparts.

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⁴ RAN PS PBC Child Returnees 1 – ICCT – Conclusions Paper, pdf p. 6.

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