

**GCTF-OSCE International Workshop on**  
**“Supporting Civil Society Initiatives to Empower Women’s Roles in**  
**Countering Violent Extremism and**  
**Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism”**

*Istanbul, 13-14 May 2014*

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**This document was prepared by the OSCE Transnational Threats Department to summarize the recommendations advanced by participants of the workshop. This document was not approved by the participants and does not necessarily reflect the views and position of the OSCE or the GCTF.**

### **I. Guiding Considerations**

- 1) The role of civil society initiatives should be recognized and supported in advancing the unique and significant roles women can play in their families, communities, educational institutions, law enforcement agencies and in the broader public sector to counter VERLT.
- 2) Governments should engage with civil society organizations—in particular women’s organizations and organizations working in the fields of conflict and violence prevention, peace-building or humanitarian assistance – with the aims of:
  - Developing a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions conducive to terrorism and factors driving VERLT in particular contexts;
  - Empowering women to develop more localized, credible, inclusive, and resonant strategies to build resilience to violent extremism;
  - Mainstreaming gender and human rights in the development, implementation, and evaluation of policies to counter VERLT at national, regional, and international levels.
  - Ensuring that educational systems and curricula include content and teachings that promote tolerance and acceptance of gender equality and universal human rights, regardless of religious or ideological differences, to allow for a peaceful and functioning society.
- 3) Governments should promote and follow approaches to build capacity in civil society organizations to counter VERLT, in ways that ensures the safety, non-securitization, and non-instrumentalization of these actors, including women’s organizations.
- 4) Governments should ensure that civil society initiatives to empower women’s roles in countering VERLT comply with human rights, by ensuring gender equality and protecting women’s rights at all times and not just as a means to counter VERLT.
- 5) The complex and varying roles of women in VERLT and in countering VERLT should be recognized. Efforts to include women’s voices and to advance their roles in countering VERLT should not be confined to gender stereotypes, such as women as victims or women as mothers. Nor should efforts to

address women's role in countering VERLT be conflated with other aspects of advancing the rights of women and girls or lead to romanticizing women in this context. Women can also be terrorist sympathizers, mobilizers and perpetrators, as well as key actors in security and other state institutions involved in countering VERLT.

- 6) Women's organizations already contribute in many ways to countering VERLT, such as through activities related to peace-building, promoting resilience and social cohesion, and protecting women's rights. At the same time, governments should develop clarity, in close collaboration with women's organizations, on when it is counter-productive or possibly dangerous to label such activities as countering VERLT.
- 7) Governments should adopt evidence-based responses and policies to counter VERLT that also reflect research on the role of gender in terrorist radicalization and recruitment, and on the impact of initiatives to involve women in countering VERLT.
- 8) Governments should establish consistent benchmarks and screening processes to vet partners and grantees in countering VERLT to ensure that they share values, including on social cohesion and tolerance, which are not inimical to women's rights.
- 9) Men should be involved in advancing the roles of women and gender-mainstreaming in countering VERLT, including for instance by stressing the role of fathers in supporting their daughters' education and empowerment.

## **II. Building Local Ownership and Partnerships with Women's Organizations**

- 10) Governments should ensure that engagement with women's organizations is based on a sophisticated understanding of the culture, religion and gender roles within a community that is free of stereotypes and without negative consequences for the women engaged.
- 11) Governments should build local partnerships and ownership of efforts to counter VERLT. In doing so, they should prioritize engagement with small grassroots women's organizations, such as those outside urban centers, rather than with self-proclaimed community leaders or only with large and well-established organizations. This may include working with umbrella organizations to identify and reach out to local partners.
- 12) Governments should develop genuine partnerships with women's organizations, building upon women's local level practices to counter VERLT, without undermining local ownership. Governments should remain aware of, and address the risks of community backlash and/or discrediting civil society partners if programmes are perceived as externally driven.
- 13) Governments should ensure that the conditions and processes for grant allocation allow women's civil society organizations to access funding, particularly those at the grassroots level and in vulnerable areas. This may include adjusting reporting and auditing requirements to reflect the limited institutional capacity of women's organizations; requiring larger grant recipients to provide several smaller grants to local organizations; reviewing grantee portfolios to ensure that funds are also being given to women's civil society organizations; and recognizing that certain efforts to counter VERLT require longer-term project timelines.
- 14) Governments should develop a legal and policy framework that allows women and women's organizations to undertake local-level activities to counter VERLT in at-risk communities without fear of being labeled as providing material support.

- 15) To ensure momentum and sustainability of efforts to counter VERLT, governments should link local and national efforts to counter VERLT; women's informal efforts to counter VERLT and formal activities to counter VERLT; women's local efforts to counter VERLT and the international agenda on women, peace and security; and initiatives in different sectors to counter VERLT (e.g., education, health).
- 16) The crucial role women's organizations can play as intermediaries and substitute service providers in at-risk communities should be recognized and supported. In some contexts, the absence of a male breadwinner or guardian (e.g., for female family members of detained or deceased terrorists or for female victims of terrorist attacks) makes it difficult for women to secure a livelihood, access basic health care or to report criminal activity to the authorities. Women's organizations can help ensure families and communities are not marginalized or dependent on (violent) extremist groups for support, building trust with at-risk communities.

### **III. Capacity-Building to Advance Women's Roles in Countering VERLT**

- 17) Funding should be prioritized for training and skills-building programmes for women's organizations in fields such as countering VERLT, promoting education, and peace-building. Special effort should be made to make training available for women-led grassroots and/or unregistered organizations outside of urban centers.
- 18) Capacity-building should particularly include critical thinking skills, communication and messaging, learning languages to engage with religious texts, and technical competency to help women engage with social media to mitigate violent extremist messaging.
- 19) There is a need to support platforms and safe spaces for women to share resources, experiences and concerns in facing violent radicalization. This includes exchanges between women's organizations working on countering VERLT, between local women and women in the diaspora, as well as between women from diaspora communities.
- 20) Governments should address the human rights concerns that often underlie the difficulties and disincentives for women to engage in countering VERLT. This includes when women belong to a group that has been the focus of disproportionate and/or discriminatory counter-terrorism policies or when counter-terrorism measures have narrowed the operating space and resources for women's organizations, by criminalizing legitimate activities of women's human rights defenders or making it difficult for small organizations to receive and administer funds.

### **IV. Ensuring Women's Safety and Security in Countering VERLT**

- 21) Gender-specific security concerns should be identified and addressed to safely engage women and women's organizations in countering VERLT, including by establishing mechanisms to protect women in at-risk communities or conflict-affected areas.
- 22) Governments should take guidance from local women's organizations, which are particularly vulnerable to community backlash and/or retaliation from violent extremist groups, on programming to counter VERLT. In particular, governments should recognize that categorizing or documenting efforts by women's organizations as countering VERLT may be dangerous or counter-productive.
- 23) Governments should recognize that in some situations –such as where security sectors are unreformed– it may be dangerous or counter-productive for civil society organizations to closely engage with security

agencies. Governments should support a non-securitized space for civil society to build community resilience independent of engagement with the security sector or other state actors.

## **V. Engaging Women in Families and Communities to Counter VERLT**

- 24) Governments should support civil society initiatives to enhance the awareness and capacity of families, including female family members such as mothers, to address and prevent violent radicalization. This includes ensuring that family members can recognize the early warning signs of violent radicalization in other family members, especially children; use their influence to prevent violent extremism; and are encouraged to access resources, such as safe spaces to express concerns and receive counseling.
- 25) Female family members of arrested or deceased violent extremists should be supported to reduce their and their family's susceptibility to violent radicalization and recruitment, including through counseling and access to alternative income, such as through monetary support or vocational training.
- 26) Female family members should be engaged in all disengagement and rehabilitation programmes for violent extremist and terrorists, whether male or female.
- 27) Female religious leaders and scholars should be encouraged to engage with their communities, especially women and girls, on issues related to (violent) extremism for instance by acting as role models or mentors, or to provide counsel and guidance to at-risk individuals.
- 28) Inter-faith exchanges and coalition-building between women, including women religious leaders and scholars, should be supported such as to promote tolerance, interact with at-risk youth, jointly protest against terrorist violence especially on women and girls, and engage with security sector responses to VERLT.
- 29) Networking should be facilitated between women in faith-based and non-faith-based organizations, as well as women's organizations that are faith-based and non-faith-based, to promote tolerance and diversity.

## **VI. Engaging Women Through Education and Within Educational Institutions to Counter VERLT**

- 30) The access of women and girls to secular and religious educational institutions should be strengthened and improved, including by increasing the number and training of female staff. This can help minimize conditions of socio-economic inequality conducive to terrorism; reduce susceptibility to violent extremist narratives; and enable women to counter violent extremist narratives in their families and communities.
- 31) The staff of educational institutions should be trained to handle incidents related to violent extremism, by students, their parents, or other staff members. Such training can address topics such as VERLT and its gender-specific dimensions. The curricula of colleges and universities teaching education and social work could include topics that specifically address gender and VERLT, including through case studies.
- 32) Curricula should be reformed, educational materials developed, and the capacity of all educators/instructors built to promote tolerance, conflict transformation, peace-building, interfaith dialogue, mediation, and respect for human rights, especially women's rights.

- 33) Efforts of local female school teachers aimed at at-risk youth should be supported, such as after-school tutoring programmes, sports, and arts activities to help vulnerable youth.
- 34) Opportunities for peer-to-peer education or support should be facilitated on issues related to violent radicalization, tolerance and social cohesion, including by training young women or girls as mentors and mediators or supporting the creation of student peace-clubs and interactive team-building.
- 35) Co-operation between women in secular and religious educational institutions should be increased as a means of promoting dialogue and mutual understanding.
- 36) Governments should support civil society initiatives to educate women about their cultural, religious and political history, recognizing that there will be different interpretations, to enable them to formulate their own approaches to challenging extremist narratives.

## **VII. Supporting Female Victims of Terrorism and Engaging them in Countering VERLT**

- 37) Governments should identify and address the direct and indirect impacts of terrorism on women and girls. This includes rejecting impunity for attacks against girls' schools, female politicians, aid workers, or human rights defenders; collecting gender disaggregated data on terrorist violence; and ensuring adequate support to victims of sexual violence, as well as children born of coerced relationships with terrorists.
- 38) Governments should ensure that first responders to violent extremism and terrorism incidents address the specific needs of female victims. This includes having female first responders and providing adequate training, possibly by involving women's organizations.
- 39) Female victims of terrorism should be supported as change agents, including to counter violent extremist narratives and to promote interaction between associations of victims of terrorism. Women should have a voice in victims' organizations and safeguarding the rights and well-being of the victims should always come first.

## **VIII. Including Women and Mainstreaming Gender in the Design, Implementation and Evaluation of Measures to Counter VERLT**

- 40) Governments should ensure the effective participation of women in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of efforts to counter VERLT, including through appointments to key decision-making positions and quotas in relevant consultative and oversight bodies.
- 41) All efforts to counter VERLT should be informed by the perspectives of women from different backgrounds. Information should be collected through consistent, replicable and ethical procedures, and gender-disaggregated data should be used, including to identify and avoid unintended consequences of efforts to counter violent extremism.
- 42) Specific gender indicators should be included in the monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness and gender and human rights impacts of both government and civil society efforts to counter VERLT, especially those that seek to facilitate women's roles. External evaluators, including women's organizations, should be involved.

## **IX. Increasing the Participation of Women and Gender Mainstreaming in Security Sectors Bodies Involved in Countering VERLT**

- 43) Governments should increase the number and percentage of women in security bodies and in training programmes to counter VERLT, including at senior levels. The structural and cultural barriers that prevent the recruitment, retention and advancement of women should be addressed.
- 44) Security officials should be trained on gender-related aspects in countering VERLT, such as the impact of terrorism and extremist violence on women; how to engage with women's organizations in their efforts to counter VERLT; how to deliver gender- and human rights-sensitive security services; and the involvement of women in terrorism and violent extremism.
- 45) Governments should consider the role of specialized female law-enforcement officers with regard to female terrorist suspects, as well as the protection of female witnesses and children.
- 46) Governments should involve women's organizations in the reform of security bodies, especially those involved in countering terrorism, through consultative mechanisms as well as exchanges and advocacy training for civil society groups and officials on the recruitment, retention and professionalization of women in the security sector.

## **X. Engaging Women in Countering VERLT through Community-Oriented Policing**

- 47) Police should develop genuine partnerships with women's organizations based on the pursuit of common goals. Police should be transparent about terrorism-prevention concerns and strive to address women's primary and broader concerns with regard to the safety of their communities. Engagement for intelligence-gathering purposes only should be avoided.
- 48) Police should actively facilitate the participation of women in police-community consultations. The location, time, venue and format of meetings can be designed to ensure the successful participation of women taking into account the local context.
- 49) Police could include awareness-raising about the threat of, and possible responses to VERLT as part of initiatives to inform women about other safety and crime-related issues, such as domestic violence or sexual abuse. Police should be however careful not to securitize their engagement with women on these and other sensitive issues.
- 50) Police should identify key women's rights defenders and women's organizations, their capabilities and needs, in order to diversify partnerships, prioritizing engagement with grassroots organizations and leaders.

## **XI. Women, Media and Strategic Communication to Counter VERLT**

- 51) Governments should ensure that strategic communication to counter VERLT also address women at risk of terrorist radicalization and recruitment, including to counter terrorist narratives aimed at women or based on gendered narratives.
- 52) Governments should rely on local credible voices and channels for strategic messaging to counter VERLT, including female community leaders and women role models who can counter the lure of violence, radicalization, and gang behaviors that often attract disenfranchised youth.

- 53) Localized strategies should be supported to reach out to women as sources of influence in otherwise insulated or at-risk communities, such as through women's radio-listening clubs, plays, television dramas, or brochures.
- 54) Capacity-building is needed to increase the technical competency of women and women's organizations to engage through social media in countering VERLT, including to build coalitions, to reach out to victims and survivors and highlight their voices, and to counter violent extremist messaging.
- 55) The capacity of media professionals should be built for gender-sensitive and non-discriminatory reporting on terrorism and violent extremism. This could include supporting women's organizations to train media on the impact of (violent) extremism on women, women's roles in countering violence, and also women as supporters and perpetrators of violent extremism.

## **XII. Addressing Female Terrorist Radicalization and Recruitment**

- 56) The factors that put girls and women specifically at risk of terrorist radicalization and recruitment should be identified and addressed, including the narratives used by terrorist organizations to target girls and women, and the role of gender inequalities in facilitating terrorist radicalization and recruitment.
- 57) The roles of women in facilitating the terrorist radicalization and recruitment of women and men should be recognized and addressed.
- 58) Governments and civil society efforts to tackle the risk of terrorist radicalization and recruitment among youths should take into account the different needs of young women compared to young men.
- 59) Disengagement and reintegration programmes should be established or adjusted to address female violent extremist or terrorist detainees. Female family members, religious leaders, educators, community elders and former violent extremists should assist in these programmes.
- 60) Support should also be provided to civil society initiatives helping women access gender-sensitive 'exit' and demobilization programmes with adequate protection and support.