



Generating Inclusive National Strategies to Prevent Violent Extremism and Counter Terrorism: Roundtable Event Outcome Document

In March 2016, on the margins of the 60th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), Inclusive Security, the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, and the International Peace Institute convened nearly 50 key actors from UN missions and entities; civil society representatives based both at the UN and at the national level; and representatives from national government.

The goal was to discuss possible ways of strengthening the national integration of UN frameworks related to women, peace, and security; preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE); and counterterrorism. Participants exchanged lessons related to the development and implementation of national strategies related to these agendas and explored areas of overlap and synergy.¹

Key Takeaways:²

1. Many policymakers and civil society organizations at the UN and national level strongly contend there is a critical need for the further integration of women, peace, and security, P/CVE, and counterterrorism efforts, particularly at the national level. To facilitate these efforts, components of National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security designed to increase women's meaningful participation in building peace and security should be integrated into national-level P/CVE strategies and vice versa.
2. Several participants highlighted the need for more UN and national level investment in and support for conflict prevention frameworks;
3. National, UN, and donor state resources should be used to analyze potential synergies vis-a-vis strategies addressing the three topics (women, peace, and security; P/CVE; and counterterrorism). Such assessments will help address the reality that these topics are often ineffectively divided (or "siloed"). In countries where a National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security and national strategies on P/CVE and/or counterterrorism exist, these assessments should inform efforts to ensure the objectives and indicators in these strategies are in alignment with each other.

¹ The following report highlights the outcomes of the discussion sessions at this roundtable event to the best extent possible and are not necessarily reflective of the views of the organizers themselves.

² Not all participants agreed with these assessments; they reflect the perspectives of the majority.

4. P/CVE programs, and in some cases counterterrorism measures, may have the potential to only further generate grievances with state institutions if not guided by a “bottom-up” approach informed by local input and/or assessments done in a context-specific manner.
5. Further investment in research and documentation on push/pull factors leading to female involvement in terrorism, including female foreign terrorist fighters, is critical to the effective development of national counterterrorism and P/CVE strategies.
6. Needs and conflict assessments should be conducted, guided by local community consultations, before national strategies on any of these agendas are created and during any update processes. These assessments should be supported by UN entities and members providing technical support.

Event Background:

In October 2015, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 2242, aimed at improving implementation of the women, peace, and security agenda. This came 15 years after the passage of Resolution 1325 in 2000, the first time the Council formally recognized that women’s full and meaningful participation in peace and security processes is necessary to effectively prevent and resolve conflict. Since that time, 58 member states have adopted national strategies to advance women’s inclusion in creating more peaceful societies.

UNSCR 2242 (2015) urged the UN to ensure women’s inclusion in the development of strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism. It requested the Security Council’s Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) and its Executive Directorate (CTED) integrate gender as a cross-cutting issue within their mandates (OP11) and urged that the Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (PVE) include women’s participation and leadership as a core element (OP13).

Within its recommendations, the PVE Plan of Action highlights women’s empowerment as a force for prevention and sustainable peace and the need to promote women’s participation and leadership across governments, the security sector, and civil society.

Additionally, UNSCR 2122 (2013) expresses the Security Council’s intention to increase its attention to women, peace, and security in all thematic areas of work on its agenda including in combatting threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts (OP3). Furthermore, UNSCR 2178 (2014) encourages member states to engage relevant local communities and non-governmental actors in CVE, including by empowering women and other concerned civil society groups (OP16).

This event was part of a number of roundtable discussions, workshops, and meetings Inclusive Security has been hosting at the UN and at the national level in key terrorism-affected countries to explore areas of overlap in women, peace, and security; P/CVE; and counterterrorism.

Event Overview:

Opening remarks were delivered by Youssef Mahmoud, Senior Adviser at International Peace Institute (IPI); Jean-Paul Laborde, Executive Director at the UN Counterterrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED); Allison Peters, Senior Policy Adviser at Inclusive Security; and Jacqueline O’Neill, Director at Inclusive Security. Many of the panelists highlighted the lack of

women's meaningful inclusion and gender-sensitive analysis in P/CVE strategies and programs and counterterrorism operations, particularly those led by the security sector, noting that women are disproportionately targeted by terrorists and violent extremists but have been largely dismissed from the formal security institutions responsible for protection and prevention. The panelists disagreed, however, on the best solutions. Several highlighted the need to formally integrate women into the development and implementation of national-level P/CVE efforts, in particular. Another panelist contended that this kind of inclusion can "instrumentalize" women and puts them at grave security risk.

Highlighted in the panel discussion were high-impact National Action Plans related to women, peace and security and their potential to advance women's inclusion in P/CVE and counterterrorism. The four major components of these plans are: the inclusion of women and civil society in the initial stages of development, political will, sufficient resources, and a strong monitoring and evaluation system. It was emphasized that the process of designing and implementing these plans must be inclusive and the content should be developed at the individual country level.

A framing for the overall event was offered with these opening remarks: "We know there are disagreements in this space on how to engage women and how they should be included. That is why we have gathered you all here today. We want you all to dive deep into the issues raised by our panelists."

Event attendees were then divided into six groups, and each discussed a series of questions about inclusive national strategies, security sector integration, and UN policy development. Below is a synthesis of some of the questions addressed:

Discussion Questions:

1. What is your national experience concerning the integration of preventing/countering violent extremism, counterterrorism, and women, peace and security frameworks?

The question of terminology emerged in most groups. At the national level in many of the countries represented and at the UN, there is not a clear definition of terrorism or violent extremism and an understanding of what constitutes efforts to prevent or counter it. This in turn hinders the development of comprehensive frameworks that actually address the drivers of violent extremism and the conditions conducive to it. Additionally, some participants saw PVE and CVE as separate agendas along a continuum, and stressed that PVE could encompass more upstream, preventative measures to be developed by governments and civil society and should be increasingly resourced by donors. Many agreed that the development of multiple, individual national-level strategies around these issues, often involving the input of different government institutions, has caused siloing of these agendas. They also agreed that and more investment was needed at the national level to explore areas of overlap and ensure efforts are not duplicated or counterproductive.

Engaging women at the decision-making level on security issues is emerging as a priority in countries such as the United Arab Emirates and Afghanistan with increasing awareness of UNSCR 1325 and its follow-up resolutions. Several of the countries present have specifically

developed National Action Plans that are designed to increase women's meaningful participation. There were many participants that argued components of those Action Plans should be integrated into national-level P/CVE strategies and vice versa. It was pointed out that in many of the countries where the UN is doing national-level assessments of P/CVE and/or counterterrorism strategies, there is no political will to integrate gender into the strategies and typically no gender focal points tasked with doing so, making advocacy for integration more challenging. Additionally, it was recommended that the mandates of UN counterterrorism entities be strengthened to support enhanced consultation with civil society, particularly for women-led organizations.

There was consensus within most groups that a "bottom up" approach, where national strategies are informed by local community consultations, is an essential component of any effort to design a national strategy on P/CVE. There was no consensus, however, on best practices/mechanisms for engagement at the local level. Participants referenced examples of women from civil society advising and consulting with security forces, noting the positive role they can play building bridges between forces and communities. It was noted, however, that often rhetoric does not match action: UN entities and member states speak often of the importance of engaging women-led civil society organizations in the drafting and implementing of these strategies, yet substantive consultation is rare. It was stressed that UN entities and member states should not just "recruit" civil society to be part of P/CVE or counterterrorism efforts, but should be a partner to them to account for civil society's perspectives; offer support to their work, when appropriate and safe; and ensure that legal frameworks do not overburden or jeopardize their work. One of the many reasons is governments may lack trust in civil society who publicly scrutinize their counter-terrorism or P/CVE actions. Alternatively, they may also lack the capacity or networks to engage meaningfully with civil society. It may also be driven by a concept of security that is only state-led. Others, however, felt strongly that the promotion of women's inclusion in either P/CVE or counterterrorism put women's safety at risk without much promise beyond them being "instrumentalized" as informants.

Additionally, many felt the means of engagement should be contextually specific. In order to better engage women on these issues, we must start by hearing from women in civil society themselves to assess their desire to be a part of nation-level policy discussions on these issues.

It was noted by several participants that women, including all of the women leaders from civil society present at this event, are already working on P/CVE programming at the national or community level around the globe. Concerns about "instrumentalizing" or "securitizing" may minimize recognition of the important efforts they are already leading. Many advocated for strategies informed prior to their development by comprehensive context assessments and consultations with organizations that work with women in local communities.

2. Should these agendas be integrated?

Most participants agreed that these agendas should be integrated on a national level with more attention put into aligning objectives and metrics of national strategies. Some disagreed strongly with this assessment, particularly due to the expressed concerns around security for women in civil society documented above. Some groups felt strongly that by not aligning the women, peace, and security agenda with P/CVE and counterterrorism strategies, the effectiveness of these strategies is put at risk. One group discussed the risk of having counterterrorism policies

that negatively impact the women, peace, and security agenda, whether intended or not, such as counterterrorism financing efforts that particularly squeeze women-led civil society organizations. These consequences can jeopardize the success of counterterrorism efforts by generating or strengthening grievances with state institutions.

Several competing best practices for integration were discussed. One group identified a multi-component approach to developing a national strategy around P/CVE, with pillars focused on governance, security, and resilience that integrate women and gender in all of its components. Other groups focused on updating or expanding existing national strategies such as national CVE strategies or National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security to incorporate these cross-cutting frameworks. It was noted that the inclusion of women-led civil society organizations in their development must be meaningful, but that more attention should be given by civil society to understanding government constraints to facilitate more open dialogue.

The topic of advancing women's integration in the security sector was discussed at many of the tables. Several of the national and UN-level participants gave specific examples of scenarios where they have seen low representation of women in the security sector have negative implications for P/CVE and counterterrorism efforts. However, there were many different perspectives as to how national governments, UN entities, and donor countries should support increased recruitment and elevation of women in the security sector. For example, one participant noted that a targeted recruitment percentage in her country set in place by the government was critical in increasing the number of women in law enforcement. Others argued that set targets such as this can be counterproductive, especially when there is a sense that they have been mandated by multilateral or donor institutions.

Overall, there was consensus that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all strategy to integrating these three agendas. It was shared that national and UN-level efforts to integrate women and gender into national P/CVE and counterterrorism strategies can be informed by a framework for integration, but must be tailored for each individual member state.

3. Is there a way to advance integration while avoiding risks to the women, peace and security agenda?

Some groups reemphasized the need to incorporate gender and women's inclusion as a cross-cutting component of any and all national P/CVE or counterterrorism strategies. While there is over 15 years of research documenting the critical role women have played in preventing and resolving conflict after UNSCR 1325 was passed, more research and documentation needs to be conducted on the work women are doing to secure their communities through the P/CVE lens. Furthermore, international funders should commit greater financial resources to support such research. This evidence should feed into any planning for a P/CVE agenda to ensure that any assessment of women's risk working on P/CVE issues is accounted for.

Other participants emphasized the importance of protecting women's rights above ensuring their inclusion at every level in security decision-making. Participants placed an emphasis on recognizing gaps in protection services for women and developing legislation to prosecute rape as a war crime. Both issues, they argued, can motivate women to support terrorist groups, rather than deter them.

4. What possible impact could further integration have on the ability to prevent female recruitment into terrorist organizations?

Every group acknowledged that certain terrorist organizations have been particularly adept at exploiting gender dynamics and recruiting women, often times in a much more concerted or systematic way than government counter-threat efforts.

It was noted that while women have always played many different roles in terrorism, counterterrorism practitioners are increasingly aware of women's involvement, particularly with the rise of female foreign fighters traveling to Syria and Iraq. One participant noted that "terrorist groups have integrated women and gender completely, but member states are lagging behind." Some participants contended that there needs to be an increased investment in understanding the resonating narratives and push and pull factors that motivate women, specifically those that join, support, and promote propaganda for terrorist organizations. It was pointed out that including women in the development of P/CVE and counterterrorism efforts could ensure these strategies address these specific factors and stem the flow of female foreign fighters.

Several participants also highlighted their conclusion that women at the local level in civil society and within homes could have significant impact on combatting violent extremist narratives overall and advocated for more financial investment in capacity building programs and counter-narrative campaigns that elevate women's voices.

For any follow-up questions or further information about this event, please contact Inclusive Security Senior Policy Adviser Allison Peters at allison@inclusivesecurityaction.org.