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Research Team Report for Activity-5:



# ASSESSING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN FIGHTING RADICALIZATION



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# Research Team Report for Activity-5: Assessing the Role of Women in Fighting Radicalization

## **Key Expert:**

Başak Yavçan, PhD

Associate Professor of Political Science and  
International Relations

TOBB University of Economics and Technology

## **Senior Researcher:**

Gülriz Şen, PhD

Assistant Professor of Political Science and  
International Relations

TOBB University of Economics and Technology



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Ortadoğu Araştırmaları Merkezi

Adresi : Mustafa Kemal Mah. 2128 Sk. No: 3 Çankaya, ANKARA Telefon:  
+90 850 888 15 20 Faks: +90 (312) 430 39 48 Email: orsam@orsam.org.tr

Tasarım: beyzaerden.com

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Departing from an intention of refinement of the concept of radicalization by placing women in this process, this research project aimed at exploring the possibility of building a gender-sensitive approach for countering and preventing violent extremism (C/PVE), as an alternative and complement to “malestream” efforts that have dominated the field and practice. Aware of the importance and complementary role of a civilian, gender-sensitive and long-term perspective that will target the rehabilitation of society and women, and given the gaps in the literature on the issue area, the major aim of the research was to probe the role of civil society, mainly women’s and humanitarian NGOs in building and implementing effective CVE and PVE strategies.

Following an extensive desk review of the related literatures and having identified important civil society and community actors in the issue area, 80 in-depth interviews were conducted in eight different provinces across Turkey, namely, Ankara, Istanbul, Gaziantep, Kilis, Adıyaman, Diyarbakır, Adana and Antakya. The actors identified as points of interest included academics, both faith-based and secular humanitarian aid NGOs, religious

networks, lawyers and bar associations, community leaders, directly affected women, local political party affiliates (both opposition and government party), and religious leaders.

The interviews indicate that NGOs and individuals have not only different definitions of radicalization but they also have different evaluations of it. Despite an interest and understanding regarding the importance of the issue, most civil society organizations lacked a clear strategy to deal with cases of radicalization. As outlined and discussed in the major findings of our report, women from Turkey, reflecting the global phenomenon, assumed varying roles as sympathizers, perpetrators, possible preventers, rehabilitators and victims in their relationship to radicalization. Any strategy has to take the complexity of these roles and motivations into account in order to formulate the much-needed gender-sensitive, inclusive approach to CVE and PVE.

Throughout our interviews, we have also explored the main push and pull factors and enablers outlined in the literature in an attempt to inform effective CVE and PVE strategies. The

findings underlined the importance of Economic/ Structural Factors, namely the material conditions of the individual or the community not as a sole motivator but mostly in play in conjunction with other Ideological (heavily for women sympathizers) and Psychological Factors. These findings have important implications for women playing different roles throughout the process be it sympathizers or preventers.

Regarding the role of civil society in CVE and PVE, NGOs have the potential to be of great use not only in terms of coming up with a counter-narrative strategy and disseminating it as a part of broader national CVE strategy, but also in terms of supporting prevention efforts with the activities and educational as well as psychological counselling services they provided and with case collection in the field. This is especially the case for NGO's concentrating on refugees, a population particularly vulnerable due to the exposure of a multitude of push and pull factors. Considering their expertise and skilled human resource, through collaboration with women's and faith based NGOs, they carry the

potential to be important actors in CVE and PVE efforts.

In terms of building a counter narrative, considering the strong role of ideology as a motivator as supported by our interviews, faith-based NGOs converged on the necessity of offering such a narrative from Islam itself with reference to Qur'anic verses and hadith that would challenge and refute the ISIS propaganda along with examples of peaceful conduct, tolerance, respect to other religious beliefs and practices, plurality, rejection of racial superiority, importance of the protection of innocent, elder and women in conflictual situations and love from the life of Prophet Mohammad and his companions, or *sahabah*. Here, an all-inclusive approach regarding different social classes and sectarian groups of society assumes great importance. This is of utmost significance for filling the information gap regarding religiously motivated radicalization and organizations that resort to violent extremism in the name of Islam.

# 1.

# Introduction



This project module mainly aims to address how and why women take part in the process of violent extremism in Turkish case and how academia (particularly those engaged in theology and gender studies) and civil society organizations (mainly faith-based as well as secular women and other humanitarian NGOs and political party organizations) conceive and attend to this phenomenon. Departing from an intention of refinement of the concept of radicalization by placing women in this process, this research, in line with raising international awareness about the women's role in radicalization and de-radicalization processes, strives to explore the possibilities of building a gender-sensitive approach for countering and preventing violent extremism in order to challenge and also “correct” the “malestream” efforts that have dominated the field and practice.

Granted the fact that the fight against radicalism and violent extremism mostly followed military vision and strategies until the emergence of more holistic discussions on “fighting terror vs. eliminating terrorism” in the international security agenda,

developing a civilian, gender-sensitive and long-term perspective that will target the rehabilitation of society and women as well as a perspective and action plan that will address the urgency of preventing radicalization and extremism is highly essential. Furthermore, current developments in world politics demonstrate that contrary to earlier decades, violent extremist groups such as ISIS place a higher importance on women, make a larger call to recruit women and thereby promote their larger involvement in their activities, resulting in a feminization of radicalization as well as victimization from radicalization.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, this reality is not fully reflected neither in the policy nor in the academic realm and efforts to understand and counter this phenomenon remain rather limited. Under this activity the research team aspires to analyse the roles women play in this process in Turkey, their motivations in their assumed roles either in promoting or countering extremism and the ways civil society, including women activism, can provide a meaningful and relevant response by drawing on past and present experience and offer future insight.

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1 UN Women Conference Report. “Women’s role vital in countering violent extremism.”, 2017. <http://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2017/10/womens-role-vital-in-countering-violent-extremism> (accessed on August 12, 2018); Brussels International Center Report. “Different Roles of Women in Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism”, 2017 <https://www.bic-rhr.com/different-roles-of-women-in-violent-extremism/> (accessed on August 10, 2018)

The research team aims to probe the plausibility and find answers to the following questions:

- **How is radicalization and violent extremism conceived by women's NGOs, academics and policy-makers in Turkish civil society?**
- **What sort of perspectives do these actors adopt vis-a-vis countering and preventing violent extremism?**
- **What seems to be general perspective as to the individual and community-based push factors to extremism?**
- **Do they embark on gender-specific programmes to reach out women to prevent violent extremism as well as to counter those that suffer from post-radicalization trauma and provide institutional support for rehabilitation and resilience of women?**
- **What kind of tools, instruments and resources do they have to do so?**
- **How do they themselves evaluate past and present efforts to cope with the challenges of countering radicalization and violent extremism?**
- **What kind of durable and viable institutional mechanisms and approaches can be built up for the future?**

To these ends, the research team outlined a research design incorporating a desk review and an original data collection via in-depth interviews with related actors, following the composition of the research team including Key Expert, Senior Researcher and Research Assistant. Under Activity 5, the research team is respectively composed of Associate Prof. Dr. Başak Yavçan, Assistant Prof. Dr. Gülriz Şen and research assistant Eyyüp Baytok. The team held biweekly meetings, outlined the research agenda, reviewed the literature, reviewed the media coverage, mapped the NGO universe, constructed a research design, operationalized the concepts via preparation of interview questionnaires, scheduled and conducted an initial set of interviews to attain the above-mentioned objectives.

In the following sections, the report will first illustrate

the findings of a review of the literature regarding the main focus on this module, that is, understanding the role of women in preventing and countering violent extremism. In doing this, particular attention will be paid on the definition of radicalization, underlying reasons pushing and pulling individuals to radicalization, the increasing role of civil society in countering and preventing violent extremism. Upon this review, a refined conceptual framework will be outlined in an attempt to formulate an appropriate approach to the field work in terms of target subjects and priority issues. Based on this analysis, we will propose a research methodology incorporating an original interview questionnaire design, conceptual and geographical map of actors active in this area, and in-depth interviews.

# 2.

## Review of the Literature



This report provides with a review of the existing literature on the themes of gender and violence and in the context of women’s diverse roles in CVE and PVE. The comprehensive literature review we conducted aimed to map out the multifaceted conceptualizations of the themes of violent extremism, radicalization, and the deepening discussions and action on countering and preventing violent extremism. In-depth work on these themes helped us to clarify the major conceptual tools and attain knowledge from previous conceptual and empirical studies on CVE, PVE and particularly the role of women in countering and preventing violent extremism. Our review of the literature made extensive use of the debates and discussions in the prominent international institutions such as the UN, EU and the OSCE with keen interest on the subject. Apart from these organizations, the review observes that various NGOs and affiliated research institutions immensely contributed to growing conceptual and empirical discussions upon the subject.

To begin with, the review of the literature demonstrates that there is no consensus on

the definition of violent extremism (henceforth VE).<sup>2</sup> As Idris and Abdelaziz argue, even the UN Secretary-General’s Plan of Action on Preventing Violent Extremism in 2015 fell short of providing an all-agreed-upon definition of the term due to the political sensitivities involved.<sup>3</sup> Despite this fact, VE has become an integral part of policy directives that aim to counter and prevent it. To this aim, many countries adopted National CVE strategies, whilst the UN Security Council adopted a number of resolutions to strengthen international and national efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism. Needless to say, international efforts aimed at CVE and PVE intensified concomitant to the rise of ISIS.

Neumann sheds light on the transformation of terminology from terrorism to VE and asserts that the term “violent extremism” was proposed as a more “accurate and realistic” term that covers not only terrorist attacks, but the whole range of violent actions that extremist groups hold responsibility for, comprising politically-motivated riots and hate crimes.<sup>4</sup> In this respect, a number of working definitions were offered for violent extremism.

<sup>2</sup> See Andrew Glazzard and Martine, Zeuthen. “Violent Extremism”, February 2016. Retrieved from [http://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Violent-extremism\\_RP.pdf](http://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Violent-extremism_RP.pdf); Peter R. Neumann, “Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism: Ideas, Recommendations, and Good Practices from the OSCE Region”. *OSCE Report*, September 2017. Retrieved from <http://www.osce.org/chairmanship/346841>; Humera Khan, “Why Countering Extremism Fails”, *Foreign Affairs*, 18 February 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Iffat Idris and Ayat Abdelaziz, “Women and countering violent extremism”, *GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report*, 4 May 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Peter R. Neumann, “Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism: Ideas, Recommendations, and Good Practices from the OSCE Region”.

Accordingly, VE can be defined as “the use of and support for violence in pursuit of ideological, religious or political goals”<sup>5</sup> or alternatively as “the choice individuals or groups make to use violence or support the use of violence to address grievances in line with a viewpoint which advocates exclusionary group identities.”<sup>6</sup>

As Khan and Neumann among many others underline, VE is not a new phenomenon. However, what makes recent efforts at countering violent extremism (CVE) different from their precedents is acknowledgement of the necessity of greater role for civil society.<sup>7</sup> Previously, fight with VE has been largely confined to counterterrorism efforts by military and government authorities, and such an approach curtailed any room for civil society. Seen as such, a practical definition of CVE comprises ‘the use of *non-coercive means* to dissuade individuals or groups from mobilizing towards violence and to mitigate recruitment, support, facilitation or engagement in ideologically motivated terrorism by non-state actors in furtherance of political objectives.’<sup>8</sup> As Frazer and Nunlist further explicate, CVE requires more than the use of intelligence, police and military means against the violent extremists, the *structural causes of violent extremism* must also be tackled.<sup>9</sup> Prevention of violent

extremism (PVE) constitutes a major dimension of CVE. As argued by many, it’s not enough to counter violent extremism, it must be prevented. PVE requires a thorough assessment of the root causes and factors that contribute to extremism and terrorism, by engaging with individuals, communities and others.<sup>10</sup> As will be detailed below, engagement with individuals, communities, civil society organizations and international organizations thus has become pillars of growing body of CVE and PVE work across the globe.

Intrinsic to the growing body of conceptual work on CVE and PVE is the notion of radicalization. Radicalization can be defined as a *process* through which people turn to extremism.<sup>11</sup> Existing literature also draws on different stages and ladders of radicalization. Radicalization is not a monocausal process, as it involves different factors and dynamics at work. Different authors offer different classifications, however in each account material and ideational factors are addressed. In general, push factors are identified as the negative social, cultural, and political features of one’s societal environment that aid in “pushing” vulnerable individuals onto the path of violent extremism. Push factors are what are commonly known as “underlying/root causes” such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, discrimination,

5 Khalil, James and Martine Zeuthen, “Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation”. *Whitehall Report* 2016, pp. 2-16. London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies (RUSI).

6 Search for Common Ground, “Transforming Violent Extremism: A Peacebuilder’s Guide”, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.sfcg.org/wpcontent/uploads/2017/04/Transforming-Violent-Conflict.pdf>

7 Humera Khan, “Why Countering Extremism Fails”.

8 Ibid.

9 See Owen Frazer and Christian Nunlist, “The Concept of Countering Violent Extremism”, *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, No. 183, 2015

10 Iffat Idris and Ayat Abdelaziz, “Women and countering violent extremism”.

11 See Peter R. Neumann, “The Trouble with Radicalization”, *International Affairs*, 89 (4), 2013, 875-876.

and political/economical marginalization. Taking a step further and going up in the latter of abstraction, Neumann classifies them in terms of grievances, needs and ideas.<sup>12</sup>

The pull factors are defined as the positive characteristics and benefits of an extremist organization that “pull” vulnerable individuals to join. These include the group’s ideology (e.g., emphasis on changing one’s condition through violence rather than “apathetic” and “passive” democratic means), strong bonds of brotherhood and sense of belonging, reputation building, prospect of fame or glory, and other socialization benefits.<sup>13</sup> James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen’s refined model on the drivers of radicalization identifies *push* and *pull* factors for radicalization, which incorporates enabling factors to the direct causal paths.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, structural motivators such as underlying grievances, socio-economic or political issues are categorized as push factors, whereas *incentives* contingent on actual participation are taken as *pull* factors. As

stated, the authors also provide *enabling factors* as a third category, which enable rather than motivate violence.<sup>15</sup> In their analysis, Khalil and Zeuthen assert that in understanding radicalization the difference between opinion and behaviour shall be taken into consideration. Having identified a wide spectrum of push and pull factors, authors propose models of CVE that specifically tackle these factors.

In addition to this basic framework, various studies looked upon the role of internet and social media, psychological factors, deprivation, poverty and lack of freedom and democratization on radicalization and proposed the necessity of addressing these issues in order to boost de-radicalization processes and achieve an effective PVE strategy.<sup>16</sup> As identified by some, personal factors include related but more specifically individual characteristics that make certain individuals more vulnerable than their circumstantially comparable peers to radicalization. This can include for example psychological disorders, personality traits and traumatic life experiences.<sup>17</sup>

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12 Peter R. Neumann, “Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism: Ideas, Recommendations, and Good Practices from the OSCE Region”.

13 Hassan, Muhsin, ‘Understanding drivers of violent extremism: The case of Al-Shabab and Somali Youth’, *Combating Terrorism Center West Point CTC Sentinel*, 2012, p. 5.

14 Khalil, James and Martine Zeuthen, “Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation”.

15 Ibid.

16 See Maura Conway, “Determining the Role of the Internet in Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Six Suggestions for Progressing Research”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 40:1, 2016, 77-98;

Khatidja Chantler, et al. “Muslim women and gender-based violence in India and the UK”, *Critical Social Policy*, 2018, 1-21; Randy Borum, “Radicalization into Violent Extremism II: A Review of Conceptual Models and Empirical Research”, *Journal of Strategic Security*, Vol.4, No.4; Arie W. Kruglanski, et al. “The Psychology of Radicalization and Deradicalization: How Significance Quest Impacts Violent Extremism”, *Advances in Political Psychology*, Vol. 35, 2014; Elizabeth Pearson, “The Case of Roshonara Choudhry: Implications for Theory on Online Radicalization, ISIS Women, and the Gendered Jihad”, *Policy and Internet*, 8:1, 2016, pp. 5-33; Gayatri Sahgal, and Martine Zeuthen, “Analytical Framing of Violent Extremism and Gender in Kenya: A Review of the Literature”,

*The African Review*, Vol. 45, No.1., 2018; 1-18; 2016, Mona Ennaji, “Recruitment of foreign male and female fighters to Jihad: Morocco’s multifaceted counter-terror strategy”, *International Review of Sociology*, 26:3, 2016, 546-557, Amin Saikal, “Women and Jihad: Combating Violent Extremism and Developing New Approaches to Conflict Resolution in the Greater Middle East”, *Journal of Muslim*

*Minority Affairs*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2016, 313-322.

17 M. Vergani, M. Iqbal, E. Ilbahar and G. Barton, “The three Ps of radicalization: Push, pull and personal. A systematic scoping review of the scientific evidence about radicalization into violent

extremism”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 2018, 1-32.

**When it comes to relative importance of these different motivators and enablers, several meta analyses assess their impact in different contexts and find that among the structural factors, the evidence regarding the role of poverty and lack of education is rather mixed and instead suggest evaluations of unfairness embedded in relative deprivation, limited access to public services, and state repression as an important motivator.**



Furthermore, most recent studies incorporate personal factors including those interacting with societal values such as self-worth, and also draw our attention to individuals who shift between opposite set of values such as those converting from serious addiction or petty criminal activity to religiously devout lifestyles.<sup>18</sup>

Having identified the various push and pull factors, the literature turns to applied use of their findings in informing CVE and PVE efforts. In this regard, CVE and PVE efforts are documented through examples of good practices, exit strategies for radicalized individuals and efforts to devise counter-narratives.<sup>19</sup> The literature puts emphasis on the necessity of a comprehensive response for C/PVE, which has to encompass prevention, intervention,

interdiction and reintegration. Unfortunately, studies illustrate that in most cases intervention and reintegration -particularly rehabilitation efforts- lagged behind and for this reason as also argued by Khan, individuals who started to radicalize have not been de-radicalized and those who engaged in violence were not rehabilitated.<sup>20</sup>

Following this general overview, the forthcoming section will propose a more gender specific approach following a discussion of previous efforts in this regard. In particular, we will unveil where women stand in processes of radicalization, their desired and existing role in CVE and PVE efforts and discuss how this gender specific approach can refine our current understandings based on the existing literature.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> See Global Counterterrorism Forum, "Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism", 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.the.gctf.org>. Hedayah, "Launch of the Counter Narratives in South East Asia How-To Guide". Retrieved from <http://www.hedayahcenter.org/activities/761/2016/780/launch-of-the-counter-narratives-in-south-east-asia-how-to-guide>; Krista Couture, "A Gendered Approach To Countering Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned From Women In Peacebuilding And Conflict Prevention Applied Successfully In Bangladesh And Morocco". *Brookings Policy Paper*, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> For a precise discussion, see Humera Khan, "Why Countering Extremism Fails".

# 3.

## Women, Radicalization and Women’s Role in CVE and PVE



As pointed out in the literature, women’s roles in violent extremism only recently became a subject of interest for policymakers, researchers and practitioners. Without doubt, this is mainly related with the growing role and visibility of women in ISIS.<sup>21</sup> According to the first global dataset compiled by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) of King’s College London, of 41,490 international citizens from 80 countries affiliated with ISIS in Iraq and Syria, up to 4,761 (13%) of them were recorded to be women in addition to 4,640 (12%) of them to be minors.<sup>22</sup> However,

the report aptly noted the absence of exact data for many countries regarding the real figures in women and minors, which directly pertained to the lack of gender-sensitive statistics. Nevertheless, women recruitment of ISIS from the Western countries and their active presence in further recruitment and propaganda for ISIS, besides their public roles in the proto-state building of the ISIS has been a particular concern for OSCE countries to attend to this hitherto neglected dimension and seek ways of understanding women’s radicalization and their roles in deradicalization and C/PVE attempts.<sup>23</sup>

21 See Meredith Loken and Anna Zelenz, “Explaining Extremism: Western Women in Daesh”, *European Journal of International Security*, 3:1, 2018, 45-68; Elizabeth Pearson, Emily Winterbotham, “Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation” *The RUSI Journal*, 162: 3, 2017, 60-72; Beverley Milton-Edwards, Sumaya Attia, “Female Terrorists and Their Role in Jihadi Groups”, *Brookings*, May 9, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/female-terrorists-and-their-role-in-jihadi-groups/>; Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, “ISIS’ Female Suicide Bombers Are No Myth”, *Foreign Affairs*, 22 September 2017.

22 Joana Cook and Gina Vale, *From Daesh to ‘Diaspora’: Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King’s College London, 2018. Online available at: <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICSR-Report-From-Daesh-to-%E2%80%98Diaspora%E2%80%99-Tracing-the-Women-and-Minors-of-Islamic-State.pdf>

23 Peter R. Neumann, “Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism: Ideas, Recommendations, and Good Practices from the OSCE Region”.

As a matter of fact, there has already been a remarkable increase in UN's efforts to incorporate gender as an intrinsic dimension of security and conflict resolution. Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Initiative of the UN already laid the contours of contemporary efforts to foster a gender-sensitive approach to security with its emphasis on gender equality and women's empowerment. Adopted in October 2000, UNSCR 1325<sup>24</sup> was a landmark resolution for the WPS. The resolution "reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security." It urged "all actors to increase the participation of women, incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts and calls on all parties to conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict."<sup>25</sup> UN's agenda on gender equality and women's empowerment was reflected in major UN Security Council Resolutions 2129 (2013), UNSC 2178 (2014), UNSC 2242 (2015) as well as reports of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, and the Committee's Executive Directorate (CTED).

Among these resolutions, UNSC Resolution 2242 adopted in 2015 deserves special attention in the context of global efforts to understand and foster women's roles in CVE/PVE. The Resolution has been the first UNSC resolution which called

for gender-sensitive research, participation and leadership of women and women's organizations in developing strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism, and greater funding of CVE projects addressing gender dimensions.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the UN Action Plan on PVE dedicated a whole pillar to the role of women and gender, including determining a percentage of funding for programmes focused only on women/girls in PVE.<sup>27</sup>

Besides UN and the OSCE, European Union and the United States also embarked on supporting research in order to address the role of women in violent extremism and formulate policy to strengthen women's role in C/PVE. To this aim, studies by the European Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) and February 2015 White House Summit to Counter Violent Extremism and related activities of the US government must be stated.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, projects entitled Women without Borders/Sisters against Violent Extremism and Center for Gender and Peacebuilding launched by the US Institute of Peace attended to the role of women as well as women's organizations with an aim to "let the women on the front lines talk."<sup>29</sup>

The research team's survey of the existing literature found out strong emphasis on diverse roles women played *for* and *against* radicalization. Most of the analyses objected to "women as victims" view as a popular misconception, which deprived them of agency and reduced women to passivity.<sup>30</sup> Studies, such as of Fink et al, pointed out the long history of women as active members of terrorist groups, through their roles as mobilizers, recruiters,

24 The text of the UNSC Resolution 1325 is online available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>

25 See <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/#resolution>

26 For the full text of the UNSC Resolution 2242, see <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/311/09/PDF/N1531109.pdf?OpenElement>

27 See Iffat Idris and Abdelaziz, "Women and countering violent extremism".

28 See [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network\\_enhttps://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/18/fact-sheet-white-house-summit-countering-violent-extremism](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network_enhttps://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/02/18/fact-sheet-white-house-summit-countering-violent-extremism); for a precise overview, see also Chantal de Jonge Oudraat, "Preventing and Countering Violent Etxremism: The Role of Women and Women's Organizations", in Fink et. al. *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*. Hedayah and The Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2016.

29 Chantal de Jonge Oudraat, "Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: The Role of Women and Women's Organizations".

30 See OSCE, "Women and Terrorist Radicalization Final Report", 2013. Retrieved from

<http://www.osce.org/atu/99919?download=true>; Sophie Giscard d'Estaing, "Engaging women in countering violent extremism: avoiding instrumentalisation and furthering agency". *Gender & Development*, 25:1, 2017, pp. 103-118.

supporters and perpetrators.<sup>31</sup> These studies underlined that women were neither mere victims, nor sole perpetrators. Indeed, since we cannot talk about a monolithic woman category, we cannot envisage a single role for women in their relationship with violence.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, as Oudraat argues, portrayal of women as passive victims only served for reproduction of gender stereotypes and risked undermining the effectiveness of CVE efforts by denying women any role.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, in our survey of literature, besides analyses on women and children being the primary victims of violence and extremism, women are also defined as “perpetrators of VE, supporters of VE and those who have peers associated with VE.”<sup>34</sup> Various articles depicted women “on the frontlines of violent extremism, as recruiters, propagators, suicide bombers, and targets.”<sup>35</sup> These analyses in essence followed up the earlier discussions on the theme of “female jihad”, which largely documented women’s role in al-Qaeda, particularly their participation in acts of suicide bombing.<sup>36</sup>

Yet, a highly important discussion on women’s central role in CVE and PVE also burgeoned and started to receive its much-deserved attention. These works put forward by academia as well as practitioners working in the field depicted women as “leaders working on de-radicalization, counter-

messaging, and peacebuilding.”<sup>37</sup> An OSCE report of 2013 framed women’s involvement in C/PVE as “policy shapers, educators, community members, and activists.”<sup>38</sup> EU Workshop on Effective programming for CVE drew upon women’s help in “de-mystifying the life of a terrorist” as well as their role in “compelling media attention and public sympathy”<sup>39</sup> Thus, the CVE and PVE analyses embraced “a more comprehensive recognition of the gender dynamics at play” both at different stages of radicalization and deradicalization.<sup>40</sup>

The research team’s literature survey traced and enlisted some of the current CVE/PVE programmes focusing on increasing education, cultural outreach and building counter-narratives to prevent radicalization at the individual and community level through social media or imams.<sup>41</sup> Prominent C/PVE initiatives undertaken so far included “Mother’s Schools” programme run by the NGO Women without Borders (2013); Danish Kingdom MENA municipality network for establishing multi-stakeholder Municipal “Prevention Networks” with the aim to capacity-build local stakeholders to coordinate efforts, advise on and respond to concerns of risk behaviour among young people and the Prevent strategy of the UK government.<sup>42</sup> The review of the programmes revealed that some countries also

31 Naureen Fink, Sara Zeiger, Rafia Bhulai (eds.), *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*. Hedayah and The Global Center on Cooperative Security, 2016.

32 Lucy Leburn, “Women As Victims And Perpetrators Of Daesh Violence”, *CFFP*, 2017. Retrieved from <https://centreforforeignpolicy.org/journal/2017/1/17/women-as-victims-and-perpetrators-of-daesh-violence>

33 See Chantal de Jonge Oudraat, “Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: The Role of Women and Women’s Organizations”.

34 James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen, “Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation”.

35 Sophie Giscard d’Estaing, “Engaging women in countering violent extremism: avoiding instrumentalisation and furthering agency”.

36 See Jessica Davis, “Evolution of the Global Jihad: Female Suicide Bombers in Iraq”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 36, 2013, pp. 279–291; Katarina Van Knop, “The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda’s Women”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 30, 2006, pp. 397–414.

37 Sophie Giscard d’Estaing, “Engaging women in countering violent extremism: avoiding instrumentalisation and furthering agency”.

38 OSCE, “Women and Terrorist Radicalization Final Report”, 2013. Retrieved from <http://www.osce.org/atu/99919?download=true>

39 Becky Carter, “Women and violent extremism”, *GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report*, 2013.

Retrieved from <http://www.gsdrc.org/docs/open/hdq898.pdf>

40 See Erin Marie Saltman and Ross Frenett, “Female Radicalization to ISIS and the Role of Women in CVE”, in Fink et al., *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*.

41 See the comprehensive library and publications at <http://www.hedayah.ae/>

42 Fink et. al. *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*; Iffat Idris and Abdelaziz, “Women and countering violent extremism”.

engaged in inter-religious and inter-communal dialogues; some undertook socio-economic development for youth and marginalized groups.<sup>43</sup>

As Idris and Abdulaziz suggest, the growing view that women can serve as preventers of violent extremism mostly defined this role in relation to women's family, as seen in Mother's Schools initiative, that is in terms of women spotting signs of radicalization among their family members and delegitimizing these extremist narratives.<sup>44</sup> However, feminist critiques object to this view, for it reproduces women's traditional role and confinement to family and indeed brings enormous burden for coping with this challenge on their own, which has to be shouldered more by the state and civil society organizations.<sup>45</sup> Apart from these discussions, experts also suggest that women can also play crucial role by assisting security actors in the making of more effective CVE programmes. In this respect, they can themselves become a part of the security forces.<sup>46</sup> These works mentioned the importance of the engagement of international community and governments with women in preventing violent extremism and called for greater focus on the gender-related reasons why women become involved as protagonists and supporters of violent extremism.<sup>47</sup>

Apart from conceptual discussions and practitioners' record of C/PVE efforts, we also compiled data and analysis produced on Turkey's experience with radicalization particularly in the context of ISIS by drawing on the major works of investigative journalism in Turkish. Among a number of pieces produced on this topic, works by Taştekin, Saymaz,

Alkan and Eroğlu were reviewed to comprehend the historical, sociological and political context of the emergence of ISIS, main contours of its ideology and policy, its policy and perspective on women.<sup>48</sup> These works mostly attended to the ideology, network and operations of the ISIS, only briefly touched upon the gender dimension, and they did so mainly in terms of women recruitment and ISIS manifesto for women. Analyses on Turkey's experience with Foreign Terrorist Fighters and its struggle with radicalization and violent extremism shed light on significant conceptual and practical dimensions of VE and radicalization in the context of Turkey, yet these works did not thoroughly discuss the gender dimension.<sup>49</sup> Nor did they provide any gender-based statistics on female recruitment to ISIS.

43 Sophie Giscard d'Estaing, "Engaging women in countering violent extremism: avoiding instrumentalisation and furthering agency", p. 105. 44 See Iffat Idris and Abdelaziz, "Women and countering violent extremism".

45 Sophie Giscard d'Estaing, "Engaging women in countering violent extremism: avoiding instrumentalisation and furthering agency".

46 See Fink et. al. *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*; Iffat Idris and Abdelaziz, "Women and countering violent extremism".

47 Sophie Giscard d'Estaing, "Engaging women in countering violent extremism: avoiding instrumentalisation and furthering agency".

48 See Fehim Taştekin, *Karanlık Çöktüğünde*. İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2016; İsmail Saymaz, *Türkiye'de İŞİD*. Ankara: İletişim Yayınları, 2017; Necati Alkan, *El Kaide'den İŞİD'e Din, Şiddet ve Terörizm*. Karınca, 2016; Doğu Eroğlu, *İŞİD Ağları: Türkiye'de Radikalleşme, Örgütlenme, Lojistik*. İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2018.

49 See Göktuğ Sönmez, "Radicalization, Violent Extremism and Turkey's Fight", *ORSAM Analiz*, 30 May 2017; Göktuğ Sönmez "Detecting and Interdicting Terrorist Travel: Global Efforts, and Turkey", *ORSAM*, 30 November 2018.

# 4.

# Methodology



## 4.a. Organizing the field work and preparation of semi-structured interview questions

Based on the literature on violent extremism with a gendered perspective and in preparation for the fieldwork, the research team conducted a desk review of the Turkish case with violent extremism using available official reports, books and literature published as well as a media review. This analysis pointed out to several new issues to be addressed when conducting the fieldwork and new actors to be interviewed. The research team then outlined an organization of the fieldwork to address some of the issues as well as the shortcomings shown in existing studies. To this end a list of issues are drafted and potential actors who can be inquired about these issues were identified. For this identification, scholarly research, international, national and local news were surveyed, and experts were consulted.

Building on the findings from the desk review, media review, and canvassing the field, we focused on case selection for the interviews. Based on the frequent reported cases of joining violent extremist organizations and expert interviews, various locations stood out. While continuing our interviews

in Ankara, we explored these locations and their feasibility to be included in the fieldwork.

The first province we chose to cover was Istanbul. In addition to sheer magnitude of cases available, this context was quite different than the remaining southeastern provinces we focused with a potential for different push and pull factors, different recruitment mechanisms and networks of action. In addition, Istanbul was a case where we could explore the radicalization of both Turkish citizens and refugee populations in a highly developed NGO environment.

The second and third provinces we chose were heavy in border crossings for both Syrians and Turkish citizens and radicalization activity, namely Kilis and Hatay. There was some NGO activity in the region, still we had to loosen our definition of an NGO and to include faith-based agencies and political party support groups.

The three following provinces we chose were known

to be very heavy in recruitment with considerable number of official cases reported in the media and law enforcement agencies. These were Adana and Gaziantep, two metropolitan and diverse provinces in the region, involving imbalanced economic and cultural development and various NGOs dealing with women's issues and refugee issues.

A province that we came across as a hub for recruitment for religiously motivated radical organizations was Adiyaman. There was disagreement in the literature on the size of this recruitment in that while some reports and news stories point out to this city as the epicentre, the others argue that its role in the process is overrated and that the networks actually spread across a lot larger area. Adiyaman was also important for us, as a district of this province Kahta is the centre of one of the faith-based organizations which is argued to have a potential to be influential in producing a counternarrative and rehabilitation in our initial interviews.

Finally, we chose Diyarbakır, a province of Turkey where the inhabitants are predominantly of Kurdish ethnic origin. This perspective was important so as to diversify our field research to a different ethnic community where ethnic radicalization and subsequent PKK terrorism has also been present for decades and where some members of this community are of Sunni faith and have shown affinity with Islamist movements with a radicalization tendency in the past and our desk review suggested the formation of groups within

al-Nusrah to accommodate Kurdish Islamists. Also, Diyarbakır has been the main host city for Syrian Yezidi women and children, known to be victims of ISIS and fled to Turkey. In other words, Diyarbakır provided a case for several roles women can play on the radicalization continuum.

The research team constructed a set of interview questions based on the issue list given the different set of actors involved. The below-mentioned cover the basic questionnaire with respect to their target separately.

With regard to collective interest groups and academics:

- What are the different understandings of radicalization and violent extremism as conceptualized by women's NGOs, academics and policy-makers in Turkish civil society?
- What are the strategies adopted by actors in countering and preventing violent extremism through women?
- What are the root causes steering women or families in this direction?
- What specific narratives are being employed in these encounters?
- Do they have gender-specific programmes to reach out women that suffer from post-radicalization trauma and provide institutional support for rehabilitation and resilience of women?
- How do they evaluate their performance in relation to CVE and PVE so far?
- What is their perspective on a sustainable institutional mechanism for an optimize C/PVE response to radicalism?

With regard to radicalized women or women at risk:

- What are the different push and pull factors for themselves and their families?
- What rationale do they base their actions in e.g. the narrative used to justify radical extremism?
- What strategies -if any- did they use to prevent radicalization?
- What institutions did they approach to get assistance prior radicalization or after/during rehabilitation stage?
- What difficulties did they face in decision making within their families, social networks or getting help from outside?

#### **4.b. Preparation of an extended interview list of NGOs, state institutions, academics working on women and humanitarian issues**

The fieldwork for this project lasted about three and a half months and covered 8 provinces across Turkey, namely, Ankara, Istanbul, Gaziantep, Kilis, Adiyaman, Diyarbakır, Adana and Antakya. As justified in the previous section, the actors identified as points of interest included academics, both faith-based and secular humanitarian aid NGOs, religious

networks, lawyers and bar associations, community leaders, directly affected women, local political party affiliates (both opposition and government party), and religious leaders. Altogether, the field visits of the research team yielded to a total of 80 interviews across Turkey. The following two tables illustrate the categories of actors interviewed and the distribution of the interviews across the 8 provinces covered.

**Table 1: Actor Categories Interviewed**

<i>Category of the Interviewee</i>	<b>Number Interviewed</b>
<i>Academic/Researcher/Journalist</i>	<b>10</b>
<i>Women NGO</i>	<b>10</b>
<i>Refugee/Humanitarian NGO</i>	<b>13</b>
<i>Faith Based NGO</i>	<b>14</b>
<i>Legal Assistance/Bar member</i>	<b>6</b>
<i>State Expert</i>	<b>2</b>
<i>Community Member/Directly Affected Contact</i>	<b>15</b>
<i>Political Party Affiliate (Women or Youth org)</i>	<b>3</b>
<i>Cleric/Religious Leader</i>	<b>7</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>80</b>

**Table 2: Geographical Distribution of Interviews**

<i>Province</i>	<b>Number of Interviews Conducted</b>
<i>Ankara</i>	<b>11</b>
<i>Istanbul</i>	<b>16</b>
<i>Gaziantep</i>	<b>7</b>
<i>Kilis</i>	<b>8</b>
<i>Adiyaman</i>	<b>7</b>
<i>Diyarbakır</i>	<b>13</b>
<i>Adana</i>	<b>9</b>
<i>Hatay</i>	<b>9</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>80</b>

#### **4.c. Sampling from the potential interviewees for the initial field research and securing interviews**

At this stage, the research team wanted to meet with a diverse group of actors to be familiarized with the different set of interests and various dimensions of marginalization and radicalization involving women. First off, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the state of the art in Turkey and the intricacies of developing a gender sensitive language and methodology, we met with academics who do research both in security studies and radicalization as well as gender studies.

Following the first set of exploratory interviews, the research team decided to focus on civil society organizations that aim to represent the rights and needs of women. For this purpose, two national and one local NGO based in Ankara were selected. The first interview was conducted with a secular NGO, headed by an academic working in the field of gender studies and with an extensive experience with women issues in Turkey via a focus on raising awareness and advocacy. The second national NGO we selected was a faith-based institution, aiming at reinstating and conveying the Turkish state's official perspective on Islam with a focus on women. These interviews were very instrumental in comprehending the relative lack of existing work and focus in the area, hence the utility of our project, and directed us to a handful scholars and practitioners working in this field. Furthermore, they helped our conceptualization of different dimensions and realizations of violent extremism.

Following these first two set of interviews, the research team decided to get closer to the target population via journalists working in the field, a local NGO platform with direct contact with women at risk and three individuals in the networks of radicalized women (friends/relatives). These interviews were crucial in understanding the different conceptualization and various stages of radicalization, and the relating push and pull factors women face. Altogether ten interviews were conducted in Ankara from the list of potential interviewees, including interviews with academics, security experts, journalists, civil society organizations working on women issues and women at risk. In addition, the research team identified actors to be interviewed outside of Ankara, approached them for interviews and secured some meetings.

In line with the stated aims of the project, the research team had direct and indirect access to women who are located at different points of radicalization. As argued initially, women were expected to assume various roles in relation to radicalization, namely as sympathizers, perpetrators, contenders and victims of ISIS and al-Nusrah front. The interviews we conducted successfully identified women with all these different roles, which confirmed that women in Turkey do have various roles and positions in their relationship with violent extremism.

The research team has not directly talked to any women who joined these networks and returned. The experiences of both Turkish and Syrian women joining these networks were transmitted to the team mostly through the lawyers associated with the bar associations in high recruitment towns such as Adiyaman, who had direct encounters with these women; local journalists and academics who have interviewed them or their families; informal women networks as well as through the local faith-based humanitarian NGOs with active works in those particular neighbourhoods with widespread recruitment.

Accordingly, most women these officials have heard of travelled to Syria or Iraq because of their husbands who joined militant Salafi networks. There have been also cases in which women were left behind in Turkey with other family members taking care of them once their husbands went to fight. Some of these women rejected joining ISIS or al-Nusrah front for a number of reasons. For instance, some of them had to stay because they were pregnant and wanted to give birth in Turkey, others did not want to interrupt their children's education in their hometowns.

The research also encountered stories of women joining ISIS or al-Nusrah front for marrying the men fighting in the ranks of these groups. These stories confirmed reports by several Turkish journalists (e.g. Saymaz) working on the ISIS networks in Turkey. Some interviewees told us that in these cases

women conceived such marriages and giving birth to children in the caliphate as "their own means of joining the fight", even though they did not take or were not allowed to take a direct combatant role.

Some members of local faith-based NGOs mentioned that in south eastern parts of Turkey (e.g. Diyarbakır), women had strong ideological motivations to join these groups because of their anti-establishment family upbringing since the 1990s mainly through Salafi publications. Yet they did not join these networks "thanks to the absence of recruiters reaching out these women." Our research also found out stories from Istanbul where similar strong ideological and anti-establishment motivations of women pushed them into Syria and Iraq.

Throughout the interviews, the research team accessed women from Turkey with relatives (sons, brothers, brother-in-law) and friends who joined either ISIS or al-Nusrah front as well as Syrian women who persuaded their sympathizer relatives not to join ISIS. In order to gain deeper insights into the victimization of women by ISIS such as Yazidi women, the project team talked to psychologists, sociologists, lawyers who either worked in the Yazidi camps or got involved with Yazidi-related social work in Diyarbakir, where the Yazidi community escaped and mainly took shelter in Turkey. The major aim of the research was to probe the role of civil society, mainly women's and humanitarian NGOs in building and implementing effective CVE

and PVE strategies. With this aim the project team reached and talked to a wide spectrum of civil society organizations as well as school teachers, local Imams who reflected on their experience of radicalization at schools or religious community in their neighbourhood. With these interviews the research also shed light on dynamics of youth radicalization and recruitment.

The forthcoming parts of our report will identify the understandings of violent extremism in the field followed by the activities of civil society that relate to CVE and PVE. Subsequently, various push and pull factors informing radicalization in Turkey and women's position vis-à-vis this process will be laid out. The next section will evaluate the agenda, perspective and programs of both secular and faith-based civil society organizations in Turkey and their prospective roles in rehabilitation

and de-radicalization and reflect on their understandings in the light of the interviews conducted. The following section will discuss the implications of these findings on the particular case of women in Turkey in relation to their different existing and potential roles within the process of radicalization namely as sympathizers, preventers and victims as well as their agency in relation to structures of patriarchy. The report will conclude with recommendations for building viable and durable institutional mechanisms in pursuit of effective CVE and PVE strategies, including national strategy, a collaborative role for civil society especially in relation to building a counternarrative, educational and social opportunities, and rehabilitative functions, all informed by the proposed gender sensitive perspective.

# 5.

## Findings and Discussion



### 5.a. The conception of radicalization and violent extremism among NGOs, academics, policy-makers and community actors in Turkish civil society

In order to assess the way radicalization is perceived by the different actors interviewed, the findings are categorized based on how they identify radicalization, violent extremism/violence, women and violence, Islamic radicalization, and civilian mechanisms in CVE and PVE.

First off, the literature on violent extremism points out to the difficulty of a coming up with an agreed upon definition of radicalization in a given community. As radicalization is defined in relation to the values of mainstream society, the term is necessarily relative. In other words, what may be considered radical in one community may be considered normal in another.<sup>50</sup> In order to understand the mental map of the actors, deemed important for this research, at the initial stage of

the interview, their understanding of radicalization has been inquired upon. The interviews indicate that NGOs and individuals have not only different definitions of radicalization, but they also have different evaluations of it. Put differently, some do not attach any negative connotations to radicalization, as per their definition and see it as a necessary option as opposed to others who feel very distant from the idea.

According to some NGOs we have interviewed, radicalization is identified as a process associated with a strong disenchantment and rebellion against the state, whereas for others it was a reaction to the established order, whichever way it was defined ranging from globalization, capitalism, bureaucracy, bourgeoisie, an unjust repressive state

<sup>50</sup> Aoife McCullough and Mareike Schomerus, "What do we know about drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism, globally and in Niger?", *Overseas Development Institute Report*, February 2017, retrieved from <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/11405.pdf>

(or groups of states) or a domination of a particular ethnic or religious group. As ours was the Turkish case, uttering 'radicalization' along with 'violent extremism' emanated associations with Kurdish nationalist movement besides ISIS and al-Nusrah front.

These different understandings necessitated clarifications by the researchers at the initial stages of the interview and providing the framework within which this project evaluates radicalization. It was easy to convey our definition based on a behavioural radicalization process resulting in sympathizing or joining violent religiously motivated groups. Essentially none of the interviews objected to this definition however some -especially those of Syrian origin, elicited a clear hierarchy among these groups with a less negative assessment of al-Nusrah front as compared to ISIS. A similar conception of hierarchy was detected in some of our interviews in Diyarbakır and Adana.

When it comes to the relational role of women to violence, almost all women's NGOs defined this relationship in terms of masculine violence, where women are purely victims in need of direction and rehabilitation. The major preoccupation of these NGOs with domestic violence against women indeed aimed to address a deep societal problem, that is deemed more widespread and imminent. This perspective actually proved to be important in understanding the violence heavy atmosphere women find themselves even before encountering violent extremism as well as comprehending the patriarchal gender roles imposed upon them which limit their options and role in countering violent extremism. When the discussion on violent extremism was initiated in the interviews, women's

NGOs soon became quite self-aware as to the importance of the topic and their institutions' lack of sensitivity to the issue as well as their sufficient engagement. They acknowledged the need to put the researchers' understanding of the relationship between women and violence into their agenda and similar to the remarks of the interviewed academics, these practitioners underlined the necessity of rethinking and redefining the concept of violence in gender studies and incorporating the discussions as to women's role in radicalization and violent extremism. These interviews testify how the omission of women from current studies and policies is reflected on the field.

As far as the CVE is concerned, the lack of a clear definition of the concept and placement in the agenda reflects on the identification of ways for countering violent extremism and assessing the NGOs' own role in this process, regardless of their focus on women or humanitarian aid. In all interviews, the researchers had to exemplify common methods of countering and preventing violent extremism and pointing out to the activities of the respective NGO in this realm. This lack of a common definition not only reflected itself on the self-assessment of the NGO, but much earlier, when these NGOs were accessed for interviewing. Put differently, as these civil society actors never considered their activities as in the realms of countering radicalization, their initial reaction to be interviewed was rather negative or confused, on the grounds that their organization does not operate in the fields related to radicalization. From this perspective, the fieldwork of the research team can be argued to have gone beyond mapping to awareness-raising for the NGOs, for which our team was thanked several times.

## **5.b. Perspectives of civil society actors vis-à-vis countering and preventing violent extremism**

Despite their lack of a clear perspective on CVE and PVE, most actors interviewed engage in various activities eliciting their potential in this area.

These activities are illustrated in great detail in the following sections on their self-assessments, but still they can be categorized under casework, skills training, psychological and theological counselling and rehabilitation. This categorization will be useful in assessing their work regarding CVE and PVE under the related section.

### **5.b.i. Casework and Door to Door Data Collection:**

These efforts are mainly performed by humanitarian aid organizations targeting the vulnerable groups in the society including Syrians and low-income individuals. In order to detect vulnerabilities and tailor their services to the community, these NGOs conduct regular needs assessments and update these needs as new issues arise. At times, these assessments spill over to their services in other areas. While they sometimes engage in cooperation and consultancy with local actors in their respective issue area, they rarely engage in active advocacy work except for some women's NGOs.

However, none of the NGOs interviewed conduct their needs assessments with a clear agenda on CVE or PVE. Both faith-based and secular organizations focus on addressing the basic necessities in their communities, be it food or clothing items, assistance and advising with reach out services eliciting some spill-over to their other activities. It is without doubt that these activities address and mitigate the impact of important push factors of

radicalization by improving socio-economic status of their communities and assisting them with their own services or removing the obstacles for them to reach public services. Nevertheless, until being interviewed, most NGOs were not aware of the implications of their work in the realms of **preventing** violent extremism. Nevertheless, through the casework they conduct some NGOs become more aware of the issue. Put differently, it is in the due course that they encounter individuals with a potential to radicalize, the relatives of those who joined violent extremist organizations or victims of them. As a result, they find themselves in a position to develop an action plan after the fact and mostly refer these cases to their counselling units where available.

### **5.b.ii Skills Training and Educational Support:**

These trainings are performed by both faith-based and secular NGOs dealing with both Syrian and Turkish population. Municipalities also cooperate with Public Education Centers and offer trainings. As an important livelihood building and supporting activity, these trainings first provide a socialization area to the vulnerable and potentially marginalized members of their community. These NGOs also build the trust among the members of the community by gaining access points to their lives. Some of these support courses target school aged children, support their formal education courses especially for low income families, while others target the youth populations and offer language, music, hobby or sports courses. Finally, there are courses for adult populations which aim at providing skills trainings such as tailoring, computer, electronics or hobby and recreational skills. Most community centres that offer these skills training

for vulnerable populations and especially for Syrians, also provide child friendly spaces overseen by pedagogues or preschool teachers in order to increase the enrolment of women. These courses can serve as both preventers of radicalization as well as rehabilitative functions.

**5.b.iii Psychological & Theological Counseling and Rehabilitation:**

Several NGOs focusing on humanitarian aid, addiction as well as women's issues and faith-based structures provide counselling grounded either in secular or theological teachings. The majority of humanitarian organizations providing services in this field have international collaborations and mainly cater to Syrian refugee communities as a way to address their war trauma or post war adaptation issues stemming from their forced displacement. These organizations have a highly skilled non-volunteer professional staff trained in the area where services are provided such as psychology and law, hold detailed case files of their clients both during needs assessments and during service provision and may come across individuals

at various stages of radicalizations. The women's NGOs on the other hand mainly cater to women and children suffering domestic violence issues and prioritize empowerment of their clients. The addiction focused organizations target mostly youth, provide awareness trainings but also provide therapy during the rehabilitation process.

Finally, the theological counselling services provided either by faith-based NGOs or on a voluntary basis by state (Diyanet) imams target the entire population and give advice on a variety of issues based on interpretations of religious teachings, texts, and centuries-old practices in line with those. These can be perceived as easy access points for sympathizers of religiously motivated radicalism in case they actually search for alternative answers or brought to these community actors by their family. All of these organizations can be quite important in detecting individuals in the process of radicalization at an early phase or address the psychological push factors before they become effective motivators and finally they may also provide rehabilitation services for returnees.

### 5.c. Identifying the individual and community-based push and pull factors to extremism:

In this section, with the aim of suggesting effective CVE and PVE strategies later, the main push and pull factors as well as enablers outlined in the literature review will be explored in relation to the interviews conducted. In order to provide a thorough assessment, interviewees were asked about the cases they know of and the potential motivators of these radicalizing individuals. The respondents will be explored under the “Economic/Structural Factors” which relate to the material conditions of the individual or the community, “Ideological Factors” referring specifically to individuals’ affinity or proximity to radical Islam and its underpinnings, and “Psychological Factors” focusing on the psyche-specific influencers such as trauma experience, self-esteem, need for distinction or meaning. Finally, some contextual enabling factors such as political polarization and rise of political Islam will be briefly discussed in relation to the accounts of our interviewees.

#### 5.c.i. Economic/ Structural Factors:

As illustrated in the literature review, the socioeconomic conditions of individuals can serve both as a direct push factor or expose individuals to radical ideas. Secondly, the economic opportunities provided by organizations that resort to violent extremism may also serve as pull factors. These factors came up frequently in our interviews. Supporting this expectation, an NGO representative from Gaziantep lays out the issue bluntly with the following:

*“In some coffeehouses where recruitment is active, all men talk about is how much they would get paid. So it is definitely an important factor in explaining the motivations of considerable number of people.”*

The pushing role of economic deprivation is also well known by these organizations and their recruiters. Hence, they concentrate their efforts in the areas of cities where they can reap the benefits of poverty, as also put by an interviewee from Adana:

*“They mostly target the poor families in economically underdeveloped parts of the city. They also target religious people that they can convince easily. In my neighbourhood, poor people are very vulnerable and open to being radicalized either through ISIS or PKK. Once they are in, with the money they get, they become more confident. Providing legitimate sources of income to these people is very important. If you have a job, you may be a sympathizer and may support them monetarily but would not go and fight for them.” (Member of a Youth Organization of a Political Party in a vulnerable region who has encountered and tried to dissuade many sympathizers)*

Another interviewee, a coordinator of an NGO in Istanbul provided the following example:

*“Two girls I know from my hometown of Bingöl but living in Istanbul joined ISIS. They grew up in a religious family of low socio-economic status. One was not educated, the other went to a preacher school -where she supposedly got good religious training but apparently not, yet they both were recruited as wives of ISIS fighters over the social media. One had to remarry three times as her husbands have all died while fighting for ISIS. So regardless of their different educational background, they both became radicalized.”*

The socioeconomic factors were also discussed in relation to Syrian refugee population in Turkey and efforts of pro-ISIS organizations in assuaging

these vulnerabilities and creating sympathy. It is very clear from our interviews that in terms of economic vulnerabilities, a considerable group of Syrian refugees are at the bottom of the society making them more open to exposure. A testimony by a humanitarian NGO worker who worked both in south eastern Turkey and Istanbul is bluntly demonstrates the gravity of the situation and the importance of aid efforts:

***“I conducted brief interviews with about 300 Syrians when ISIS was in rise. The perception was positive and supportive. Many Syrians found ISIS and al-Nusrah as good organizations who helped them and distributed food and supplies to them. They sympathized with the cause also but found it too strict. Still, the economic incentives were an important pull factor for them. In this regard, humanitarian aid provided by Turkish government and International donors is important as it provides an alternative, socio-economic aid with no strings attached. The economic hardships these people go through can be so bad that they may see radicalization as a viable alternative especially if they have an ideological inclination. We even had a case with heavy psychological disturbance. There was a Syrian man who would ask for help and threaten to go join ISIS if we do not provide him with humanitarian aid. Later we found out that back in Syria he had some contact with Salafi organizations and hence in a state of fury out of economic hardships, this became a viable alternative for him.”***

All in all, there was not a single interviewee who did not consider economic hardships as an important push factor, but they also underlined that it is not important to explain the phenomena alone. Our interviewees were cautious about not overestimating the impact of economic factors and throughout the fieldwork we have heard numerous cases of well-off individuals who were radicalized.

Our interviewees further argued that making more money was even less of a motivation for women as they are either ideologically pushed into that direction or were put in a position to choose in a de-subjectified way. Nevertheless, not being after ISIS salaries does not necessarily mean the economic/ structural conditions does not play any role, especially for the latter case where their options are limited, and they have to survive. Put differently, some women are not particularly interested as joining violent extremist groups, but they are compelled to do so because of other male members of their family, especially husbands and brothers. According to our interviews, some of these women feel obliged and forced to go, in that they are afraid to be subject to physical violence if they do not go or they would not be able to sustain themselves -here the push is not making more money but being deprived of current income. Others are worried about their marriage at a more societal level and feel it is appropriate for them to go because their husbands are going or because they are worried their marriage would break apart otherwise. In other words, they become the followers of their male family members.

All in all, the economic and structural conditions seem to play an important push and pull factors informing the strategies of ISIS recruiters, their approach to vulnerable populations and provide better alternatives for livelihood. Nevertheless, in most of these interviews conducted, these factors appeared in conjunction with other motivators and in some exceptional cases did not appear at all. The following sections will discuss the findings in relation to other push and pull factors.

#### **5.c. ii. Ideological Factors:**

As illustrated in the review of the literature, the

appeal of the specific ideology of the organization resorting to violent extremism to the individual is an important factor in pushing him or her to radicalization. Here, the impact of two of these ideological factors, namely the state of **takfir**<sup>51</sup> and lack of awareness regarding the radicalized Islam practice will be evaluation in their effectiveness of radicalizing individuals.

## **-State of Takfir and Desire to Live and Fight for the so-called “Islamic State”**

Being a better Muslim is the first and foremost promise of religiously motivated radicalism. As suggested by our interviewees, the period of politicization of religion especially during the 1990s, an upbringing with strong anti-establishment and pro-Salafism undertones aids this process of the emergence and dissemination of **takfiri** ideology. One young woman we interviewed in Istanbul who stated to have close contact to radicalized women suggest the following:

***“Being more Muslim is definitely an important ideological motivator. There was a woman who read Salafi authors such as Ali Shariati, Sayyid Qutb and Islamist female authors, who watched videos of Ali Murat Khan where he shows how he guided Muslims stuck in the United States’ institutions, and soon became very radicalized.”***

The precondition for this process is a belief in the institutions of Islamic State as the sole model for an idealised Islamic living. This goes hand in hand with declaring the state (here the Turkish state), its institutions, laws and regulations as infidel = not

on par with the teaching of Islam. Furthermore, members of the community, family or friend circle can also be subject to **takfir** and be categorized as infidels if they do not respond to the individual’s call to radicalize, regardless of how much practicing Muslims they are. This categorization and following in-group favouritism and out-group degradation greatly hinder efforts of employing a counter narrative as part of CVE, which will be discussed in the respective section, and aids the recruiters in pacifying voices of their target individual’s family and friends. As suggested by a mother and sister of ISIS fighters from Adana:

***“The male members of my family did not join due to economic reasons. They had everything. They were religiously motivated as they questioned the way Islam is practiced in this country (Turkey), did not approve of some law such as the legality of alcohol or brothels and joined the so-called ‘Islamic State’ which they thought was better at providing a governance guided by true Islamic teachings”***

Our interviews also drew upon the important yet different role of ideology on radicalization processes for Syrian refugees. For them, violent extremism is an option as part of the fight against Assad forces and sympathize maybe not with ISIS but with al-Nusra front. A report published by International Crisis Group<sup>52</sup> reflect on this issue as follows:

***“...the problem of jihadist militancy is larger than ISIS, whose reputation is complicated but mostly negative among Syrians. Other armed groups in Syria’s war that are more closely aligned with the Syrian opposition cause and its resistance to the Syrian regime have also espoused versions of jihadist militancy....a number of Syrians interviewed indicated sympathy with Hei’at***

<sup>51</sup> **Takfir** means excommunication of other Muslims, a process through which one Muslim designates the other as a non-believer (**kafir**). In modern times, it became a central ideology of militant groups and served as a means of sanctioning violence against those that are deemed insufficiently religious, whilst being opposed by mainstream Muslims and Islamist groups who see it as a doctrinal deviation. Excommunication shifted the terrain of struggle from war between Muslims into war between faith and the infidel. See **The Oxford Dictionary of Islam**.

<sup>52</sup> International Crisis Group. “Mitigating risks for Syrian Refugee Youth in Turkey’s Şanlıurfa.” **Europe Report** No: 253, February 11, 2019, retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/western-europemediterranean/turkey/253-mitigating-risks-syrian-refugee-youth-turkeys-sanliurfa>

***Tahrir al-Sham (formerly al-Nusra front), believing that the group is fighting for a legitimate cause in Syria.***

Ideological factors are argued to be especially important in explaining women's radicalization as suggested by several actors interviewed. The following statement by an Istanbul NGO representative clearly states this effect:

***"Women radicalize less for money and more for ideology. They read more, get exposed to this ideology and became vehement defenders of it. I know a case where the women persuaded and encouraged her husband to join Daesh (ISIS) for a better Islamic life by continuously expressing her discontent for living with infidels under infidel institutions."***

Finally, some women are reported to be recruited through social media, got radicalized and joined these institutions to marry ISIS or al-Nusra fighters to as a way to service Islam. This is consistent with the practice of ISIS elsewhere. In particular, the practice of ISIS recruiting women via contacting them directly through social media platforms has been documented in the case of Indonesia<sup>53</sup> and other countries of the Middle East.<sup>54</sup> Videos and photographs of areas governed by ISIS are used extensively to describe the Islamic State as a beautiful land full of happiness and prosperity. Sometimes these are women members of ISIS playing the role of propagandists and recruiters<sup>55</sup>, at other times it is men who promote this fantasy image of ISIS.<sup>56</sup>

## **-Lack of awareness regarding the radical Islam practice**

While being exposed to the pro-Salafi literature creates an inclination towards radicalization along violent extremist lines, in reality, these individuals know little about the practical reality of their abstract ideology. Knowing so little about the way Islam is practiced among these organizations, they get exposed to a very biased picture by the recruiters which aids their idealization of the conditions of ISIS or al-Nusra front operated areas. The following quote attests to this point:

***"Growing up, families in conservative areas are happy that their children go to Islamic scholars and become devout Muslims but not aware of the dangers. All radical organizations in Syria and Iraq are now after war trophies, no one knows what their intentions are, but these recruits only become aware of it after they go and see it with their own eyes. They do not know about their links with Israel, they do not know about how sinful killing a human being is in Islam." (Member of a Youth Organization of a Political Party in a vulnerable region who has encountered and tried to dissuade many sympathizers)***

### **5.c.iii Psychological Factors**

The psychological factors are found to be important in understanding the process of radicalization. In particular, the feelings of self-worth and level of self-esteem are influential in the course of radicalization in that individuals' lack of self-realization is an important push factor.

53 See Tia Mariatul Kibitiah and Christina Tirajoh, "Indonesian Women and Terrorism: ISIS Recruitment Strategy through Social Media". Paper presented at Conference: ICOBIRD Binus University, Jakarta, Indonesia, 2019. Retrieved from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330169343\\_Indonesian\\_Women\\_and\\_Terrorism\\_ISIS\\_Recruitment\\_Strategy\\_through\\_Social\\_Media](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330169343_Indonesian_Women_and_Terrorism_ISIS_Recruitment_Strategy_through_Social_Media)

54 Antonia Ward, "ISIS's Use of Social Media Still Poses a Threat to Stability in the Middle East and Africa". *Georgetown Security Studies Review*, 10 December 2018. Retrieved from: <http://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2018/12/10/isis-use-of-social-media-still-poses-a-threat-to-stability-in-the-middle-east-and-africa/>

55 Nur Irfani and Binte Saripti, "Female Members of ISIS: A Greater Need for Rehabilitation". *Counter Terrorist Trends and Analyses*, 2015, 7:3, 26-31.

56 Wendy A. Prajuli, "On social media, ISIS uses fantastical propaganda to recruit members", *The Conversation*, 4 December 2017. Retrieved from <http://theconversation.com/on-social-media-isis-uses-fantastical-propaganda-to-recruit-members-86626>

## -Searching Meaning in Life

A teacher from a high school in Adana where two students joined ISIS and got killed argue that an important push factor is students' desire to be distinct and lack of social life/sports facilities for them to realize themselves. In his words:

***"In every class there are at least two students that try to differentiate themselves even in the way they call themselves "Islam" rather than "Muslim", the way they pray in our school masjid, their withdrawal from interacting with female students. Coming from low income and dysfunctional families, in their search of becoming a better individual and in the lack of better role models radicalization is their only option. They now try to give speeches at school, some other students listen to them and they fill fulfilled."***

Other interviewees suggested this process of positive inclination towards ISIS as stemming from a spiritual emptiness. Accordingly, this emptiness may have various sources such as a desire to be respected as a warrior for Islam or as a mother or wife of an Islamic hero, as someone more respected with more knowledge on religion or more income or even a search for more adventure in life. This process is aptly described as "From Zero to Hero" as one of our interviewees. As part of the field research due to the several linkages discovered with drugs and radicalism -either in the form of use or trade, a number of interviews with NGOs that directly or indirectly deal with addiction to illicit drugs have been conducted. The coordinators of a Diyarbakir and an Istanbul NGO, both working in schools to counter and prevent

addiction agreed on the following point:

***"The same spiritual emptiness that leads to drug use, also leads to radicalization. These young individuals are in search for proving themselves to their peers, to the society. When they have no opportunities to reach at this respect from society and find meaning through cultural and sports activities, they turn to these organizations."***

A Syrian university student interviewed in Kilis, who once was a sympathizer and quite determined to fight for ISIS also confirmed this point through his own experience.

***"I was at a refugee camp, lost in crowds and searching for answers in life. For me a knowledgeable imam who had all the answers to my questions on religion was impressive and a role model. Now I am a university student and cannot believe I was a sympathizer back then and even considered going to Syria to fight for ISIS."***

The desire to search for meaning may also be triggered by feelings of low self-esteem and self-worth. As it is put by one of the interviewees, women who feel useless at home are thrilled to become part of a holy movement as a wife of a mujahid or as birth-givers and bearers of future mujahideen. Furthermore, the interviewees note that militant Salafi groups such as al-Nusrah or ISIS are different than ethnic based violent extremist groups such as PKK, in that women do not directly become protagonists in public space but still acquire value as indirectly supporting the so-called "holy war".

## -Trauma and Revenge for Injustice

As also indicated in the literature, perceptions of victimization to injustice and a desire to take revenge can also be a push factor leading to radicalization. Several experts interviewed emphasize this factor as predominantly affecting the Syrian population in Turkey in motivating for radicalization. A psychologist in Diyarbakır also pointed out to this motivator with the following assessment:

***“The vindictive feelings of taking revenge for past behaviour of an unjust state, leader, community or even family feeds into the tendency to radicalize. Obviously, it is not only the perception of being treated unfairly but also the belief that all possible actions of addressing this injustice as acceptable creates a push factor.”***

According to another psychologist working at a humanitarian NGO in Istanbul, this push factor was especially evident among Syrians who radicalize.

***“Most of the Syrians have experienced major trauma. Many have lost their family, relatives and friends in war, mostly civilians, which they consider very unfair. Joining ISIS or al-Nusra can be an acceptable way for them to take the revenge of their lost ones. This is both ideological and personal.”***

Another representative of an NGO in Istanbul pointed out to the following:

***“When the first wave of the refugee influx took place, we determined that a majority of this population had psychological disorders, 70 percent had lost someone, 30 percent had been directly subjected to violence, did not go to school here. They work in textile as child labour and drug addiction is very widespread as it became their way of treating their wounds and be able to sleep. A young generation that is so vulnerable, psychologically frayed and socially lost is of course open to radicalization.”***

Here, we observe an amalgamation of trauma and a reaction to unjust order in action, which is quite likely to cloud judgements of who is responsible for this injustice, what is an appropriate way of addressing this issue and a revengeful radicalization can easily be triggered. This is an important push factor for especially Syrians in Turkey but the reactions to injustice mostly due to a perception of religious-ideological victimization are also found among the Turkish society as mentioned by the interviewees. For instance, as put by a representative of Gaziantep women’s NGO:

***“Violence in family breeds violence in community. Both men and women who experience violence and have poor communication with parents become open to crime and radicalization.”***

### 5.c.iv. Contextual enabling factors:

This section will lay out the societal, historical and political context in the region and in Turkey the way it is reflected on the individual’s community. In the background of rising Salafi interpretations

in the close proximity to Turkey, a country with a historically strictly secular education system along with predominantly Sunni Muslim belief structure, this section will evaluate the impact of a theological training in traditional mainstream Islam (or lack thereof), aggressive and convincing recruitment techniques of radical organizations and a polarized societal structure in serving as enabling factors throughout this process.

## **-Lack of prior training in mainstream/traditional Islam**

Many of those we interviewed, especially those representing faith-based NGOs underlined the importance of the knowledge of traditional Islam as a shield against radicalization and how this knowledge was lost as a result of very secular education system widespread in Turkey until lately. They argued that having lost the homegrown practice of Islam, they became more prone to these alternative and anti-establishment interpretations. As put by the following interviewee:

*“We lost our Turkish interpretation of Islam incorporating elements of mysticism and sufism, which speaks to the very hearts of people. As a result of this emptiness, now we are more open to Salafi radicalism.”*  
(Lawyer from Adana, who takes cases of returnees)

*“In Diyarbakir, at least 20 people in our community in our underdeveloped peripheral neighbourhood became sympathizers to Salafism and ISIS. They all had a biased knowledge of Islam which they learned from*

*recruiters which is all about jihad. Our wrongdoing is not being able to explain them how much more there is to Islam such as the lives of followers of Sunnah as shown by the Prophet Mohammad, beyond jihad a priori.”* (a representative of union of Diyanet staff)

*“The male members of my family who joined ISIS could not find answers to their questions from the imams in mosques, they either did not know religion well or were not interested in guiding them in the right direction.”*  
(Mother and sister of ISIS warrior from Adana)

## **-Aggressive and convincing recruitment techniques**

All civil society and community actors we talked to, emphasized the aggressive and hard to counter, convincing recruitment techniques of these radical organizations. As put by one interviewee at a Diyarbakir NGO, “unless you are resisting vigilantly as a result of your predispositions about religion or the radicalized group, the recruiters are very good at convincing you about joining the so-called “Islamic state” and train you to realize that in a matter of two months”.

When it comes to women, these recruiters are not known to be directly contacting women face to face but prefer to recruit the entire family through the male members. As put by an interviewee from Adana:

*“Women are convinced by their families mostly male members. They are continuously exposed to religious*

*propaganda by these recruiters.” (Member of a Youth Organization of a Political Party in a vulnerable region who has encountered and tried to dissuade many sympathizers)*

The interviewees argued that the recruiters in Turkey who do door to door recruiting are mostly men and they do not have direct access to women. In their words “We were lucky that ISIS did not have female recruiters in Turkey. Most recruitment of women they do is over social media with heavy propaganda of ISIS reading of Islam and invitations to the Islamic State. When the parents see their daughters start practicing more Islam, at first they are happy. They realize the increasing use of social media but do not get suspicious of it.”

Here it is important to reflect on the experience of Syrian refugees as their social quarters tend to elicit characteristics of more of unregulated space where recruiters can run rampant. Here important examples given by our interviewees who were directly affected by these recruitment practices were prayer brooms in refugee camps or temporary education centres which were rather unregulated in curriculum with dubious recruitment practices. This was the case especially in the early years of the refugee crisis where the state was unprepared when these education centres -mostly informal and unregistered, were mushrooming around. The lack of regulation of the Turkish state in these spaces seems no longer widespread.

## **-Polarization in the society and the spread of violence as an acceptable mean for achieving an end**

Many of those interviewed suggest that even though it is inadvertent/unintentional, the polarizing language of daily politics in Turkey makes radicalization easy. According to our interviewees, polarization in the society creates an environment where individuals are forced to choose sides. Interviewees in Adiyaman and Diyarbakır argued that, feeling stuck between two sides of the issue in the background of a very hostile language, sometimes they choose one of these sides so that they are not left out and become violent against the out-group. At other times, they completely check out of the system and choose another alternative that is also violent such as ISIS. This becomes especially evident when protective support networks of individuals are absent and they are exposed to multiple vulnerabilities. Our interviewees reported cases both from Turkey and Syria where sympathizers for one group would quickly change sides and get involved with the activities of another group. This is also put by an NGO representative from Diyarbakır, a province where ethnic polarization is visible.

***‘The polarization of the society aids the recruitment mechanisms as the political climate makes individuals more vulnerable and open to manipulation’***  
(Humanitarian NGO Rep in Diyarbakır)

#### **5.d. The tools, instruments and resources of civil society organizations for possible CVE and PVE roles**

This section will draw upon the tools, instruments and resources at the disposal of the interviewed civil society organizations for their prospective roles in CVE and PVE strategies. It will start with the research team's assessment of the possible CVE and PVE dimensions of these actors by building on the categorization of their activities offered in Section 5.b. and subsequently present the self-evaluation of the past and present efforts of civil society actors with regards to countering and preventing violent extremism.

##### **5.d.i. The Research Team's assessments of civil society's works**

The research team found out that civil society organizations, be they local or national, secular or faith-based, women's NGOs or broader humanitarian aid networks, have various tools, instruments and resources that *can* be utilized in CVE and PVE. However, as mentioned earlier, the absence of a clear and all-agreed definition of radicalization seems to have resulted in a lack of conception among these civil society actors regarding how their current work that already addresses most of the push and pull factors of radicalization can contribute to countering and preventing violent extremism.

In search for identifying the possible tools and instruments that civil society organizations have at their disposal, these NGOs mostly talked about their current work vis-à-vis different social actors such as women, youth, refugees and socio-economically deprived families in poor neighbourhoods. Building

on these accounts of activity, the research team also inquired the interviewees about the potential ways their experience in local and national social projects can be transmitted to efforts at countering and preventing violent extremism.

- The project team observed greater systematic and programmatic work aimed at protecting Syrian refugees. This has been the case for humanitarian and refugee-related NGOs working in Istanbul's major refugee neighbourhoods, e.g. Sultanbeyli as well as cities such as Gaziantep, Kilis, Adiyaman and Diyarbakir. The field research also revealed closer cooperation between established local women's NGOs and the NGOs working with refugees in Adana, Adiyaman and Diyarbakir particularly regarding awareness raising on the social and legal rights of refugee women as well as women's health issues.

- Women's NGOs both at the local and national level seemed to have built remarkable expertise in dealing with issues of domestic violence, sexual abuse and harassment by working closely with academia, municipalities, relevant state institutions and international organizations for conducting public conferences, workshops and providing effective assistance. Recently, their scope of activity is extended to cover children's rights and the issue of child brides (e.g. Adana). However, the field research has shown that women's NGOs too have not embarked on specific programs to reach out women and build upon women's different roles and motivations to counter and prevent violent extremism. As mentioned before, women's relationship with violence from the prism of radicalization and violent extremism remained

as a non-agenda and almost all efforts were put to deal with women's victimization by domestic violence.

- Apart from both secular and faith-based NGOs working in the field of refugees, the field research revealed that humanitarian aid NGOs built extensive capability, logistics and network to provide socio-economic assistance to the deprived neighbourhoods. Recently some of these organizations moved beyond their local and national scope of activity and attained a transnational scope with humanitarian work in Syria. These organizations pursued detailed case-work and door-to-door activities in order to assess the needs of the people. Their activities, however, did not remain confined to households; the interviewees mentioned developing youth projects and organizing symposiums, in addition to specific programmes aimed at vocational training and rehabilitation of the prisoners. Yet, most of these networks did not have a specific gender or women agenda in their portfolio. Organizationally speaking, some of our interviewees told us that only recently they started setting up women's branches in their organization. In terms of their work, the scope was largely on socio-economic problems of the family and women's issues came to be perceived from such a lens.

- Faith-based humanitarian aid NGOs seemed to have wider networks and outreach compared to secular humanitarian NGOs. We observed a more balanced effectiveness of secular and faith-based NGO activity in regard to addressing the problems of the Syrian migrant communities.

- The field research in designated cities also revealed civil society's efforts to provide rehabilitative support for victims of war, domestic violence and drug addiction. Some of these efforts were institutionalized within the scope of women's NGOs vis-à-vis domestic violence. We have also come across with a number of associations that specifically address the trauma and victimization of violence. Compared to other NGO activities cited above, these efforts remained relatively limited. Municipalities also got involved with a select group of NGOs in their studies in organizing vocational and skills training such as mosaic workshops as a means of rehabilitation for victims of violence, domestic abuse and drug addiction.

As mentioned earlier, the broad range of civil society actors we have contacted offered skills training, educational support, psychological and theological counseling and rehabilitation for victims of violence and trauma, besides socio-economic assistance and substantial work conducted to fight with drug addiction among the youth. Indeed, these works already directly or indirectly address the structural drivers of radicalization which are discussed in detail in the literature review and findings of the field research regarding the push and pull factors. The themes of social cohesion, inclusiveness, integration stand out as good practices that can be employed in building effective CVE and PVE strategies for these efforts work against the processes of marginalization and estrangement of individuals and collectivities. Yet, these efforts still need to be structured within a well-guided and clearly set programme of CVE and PVE, which shall integrate civil society actors.

5.d.ii. Civil society's self-evaluation of past and present efforts to cope with the challenges of countering radicalization and violent extremism

Granted that there is no consensus over the meaning of radicalization and what violent extremism entails, the research team had to introduce and clarify the term violent extremism to the interviewees. Once the prominent roles that the civil society may assume in the context of CVE and PVE are raised out, our interviewees showed greater interest and enthusiasm to respond to the questions. By doing so, the research aspired to initiate a process of self-assessment and reflection by the civil society organizations and contribute to awareness raising regarding the critical roles they may be willing to play alongside their capabilities and issue areas, as well as build new agency to attend to this rather neglected phenomenon. This section aims to highlight the major findings from civil society's evolving self-evaluation particularly in the context of relevance of their works to CVE and PVE.

Both secular and faith-based NGOs, the research team contacted in various cities and regions of Turkey expressed that they have not developed any systematic program to deal with the issue of radicalization as understood and framed within the scope of our project. However, all of our interviewees had a conception of violence. This dimension became more pronounced in regions with history of violence and conflict; hence, radicalization was mostly conceived through the political setting and social histories of the cities and regions included in our field research. It was mainly the civil society organizations in the south and southeastern parts of Turkey, which underlined that violence has been an intrinsic part of political and social life. These

NGOs and civil society activists were cognizant of radicalization and youth's turn to violence from past examples of PKK terrorism.

Despite the lack of a programmatic commitment to CVE and PVE, civil society actors still performed rather *ad hoc* efforts for prevention and struggle with the rising trend of religious radicalism. In cities like Adiyaman, Adana and Diyarbakır, local people and NGOs were more open to discussion of religious radicalization and recruitment of people (mostly men) to ISIS and other militant Salafi networks. They provided a comprehensive analysis of how violence assumed new forms and paths with transformation of Hezbollah into a political party.<sup>57</sup> The profound discontent of some of its followers led them accuse the party of entering into the politics of democracy and elections, which are widely accepted as "*taghut*" and un-Islamic within the group and resulted in their fast-growing recruitment to al-Nusrah front in Syria. This process was reportedly coordinated by some religious associations which through their network and publications worked for recruitment of youngsters who did not feel belonging to either to the PKK or the state and searched for a third alternative with motivations of salvation and spiritual self-realization. This shows the multifaceted nature of civil society's approach to radicalization both as preventers and at times promoters of violent extremism. However, the research team focused and aimed to reach out to civil society actors who would contribute to countering and preventing violent extremism.

As to the past efforts for prevention and struggling with this phenomenon, some of our interviewees mentioned personal and voluntary efforts aimed at preventing radicalization, mostly through finding

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<sup>57</sup> It is important to note that, the process being referred here is one of Turkish Hezbollah becoming Hüda-par, not of the political transformation of the Lebanese Hezbollah. Formed in southeastern Turkey in the 1980s, Turkish Hezbollah is known for its brutal terrorist practices involving torturing individuals before killing them. As an ethnically Kurdish-composed group, targeting civilians, mainly Kurds who are allegedly PKK sympathizers in southeast Turkey, Turkish Hezbollah is responsible for hundreds of murders. The group sought to overthrow the constitutional and secular government and establish a strict Islamic theocracy. See Harvey W. Kushner, "Turkish Hezbollah", in *The Sage Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2003, 369.

jobs for young people with propensity “to go to fight in Syria.” By doing so, they tried to keep these young people aloof from joining militant Salafi networks. This has been the case for some young men in Adiyaman and Adana whose close relatives joined ISIS or al-Nusra front. In these cases, senior and wealthy locals and youth organizations of political parties played an active role which can be classified within the scope of PVE efforts.

Another line of field activity that may be utilized in constructing an effective PVE and CVE strategy is the one adopted by NGOs that deal with drug addiction. Our field research findings indicate important conceptual similarities between drug addiction and radicalization both in terms of the push factors and in terms of countering efforts. These NGOs all emphasize the importance of preventive activities such as awareness raising and the difficulty of countering when an individual is strangled in the process. Some of them adopt a long-term therapy perspective incorporating both secular and faith-based argumentation for reasoning and social and sports activities as part of rehabilitation, all of which can be brought into CVE and PVE efforts of NGOs.

Besides civil society’s efforts to deal with the phenomenon of religious radicalization, our field research also acquainted us with agency of community actors that are not aligned with formal civil society organizations, e.g. high school teachers in Istanbul and Adana, who detected the signs of radicalization among students, attempted to prevent students with inclination towards radicalization from joining these networks by formulating counter-narratives, talking to their families and directed them to theological counselling.

### **5.e. Where do women stand in Turkey’s case of religious radicalization?: An analysis of the findings from the field**

Apart from the absence of a radicalization perspective and ambivalence over “who is a radical?” among civil society, the field research demonstrated that a gender-sensitive perspective was/is also mostly missing in civil society’s understanding of violent extremism. The presence of women from Turkey in ISIS and al-Nusra front and various roles they play in these networks mostly went unnoticed or unspoken. The information is largely framed through media’s coverage of Western women joining these networks. Our interviewees both in secular and faith-based NGOs seemed to be aware of Western women’s presence in ISIS, but not necessarily of women from Turkey. Strikingly this has been the case for women’s NGOs as well. Hence the example and experience of Turkey in this regard called for further light and greater focus.

- The reason why women from Turkey was missing from this picture is mainly accounted by persistence of patriarchy and gender stereotypes. A lawyer we have interviewed in Adiyaman argued that they did not really know about the motivations of women going to the so-called “caliphate”, “since we live in a closed society of deep and diverse problems like addiction, sexual harassment and domestic violence and can’t reach to women.”
- There is a common view that most women from Turkey went to Syria and Iraq rather *passively* because of their husbands. These women had to go in order to keep their family intact and to not “lose their husbands to other wives in the caliphate.”

- Our encounters with women’s stories from Ankara and İstanbul, however, showed that women were also strong ideological sympathizers and sometimes it was wives who pushed their husbands and families for joining the so-called “jihad”. On another account, young daughters who went to Syria called their mothers to make “hijrah”<sup>58</sup> to the so-called “caliphate” and leave their “*kafir*” father behind. Some women also reportedly declined to return to Turkey, “as they did not wish to live in an infidel land.”
- Our interviewees who observed strong anti-establishment posture and ideological motivations of women since the 1990s emphasized women’s own agency and choice to leave for ISIS or al-Nusrah front as opposed to rather passive presence of women in these groups.
- Yet, our interviewees in Diyarbakır also underlined the fact that the relatively low levels of recruitment from women with robust ideological sympathy for Salafi militancy was mainly because of the lack of women recruiters. Instead, women who joined ISIS and al-Nusrah ranks from Turkey were rather exposed to the extremist propaganda by means social media networks and family members.
- In our interviews, we also questioned the role of mothers in detecting the radicalization of their children or other family members and tried to comprehend the means as well as limitations of their struggles for prevention. A common theme from our interviews regarding the role of mothers is that they are almost always the first to discover their children’s tendencies for radicalization, yet their ability to prevent their children from joining those terror groups is significantly curbed under structures of patriarchy. It’s argued that the culture of patriarchy portrays women as docile and vulnerable creatures with no understanding of war, which is seen as a realm exclusive to men. According to an Islamic feminist civil society activist from İstanbul, relegated to “second-class status”, women’s warnings and concerns are not taken seriously. Our interviewees told us that fathers or grandfathers held greater authority over children and their intimidation and warnings worked better to prevent some of those who wanted to join militant Salafi groups. Needless to say, their persuasive capabilities depended on the degree of radicalization and did not succeed in all cases. We have observed rather weak father-son ties in families whose sons left for ISIS or al-Nusrah front.
- Our interviews also revealed that sometimes mothers can’t detect the signs of radicalization of their children, for they may view their son’s or daughter’s turn to religiosity as a positive sign (mostly in conservative families) or see their children’s activities in the social media as a means of socialization. This has been the case for a number of women or men’s radicalization stories from İstanbul and Diyarbakır. For

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<sup>58</sup> *Hijrah* historically refers to migration of Prophet Mohammad and his companions from Mecca to Madina in 622 as well as any Muslim’s migration to a land where s/he can practice his religion freely. In a bid to recruit more people to its ranks, ISIS called Muslims around the world to make “*hijrah*”/migrate to ISIS-held territories spanning through Syria and Iraq and start living under its declared caliphate. In the context of extremism, the term came to denote a foreign fighter’s journey from his country of origin to terrorist-held territories abroad. See *Oxford Dictionary of Islam and Glossary* of Counter Extremism Project, online available at <https://www.counterextremism.com/glossary> for further details.

instance, a mother couldn't notice that her daughter has been exposed to ISIS propaganda via Facebook or think that her daughter's newfound online friends were recruiters for the fight in Syria and Iraq.

- Our interviewees told us that once facing the reality of losing their children to militant Salafi networks, mothers generally try to prevent it by uttering threats of denying their motherly rights, but their sons or daughters usually forego these threats, as they think they are making sacrifices for the greater cause of the so-called "holy war". As attempts inside family do not help, mothers usually take their children to religious authorities from her religious community (if she has any) or to close relatives for persuasion. Here, observes one of our interviewees from Diyarbakır, the goal is to prevent criminalization of their children. Families searched for official help and applied to the police only after their children went to Syria or Iraq.
- The field research also aimed to shed light on the victimization, trauma and attempted rehabilitation of the Yazidi women, who escaped from the ISIS atrocities in Sinjar and mainly took refuge in Diyarbakır. The experience of the Yazidi women proved to be an obvious exemplar of women's victimization by religious extremism. Our interviews with a number of psychologists and sociologists working on the rehabilitation of the Yazidi community revealed the deep trauma of violence and abuse particularly widespread among the women and children in the camps. The interviewees asserted the difficulty of

rehabilitation efforts due to the ongoing trauma of the community and mentioned their unwillingness to stay in Turkey. Our research found out that almost all of the Yazidi community left Turkey for Germany to join the diaspora.

## **5.f. What to expect from future?**

### **Recommendations for durable and viable institutional mechanisms and approaches to CVE and PVE**

This section presents the suggestions of the project team based on the literature review and key findings derived from the field research for building durable and viable institutional mechanisms and approaches for countering and preventing violent extremism.

#### ***5.f.i. Building a national CVE strategy***

The findings from our field research demonstrate that local actors look for approval from the state authorities to undertake CVE and PVE efforts in order to make sure that they are not operating in a criminal or gray zone and their actions and strategies have a legal and legitimate basis. The NGOs in this respect emphasized the necessity of a coherent and well-communicated strategy of the state that shall integrate the civil society as an indispensable partner for CVE and PVE efforts and open up greater space and scope for their contribution on a "pluralistic and inclusive basis", as one member of a prominent women's NGO in Ankara stated. Since the advent of the ISIS threat, a growing number of countries have formulated national strategies and Turkey is yet to prepare its own national strategy. A National Strategy prepared with inclusion of all relevant state institutions as well as inputs from the civil society may help ameliorate

the confusion and fear on the side of the civil society and pave the ground for effective cooperation.

At the state level too, experts and bureaucrats that the project team interviewed mentioned the lack of a coordinated strategy among various state departments, which precluded a concerted approach, and underlined the need for devising a National Strategy. Whilst the state-level struggle with violent extremism attained greater efficiency through enhanced risk analysis and assessment procedures, the challenges of attaining a systematic policy that would move beyond voluntary efforts and remain in practice despite changes in top bureaucrats were cited as major shortcomings. Regarding the role of civil society in CVE and PVE, one senior bureaucrat emphasized that the state expects greater help from civil society in **prevention** and **rehabilitation** stages of radicalization, while law enforcement forces concentrate their efforts in **intervention** stages.

#### **5.f.ii. Building and disseminating the counter-narratives: Respective roles of state and civil society**

As extensively researched and discussed in the literature of CVE and PVE, the project team probed the possibility of building an effective counter-narrative against violent extremism, its contents as well as the actors that shall get involved in devising and implementing these strategies. The interviews showed that both secular and faith-based civil society actors looked upon the Presidency of the Religious Affairs (henceforth Diyanet) to initiate the process, whereas particularly faith-based NGOs and actors embraced playing greater role in local dissemination of the official narrative for reasons that will be discussed below.

- Almost all the interviewees asserted that building a persuasive counter-narrative would serve as a more helpful tool in prevention stages than countering VE. According to our contacts, once radicalized, it seemed almost impossible to persuade these women and men to not join such networks. They act as if they are “poisoned” or “blind and deaf” told the heads and senior officials of two local faith-based humanitarian NGOs operating in İstanbul and Kilis. Our contacts underlined that the “**takfiri**” mentality has been the hardest to fight, for these people would not be receptive to any counter-messaging effort or they would strictly deny any persuasion from families, teachers or community leaders whom they despise as infidels. Hence, offering a counter-narrative seemed to be more effective at the prevention stage, that is, before radicalization takes roots and drags people into further violence. Yet, it was noted that intervention in an earlier stage of radicalization ladder with an effective counter-narrative would still serve CVE purposes.
- Regarding the **contents** of the counter-narratives, faith-based NGOs converged on the necessity of offering such a narrative from Islam itself with reference to Quranic verses and hadith that would challenge and refute the ISIS propaganda. As one interviewee in Kilis argued, for a better persuasion, the person has to be competent and well-versed in religion.
- A faith-based NGO representative from Diyarbakır argued that examples of peaceful conduct, tolerance, respect and love from

the life of Prophet Mohammad should be emphasized in order to denounce the violent acts of ISIS. “These people shall be reminded that the real model for Muslims is the life and teachings of Prophet Mohammad and shall be asked on which side they really are: either on the side of Allah and the prophet or on the other side?”, asked a member of the faith-based NGO in Gaziantep.

- Our interviewees also underlined the necessity of revisiting the term “jihad” and rethinking its meaning for an effective counter-narrative strategy. It was commonly argued that jihad in Islam is primarily the believer’s struggle with his/herself to be a better person. In this respect, they argued, jihad must aim at dispersing the good words and deeds. Besides, women’s branch of a faith-based NGO in Gaziantep added that one’s responsibility lies with his/her close surroundings: family, friends, neighbours, “not in distant lands, fighting for dubious agendas”. In these views, use of violence is strictly condemned and reference to Prophet Mohammad’s peaceful conduct is abundant. One interviewee from faith-based NGO in Diyarbakir expressed his regret for not being able to tell people that “Islam is not solely about jihad” and underlined the failure of religious authorities to offer a comprehensive account of the very concept of jihad.
- A common theme offered by faith-based NGOs as a panacea for Salafi extremism was building a language based on the extension of globally mainstream religious interpretation in Turkey, which is called with various names such as “traditional Anatolian

Islam” or “Turkish Islam” both more widely called by its followers as the “*ahli sunnah wal jamaah*” line. This line, which also utilizes its historical legacy from the Ottoman and Seljukian scholars refer to Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi and Yunus Emre among many others as exemplars of tolerance and coexistence. Our interviews with prominent representatives of the Alevi community in Antakya also showed their support for building a cross-sectarian counter-narrative to fight with violent extremism and strengthen the social cohesion and harmony between different religious sects. The longing for this common language that would not evoke any particular religious community however remains unfulfilled for some of our interviewees.

- Apart from building the counter-narrative on verses and hadith, some of our interviewees also suggested challenging radicalization with counter arguments on the geopolitics of jihadism. In this line of thinking, for example, the alternative narrative could pose questions as to the fate of jihad in Iraq and Afghanistan and emphasize that “Syria is not a real jihad”, therefore “the goal is not an Islamic state, but another agenda controlled by outside actors and their intelligence networks” told one of interviewees in Kilis. Despite *takfiri* mentality, “the message that Muslims would not kill Muslims shall be strengthened”, added an NGO member in Adana. Considering the fact that either Muslim or not, intentionally killing an innocent person is seen as killing all humanity according to Islam, this message seems already existent in the main texts which, however, needs to be disseminated

more effectively. Some of our interviewees also proposed questioning “why ISIS as an Islamic group has not targeted Israel in its propaganda or deeds or never truly raised the issue of Palestine.”

- Most of our interviewees suggested that Diyanet shall undertake the mission of building and dispersing the counter-narrative against radicalization and violent extremism. For one of our interviewees in Diyarbakır, the institution is capable of offering the “most secular and soft interpretation of Islam” and well-poised to do so with its network and personnel. For more conservative civil society organizations we interviewed in Adıyaman, entrusting this task to Diyanet is entrusting the major responsibility to the state “to guide people to the righteous resources.”
- Indeed, Diyanet already embarked on building anti-ISIS counter-narrative through its sermon entitled “Islam: The Religion Targeted by Global Terror”, which was distributed and read over 80,000 mosques in Turkey and 2,000 mosques abroad in 2015. Yet, despite these moves, there were doubts expressed by our interviewees as to the efficiency and effectiveness of these messages, and criticisms as to the capabilities and organizational structure of the institution.
- To begin with, our interviewees underlined that the Salafists see Diyanet likewise the state itself as an *infidel* institution. Diyanet’s association with the “State Islam” delegitimized the institution in the eyes of those who question the legitimacy of the state. Moreover, those who radicalized and

joined the violent extremist Salafi groups in Syria and Iraq long ceased going to the state mosques, instead created their own masjids. Hence, the disentanglement of these groups from official religion and the reach of Diyanet’s messages creates a serious problem as to the effectiveness of the counter-messages. Besides, one of our interviewees, who is associated with syndicate of Diyanet told that he doubted the influence of these sermons even on the believers who frequently go to the mosques, by reflecting on their responses in return for his questions about the content of the sermon. Some of our interviewees questioned the capabilities and awareness of the Diyanet imams regarding the issue of radicalization and their ineffectiveness in competing with “charismatic” radical orators of ISIS seeking local recruitment. For them, the local personnel of Diyanet seemed to lack a perspective of radicalization. Furthermore, women whose relatives joined ISIS told us that Diyanet’s imams were not attentive enough and did not respond to their children when they approached these religious officials to hear more about what “shirk” or “taghut” meant.<sup>59</sup> They claimed that a better and persuasive response might have prevented their sons’ radicalization. Another observation shared by our various contacts was that people do not learn religion from Diyanet. Particularly in our digital age, they seek religious answers and knowledge from internet and usually get exposed to radical views of ISIS and like-minded other groups.

- There were criticisms as to the growing bureaucratization of the institution, which

was claimed to have turned Diyanet into a gigantic administrative unit and distanced it from its religious tasks. Our interviewees pointed out to the contending positions within the institution, as a factor curtailing Diyanet's efforts to offer a common, all-encompassing message to fight with radicalization. They underlined divisions inside the schools of Theology and competing schools of thought.

- Our interviewees, particularly from faith-based NGOs, suggested a greater role for civil society in promoting and disseminating counter-narrative strategy alongside other components of a CVE/PVE strategy, which they believed would reap greater benefits than the direct involvement of the state. Among those who proposed a more civilian perspective, a prominent women's NGO from İstanbul working on women's political participation argued that local NGOs have a better knowledge of their neighbourhoods, thus can better assess "who is a radical or not" and employ the counter-narrative strategy. Others who suggested a civilian perspective asserted that this seemed to be a more appropriate strategy due to recent political climate and polarization of Turkish society.
- To prevent people from joining these networks, some of our interviewees proposed directing them to review and consult to other interpretations and sources of Islam, rather than relying on a single source. A Syrian father from Kilis followed this practice vis-à-vis people with radicalization tendencies around him including his own sons. In this regard, one

of the most cited examples of what mothers or fathers did to stop their children was to take them to senior religious people in their neighbourhood, mostly "religious opinion leaders" or local imams for persuasion that they were being misled by the ISIS propaganda and it was not a righteous path to take. The project team also heard stories of women from İstanbul who were persuaded at the border by influential clerics to not join these groups and return to their homes. They later rejoiced this decision, told our interviewee who is a distant friend of these women.

- The research found out that the relatives or friends of people who have propensity for religious radicalization sought help from faith-based civil society organizations and did not consult to secular NGOs, which are viewed of a "different world". Our interview with two women whose sons and brothers joined ISIS informed us that they did not consider seeking help from secular women's NGOs or legal organizations. In their case, stigmatization by their neighbours even precluded them from seeking help from religious civil society networks. Furthermore, our contacts from secular women's NGOs including Bar associations in Adiyaman, Adana, Diyarbakır and Gaziantep told us that they have not received any application from women seeking help to get back their relatives from ISIS or al-Nusra front or looking for socio-economic or legal assistance. Nevertheless, particularly women NGOs have shown interest in future collaboration with faith-based networks on the issue of exploring women's possible roles in radicalization as much as their

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<sup>59</sup> *Shirk* is putting someone or something in the place of God, whereas *Taghut* is a Qur'anic term that stands for false god or idol. It has been also in use to refer to tyrannical rulers who arrogate God's absolute power and use it for oppression of the masses. See *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* for further details.

role in countering and preventing violent extremism.

### **5.f.iii. Engaging the civil society beyond counter-narrative efforts**

As noted before, in the field, the research team had to introduce and clarify the term **violent extremism**, which is relatively novel and still under debate even among international actors. Once the central role of civil society in CVE and PVE efforts is mentioned, the interviewees showed greater interest and enthusiasm to respond to our questions and appraised the project for bringing up this “essential issue” into their consideration and raising awareness among diverse civil society actors. Most of our interviewees underlined the necessity for a community-based approach for an effective CVE and PVE strategy. As a follow-up to the previous section, this section will discuss the possible roles of civil society networks beyond the making and dissemination of counter-narratives.

The civil society networks we have contacted outlined several possible areas of action in CVE/PVE efforts.

- Almost all the secular and faith-based civil society networks interviewed throughout the field research volunteered to play a greater role in CVE and PVE efforts and integrating women into these strategies, should the state provide them with a clearly defined guideline. They believe that they are well-placed to play such a role with their experience in working with local actors (both Turkish and Syrian) and comprehensive knowledge of the major socio-economic and

political problems of their neighbourhoods. Civil society networks also highlighted their ability to build and sustain trust with local community, which they believed will help bridging state-society affairs.

- Drawing on the need to engage with those who suffer from post-radicalization trauma, both faith-based and secular civil society organizations mentioned the necessity of providing institutional support for rehabilitation and resilience of women. They drew on extending their present psychosocial therapy sessions, educational and vocational activities, art and crafts courses as means to embark on a more structured rehabilitation agenda to address post-radicalization trauma and ensure de-radicalization and social integration by boosting the self-worth of women as individuals and empowering their status with education and employment. They also pointed out the need for struggling with stigmatization of the returnees or family members of those who joined these organizations.

### **5.f. iv. Building a gender-sensitive approach**

Integrating gender into peace and security agenda of global politics has been an explicit objective of the United Nations since early 2000s with the groundbreaking UNSCR 1325, followed by UNSCR 2129 (2013), UNSCR 2178 (2014) and UNSCR 2242 (2015) reflecting its resolve to empower women and gender equality. As noted earlier, UNSCR 2242 has been of particular significance to our project, since it called for gender-sensitive

research, participation and leadership of women and women's organizations in developing strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism, and greater funding of CVE projects addressing gender dimensions.

As of date, ISIS is militarily defeated, yet, the challenge and urgency of how to treat the (potential) returnees, devise strategies of rehabilitation and deradicalization lingers. Granted that it would be mainly women and children who are most likely to return makes the gender dimension even more compelling. As noted by Patel and Westermann (2018), governments and civil society have to be ready for security challenges posed by the returnees, while developing novel approaches for integration of women within the CVE strategies by ensuring gender perspectives are incorporated to all stages of policy design. They aptly note that maintaining an “effective balance between security and support” will be the daunting challenge of the new era.<sup>60</sup>

In Turkey too, the issue of women returnees surfaced with the news in early 2018 regarding Turkey's attempts to repatriate Turkish women who are sentenced to death by Iraqi authorities on the charges of being ISIS members and their children.<sup>61</sup> Albeit inconclusive, in case these demands are met affirmatively, state and civil society have to consider whether there are any rehabilitative programs tailored for the returnees or strategies to achieve de-radicalization and social integration. These issues so far proved highly contentious for countries such as UK, as the recent example of Shamima Begum case has shown.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See Sofia Patel and Jacqueline Westermann, “Women and Islamic-State Terrorism: An Assessment of How Gender Perspectives are Integrated in Countering Violent Extremism Policy and Practices”, *Security Challenges*, 14:2, 2018, 53-81.

<sup>61</sup> Selin Girit, “Irak'ta tutuklu 'İŞİD'in aile mensupları' Türkiye'ye iade edilmeyi bekliyor”, *BBC Türkçe*, 23 Mart 2018.

<sup>62</sup> For further details, see <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/shamima-begum>

# 6.

## Conclusions: Radicalization and Women's Role in CVE and PVE



- As outlined and discussed in the major findings of our report, women from Turkey assumed varying roles as sympathizers, perpetrators, possible preventers and victims in their relationship to religious radicalization. Any strategy has to take the complexity of these roles and motivations into account in order to formulate the much-needed gender-sensitive, inclusive approach to CVE and PVE. Coming up with durable solutions for countering and preventing violent extremism requires identification of women's conditions, considerations and perspectives on violent extremism as well as the unique push and pull factors implicating on their choices.
- The field research and interviews with a wide range of civil society actors has demonstrated the necessity of revisiting the relationship between women and violence and transcending the gendered perspectives, which depict women merely as victims. Rather, women shall be seen as agents on their own, as individuals with autonomy and will to commit violence as well as to counter and prevent violent extremism.
- Having said that, the research also put forward how women's agency in CVE and PVE is constrained by structures of patriarchy while exploring mothers' and sisters' roles and efforts to impede their children or brothers from joining violent extremist and/or terrorist groups. Besides, the extensive focus on women's motherhood at the expense of women's other public roles and contributions in CVE and PVE reflected

the intrinsic elements of patriarchy. Hence, the research looked beyond women's possible roles in CVE and PVE as mothers and searched for women's agency in the context of civil society activism as well.

- Throughout our interviews, we have also explored the main push and pull factors and enablers outlined in the literature in an attempt to inform effective CVE and PVE strategies. The findings underlined the importance of **Economic/Structural Factors**, namely the material conditions of the individual or the community not as a sole motivator but mostly in play in conjunction with other **Ideological** (heavily for women sympathizers) and **Psychological Factors**. Our interviews also pointed out to the role of some contextual enabling factors such as polarization and rise of political Islam. These findings have important implications women playing different roles throughout the process be it sympathizers or preventers. The findings also illustrate how pull and push as well as enabling factor operate interactively for different demographics where non-enrolled youth, women and Syrian refugees are among the most vulnerable and most open to exposure.
- The research confirmed the necessity of empowerment of both women and women's NGOs in order to attain a more effective CVE and PVE strategy. Academics and civil society volunteers pointed out to structural constraints such as socio-economic deprivation and patriarchy as fundamental obstacles to women's empowerment and underlined the need to fight with these issues which would not only lessen their engagement with violence, but also strengthen women's role in CVE and PVE. The broad definition of empowerment encompassed women's access to education, employment and decision-making as individuals on its own as well as citizens.
- Civil society actors interviewed indicated great willingness to be involved in efforts of building and disseminating a counter narrative as well as on the ground CVE and PVE efforts, with many showing the capacity to be effective. Each category of NGOs elicits different strengths that can be utilized in these efforts. For instance, humanitarian aid NGO's targeting refugee populations have both the skilled human capital and the methodology to be involved in prevention and rehabilitation aspects of these effort, given that they have resources to expand their clientele beyond Syrians and they build collaborations with other types of NGOs.
- As to the processes of women's radicalization, another issue that was widely mentioned in our research is women's lack of information as to their alternatives. Accordingly, without knowing the options provided to them by their community, civil society and the state, they are more likely to make uninformed choices. At this point, women at risk may be in great advantage if they have a toolkit of strategies or good practices as experienced by other women which would indeed serve another means of empowerment.
- Likewise, women shall be informed about where to go and what to do when they encounter radicalization and signs of violent extremism. They shall not be left alone,

bearing all the responsibility of prevention and de-radicalization. As detailed above, our interviews paid special attention to the process and prospects of building counter-narratives to tackle violent extremism. According to those interviewed, women at risk should be provided with a set of easily accessible discourse against violent extremism, with all political and community actors becoming involved in spreading it.

- In CVE and PVE efforts, interviews demonstrated the necessity of providing rehabilitation and reconciliation services in efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism. Many of those interviewed with close proximity to radicalized women emphasized how psychological reasons interact with faith-based considerations. In particular, interviewees mentioned the quest for self-identification, an aspiration for belonging triggering an increased tendency to a potential negative evaluation of an outgroup in the form of a declaration and degradation of both non-believers and less believers as unbeliever/unworthy (*takfiri*) as an important motivator. This again, shows the importance of both an individual and community-focused approach to these women.
- Our research from the very beginning emphasized that utmost care and attention must be paid in order to avoid instrumentalizing women's role in CVE and PVE, whilst empowering and integrating them into CVE and PVE strategies as indispensable and constructive actors. Countering and preventing violent extremism shall be devised as a multi-actor and multi-layered strategy built upon first and foremost supervision of state authority and effective coordination and cooperation between the state and civil society.
- The women's NGOs stressed the urgency of understanding the problems and motivations of women and youth in order to propose a gender-sensitive perspective and called for the empowerment of women's civil society networks. Activists and members from faith-based women's NGOs pointed out the growing connections and cooperation between secular and faith-based (mostly Islamic feminist) women's civil society groups regarding efforts for preventing domestic violence. They noted that there has been greater embrace of feminist methodology and literature among faith-based women's NGOs and the focus has extended to cover LGBT-I individuals and children. There has also been greater attention and support from Muslim men for these initiatives. However, this example was largely confined to major cities such as İstanbul and Ankara. Even in cities like Adana with well-established women NGOs against domestic violence, sexual abuse and harassment, our interviewees told us that contacts with their faith-based counterparts or women's branches of faith-based humanitarian NGOs was highly limited, though they expressed openness for greater cooperation particularly in the newly emerging agenda of women's roles in CVE and PVE.
- The proposed empowerment of women and women's NGOs cannot be detached from the overall **empowerment of civil**

**society.** As put forward by many experts, violent extremism can't be tackled without addressing the broader structural factors reproducing it. Almost all of our interviews put forward the relationship between violence and the lack of development and democracy and freedoms and offered democratization and rule of law as a panacea for radicalization. Women's as well as community's perception of feeling under oppression and having no legitimate alternatives to raise their concerns also directs them towards illegitimate ways of engagement. Therefore, efforts should also focus on increasing their efficacy and self-worth as participants in legitimate courses of political participation.

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Research Team Report for Activity-5:

# Assessing the Role of Women in Fighting Radicalization

**Key Expert:**

Başak Yavçan, PhD  
Associate Professor of Political Science and  
International Relations  
TOBB University of Economics and Technology

**Senior Researcher:**

Gülriş Şen, PhD  
Assistant Professor of Political Science and  
International Relations  
TOBB University of Economics and Technology



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