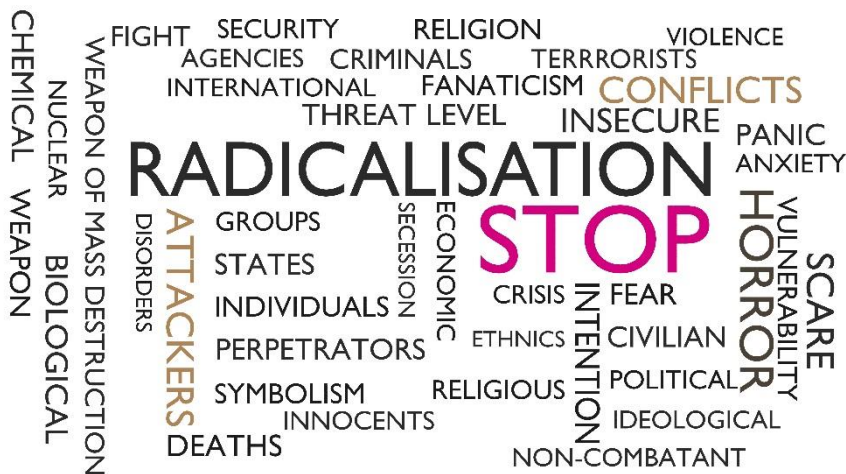


# Radicalisation and violent extremism – focus on women: How women become radicalised, and how to empower them to prevent radicalisation

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Committee on Women’s Rights &  
Gender Equality





**DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES**  
**POLICY DEPARTMENT FOR CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND**  
**CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS**

**WOMEN'S RIGHTS & GENDER EQUALITY**

**Radicalisation and violent extremism –  
focus on women:  
How women become radicalised, and  
how to empower them to prevent  
radicalisation**

**STUDY**

**Abstract**

This study, commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, focuses on Islamist radicalisation and violent extremism in the EU and has two aims: 1) to explore and assess the question of women's radicalisation and their involvement in violent extremism in the EU as well as to look into the mechanisms in place to prevent women and girls from radicalisation and propose further actions; and 2) to identify the potential of women in preventing radicalisation, in particular by looking into women's current role in counter-radicalisation strategies and to explore potential gendered approaches and best practices to counter-radicalisation.

## **ABOUT THE PUBLICATION**

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## CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>GLOSSARY</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>PART I</b>	
<b>PREVENTING RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>1. RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM: THE EXAMPLE OF JIHADIST RADICALISATION</b>	<b>12</b>
1.1. Radicalisation and violent extremism	12
1.2. Jihadist radicalisation: Women’s role in jihad from a historical perspective	13
1.3. Overview of the current situation in the EU	16
1.3.1 Socio-demographic gender differences	17
1.3.2 Gender differences in radicalisation	17
1.3.3 Arrests	18
1.3.4 Legislation	19
1.4. Overview of EU Policy on PVE/CVE	19
<b>2. WOMEN’S JIHADIST RADICALISATION AND THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM</b>	<b>23</b>
2.1. Western women supporting jihadist organisations	23
2.1.1. Pathways to radicalisation	23
2.1.2. Roles of women supporting ISIS/Da’esh	25
2.2. Online radicalisation	29
<b>3. WOMEN’S ROLE IN PVE/CVE EFFORTS AND RELATED INITIATIVES</b>	<b>33</b>
3.1. The role of women in countering radicalisation	33
3.2. Good practice examples of PVE/CVE initiatives	35
<b>4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>PART II</b>	
<b>CASE STUDIES – GERMANY, THE NETHERLANDS, SPAIN AND THE UNITED KINGDOM</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>5. OVERVIEW OF THE CASE STUDIES</b>	<b>43</b>
5.1 Germany	43
5.2 The Netherlands	44
5.3 Spain	45
5.4 The United Kingdom	46

<b>6. CASE STUDY: GERMANY</b>	<b>48</b>
6.1. Introduction	48
6.2. Profiles of women	49
6.3. The role of online radicalisation	53
<b>7. CASE STUDY: THE NETHERLANDS</b>	<b>57</b>
7.1. Introduction	57
7.2. Profiles of women	58
7.3. The role of online radicalisation	60
7.4. Good practice initiatives	61
<b>8. CASE STUDY: SPAIN</b>	<b>65</b>
8.1. Introduction	65
8.2. Profiles of women	66
8.3. The role of online radicalisation	69
8.4. Good practice initiatives	72
<b>9. CASE STUDY: THE UNITED KINGDOM</b>	<b>74</b>
9.1. Introduction	74
9.2. Profiles of women	76
9.3. The role of online radicalisation	79
9.4. Good practice initiatives	82
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>85</b>

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AIVD</b>	Dutch Intelligence Service
<b>CVE</b>	Countering violent extremism
<b>EUISS</b>	European Institute for Strategic Studies
<b>GCTF</b>	Global Counter-Terrorism Forum
<b>ICCT</b>	International Centre for Counter-Terrorism
<b>ICSR</b>	International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation
<b>IP</b>	Intervention Provider
<b>MEMRI</b>	The Middle East Media Research Institute
<b>NCTV</b>	Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism
<b>NMWAG</b>	(UK) National Muslim Women’s Advisery Group
<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>PEN-LCRV</b>	(Spanish) National Strategic Plan of Fight Against Violent Radicalization
<b>PVE/CVE</b>	Preventing/countering violent extremism
<b>PVE</b>	Preventing violent extremism
<b>RAN</b>	Radicalisation Awareness Network
<b>RUSI</b>	Royal United Service Institute
<b>SIPI</b>	(Dutch) Foundation for Intercultural Participation and Integration
<b>SNRP</b>	Amsterdam Strategic Network Radicalisation and Polarisation
<b>STRIVE</b>	Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism
<b>VPN</b>	Violence Prevention Network
<b>WARN</b>	Women Against Radicalisation Network
<b>WomEx</b>	Women/girls in violent extremism

## GLOSSARY

### Departees / Foreign fighters

These terms refer to individuals that have for a variety of reasons and with different (ideological) backgrounds joined an armed conflict abroad,<sup>1</sup> in the case of this study, the conflict in Syria and Iraq.

### Digital Umm

Umm the Arabic word for mother. The Digital Umm refers to the online female jihadist community. The Digital Umm represents for these women a community of mothers, or future mothers, brought together online by the violent goal of educating their children to accept the jihadist ideology. Their online kinship is the recognition of themselves as online sisters who share the same violent narrative.

### Hijra (also spelled Hijrah or Hejira)

Migration to the ISIS / Da'esh Caliphate.

### ISIS/Da'esh (IS, ISIL); Caliphate

Da'esh refers to the Islamic State (IS), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Islamic State of Iraq and Syria or al-Sham (ISIS). Da'esh is the acronym of the group's previous name in Arabic (al-Dawla al-Islamiya fil Iraq wa al-Sham).<sup>2</sup> Also the term Caliphate is used in this study synonymously.

### Jihad

Jihad generally translates as 'effort' or 'struggle'. The Islamic tradition distinguishes between two forms of jihad.<sup>3</sup> On the one hand, there is the inner jihad, referring to the struggle against temptation and to improve one's own character. To most Muslims, this jihad is an integral part of the daily practice of their faith. On the other hand, jihad refers to a militant struggle waged to defend the (land of) Islam.<sup>4</sup> When referring to jihad, this report refers to the militant and not the spiritual struggle.

The origins of *modern jihadism* can be traced back to the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. Starting out as a defensive jihad against Soviet invasion, it evolved into a proxy war with recruits travelling to Afghanistan to support the *Mujahedeen* [term for those engaged in jihad] from all over the world.<sup>5</sup> Contemporary jihadism is not an organised, singular movement, but rather a loose network of actors, connected through similar views and subject to constantly changing alliances and rivalries. Nevertheless, the spiritual and political foundations of this diverse group are based on two main pillars: religious puritanism propagated by Salafism and the inspirational dimension of political Islam/Islamism.<sup>6</sup> Jihadists often refer to *takfir* – rendering those who do not share their interpretation of Islam – to justify attacks. The traditional distinction in jihad between *dar al-Islam* [the land of Islam/peace] and *dar al-harb* [land of war] is thereby reframed completely to accommodate

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<sup>1</sup> International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, *Foreign fighters*. Available at: <https://icct.nl/topic/foreign-fighters/>

<sup>2</sup> Irshaid, Faisal, *Isis, Isil, IS or Daesh? One group, many names*, BBC News, 2 December 2015. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-27994277>

<sup>3</sup> Kusserow, Sebastian and Pawlak, Patryk (2015), *Understanding Jihad and Jihadism*, European Parliamentary Research Service. Available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/557007/EPRS\\_ATA\(2015\)557007\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2015/557007/EPRS_ATA(2015)557007_EN.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), *De gewelddadige jihad in Nederland*.

<sup>5</sup> Kusserow, Sebastian and Pawlak, Patryk (2015), *Understanding Jihad and Jihadism*, European Parliamentary Research Service.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.



the jihadist self-image as the only true representative of Islam.<sup>7</sup> To jihadists, the use of violence is the sole approach to achieve societal and political changes in accordance with their radical, jihadist beliefs.<sup>8</sup>

### **Kuffar**

Derogatory Arabic term used to refer to non-Muslims/Unbelievers.

### **Mujahedeen**

Plural form of the Arabic word mujahid, referring to those engaged in jihad.

### **Niqab**

A garment of clothing that covers the face that is worn by some Muslim women as a part of a particular interpretation of hijab [modesty].

### **Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) / Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)**

Using non-coercive means that seek to address the drivers and/or root causes of violent extremism.

### **Radicalisation**

The European Commission defines radicalisation as a complex phenomenon of individuals or groups becoming intolerant with regard to basic democratic values like equality and diversity, as well as a rising propensity to use means of force to reach political goals that negate and/or undermine democracy.<sup>9</sup> Terrorist radicalisation is understood as the complex phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas that could lead to committing terrorist acts. As stressed by the European Commission, terrorist radicalisation is not confined to one faith or political ideology.<sup>10</sup> The European Commission acknowledges that drivers conducive to radicalisation may include a strong sense of alienation, perceived injustice or humiliation reinforced by social marginalisation, xenophobia and discrimination, limited education or employment possibilities, criminality or psychological problems. Recruiters can exploit these factors and prey on vulnerabilities and grievances through manipulation.<sup>11</sup>

### **Rumiyah; Dabiq**

Online glossy propaganda magazines launched by IS for non-Arabic speakers. *Dabiq* was circulated between July 2014 and July 2016. *Rumiyah* is currently the primary online magazine for non-Arabic speakers and was first released in September 2016.

### **Salafism**

Salafism is a fundamentalist, Sunni Islamic movement that aims for a return to a pure Islamic society. Although Salafi positions vary considerably and do not necessarily prescribe the use of violence, their rejection of large parts of Islamic tradition and jurisprudence has de facto created favourable conditions for the spread of the jihadist ideology.<sup>12</sup>

### **Terrorism**

In the absence of a generally accepted definition under international law, the European Commission defines terrorism as the intentional and systematic use of actions designed to

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), *De gewelddadige jihad in Nederland*, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> European Commission, *Migration and Home Affairs Glossary*. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/e-library/glossary/r\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/e-library/glossary/r_en)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> European Commission, *Migration and Home Affairs Glossary*.

<sup>12</sup> Kusserow, Sebastian and Pawlak, Patryk (2015), *Understanding Jihad and Jihadism*, European Parliamentary Research Service.

provoke terror in the public as a means to certain ends. Terrorism can be the act of an individual or a group of individuals acting in their individual capacity or with the support of a State. It may also be the act of a State, whether against the population (human rights violations such as forced labour, deportation, genocide, etc.), or in the context of an international armed conflict against the civilian population of the enemy State.<sup>13</sup>

### **Ummah**

The Arabic word refers to the wider Muslim community. In the Quran, the ummah typically refers to a single group that shares common religious beliefs, specifically those that are the objects of a divine plan of salvation. In the context of Pan-Islamism and politics, the word Ummah can be used to mean the concept of a Commonwealth of the Believers.

### **Violent extremism**

As with terrorism, there is no internationally agreed definition of violent extremism. Often, the two are used interchangeably. Mostly, violent extremism is regarded as including, but not limited to, acts of terrorism.<sup>14</sup> The EU does not provide an official definition. Therefore, in this study, violent extremism is regarded as the willingness to use violence, or to support the use of violence, to further particular beliefs of a political, social, economic or ideological nature.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Nasser-Eddine, Minerva, Garnham, Bridget; Agostino, Katerina and Caluya, Gilbert (2011), *Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Literature Review*, Australian Government, Department of Defence, p. 9.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The willingness to use or support violence to further particular political, social, economic or religious beliefs can be found in all societies and is typically described as a very “male” phenomenon. The role of women in such extremist movements is often neglected or reduced to the passive role of being victims. But women have been taking part in extremist and violent movements throughout history. On the other hand, they have also always played an important part in preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism.

The present study focuses on these active roles of women: as perpetrators or supporters of extremist violence and as actors in prevention and countering efforts. In exemplifying and describing these roles, the study concentrates on the yet underexplored part that women play in jihadist movements. The focus here is often on domestic chores and raising their children according to the jihadist ideology, but their roles encompass much more than this and also include for instance professional positions (such as doctors, administrators, teachers) and acting as recruiters/propagandists and/or fundraisers. Furthermore, women can be powerful propaganda assets, particularly when Western women join the group or when their willingness to use violence is used to shame men into participating in jihad. Finally, women have also taken up operational roles and have been involved in carrying out militant operations themselves, including suicide attacks. For all these reasons, women are playing a fundamental role in sustaining and propagating the jihadist ideology and thus form an integral part of jihad.

There is a complex multiplicity of motivations for women to support or join movements such as ISIS/Da'esh and thus there is no common profile of women supporting jihadism. Research shows women who joined ISIS/Da'esh have different socio-demographic make-up and background stories. Their motivation ranges from a quest for belonging, the aspiration to help build a utopian Islamic state, to belong to something bigger and divine and a (perceived) moral duty to support their Muslim brothers and sisters, to a sense of adventure, the prospect of marriage, or a combination thereof. Radicalisation is a complex, multi-causal phenomenon. Understanding and responding to female radicalisation requires the same multi-layered approach. Furthermore, as argued by different scholars, caution is advised when translating findings regarding increased vulnerability for radicalisation into policies and programmes. Labelling certain groups as more vulnerable to radicalisation can be counter-effective as it can increase stigmatisation and feelings of estrangement.

For most individuals travelling to the ISIS/Da'esh territory, the internet and particularly social media played some part in their radicalisation and they appear especially relevant in female Islamist recruitment.<sup>15</sup> ISIS/Da'esh approaches women differently than men. The official propaganda aimed at women is “traditionally feminine” with purple and pink backgrounds, pictures of sunsets and landscapes.<sup>16</sup> However, this is not to say women are not attracted to the brutal and violent imagery also distributed by ISIS/Da'esh. Women are furthermore also very active in distributing propaganda online and recruiting other women to the cause.

While men are mostly considered active players in their radicalisation, women are often reduced to passive actors. Their radicalisation is perceived as a situation that happens to them, rather than a process they are a part of. These gender misconceptions hinder an

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<sup>15</sup> Pearson, Elizabeth (2016), *The Case of Roshonara Choudhry: Implications for Theory on Online Radicalization, ISIS Women, and the Gendered Jihad*, Policy and Internet, Volume 8, Issue 1, March 2016, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

adequate response to the phenomenon of female radicalisation. Any serious attempt to prevent or counter female radicalisation requires acknowledgment of the diversity of women and should avoid generalisations and oversimplifications.

When it comes to the contribution of women in preventing violent extremism and combating violent extremism (PVE/CVE) programmes, gender misconceptions and gender stereotypes often affect the space within which women contribute to these initiatives. Frequently, women are included in these programmes as mothers, sisters and wives, as they are considered ideally positioned to spot early warning signs of radicalisation. While this can be a valuable element of PVE/CVE programmes, it reinforces gender stereotypes and overlooks women's capacity to contribute in many other areas. Different studies and experts point out that women can play a vital role as policy shapers, educators, community members and activists.

Recommendations for policymakers on involving women in PVE/CVE efforts include facilitating and stimulating local grassroots initiatives, the avoidance of demonising specific groups, offering training to all professionals working with Islamist radicalised women and girls, facilitating and stimulating cooperation between existing initiatives, encouraging women to partake in prevention efforts and safeguarding the quality of prevention and intervention programmes.

Proposed considerations for PVE/CVE programmes aimed at women include targeting female-specific push and pull factors for female radicalisation and recruitment, addressing female-specific vulnerabilities, recognising female-specific enabling factors, accounting for female-specific issues in intervention and reintegration programming, raising awareness of women's increased vulnerability to online recruitment and making use of the opportunity that the internet can provide to spread counter-narratives.

## INTRODUCTION

Women have been taking part in radical and violent movements throughout history. However, since men carry out most violent attacks, women as actors are often overlooked. Women can for instance take up roles as facilitators, recruiters, enablers and supporters of the rhetoric of the group; they link different cells through marriages; raise their children according to the ideology; and organise social events to attract more members or act as fundraisers. Increasingly, women are also involved in operational activities.

At the same time, women have an important role in countering and preventing radicalisation: mothers, for instance, can have a strong influence in terms of dissuading family members from (further) radicalisation. Furthermore, women can prevent radicalisation as community members and activists. Therefore, empowering women within families and communities is frequently considered as crucial for tackling the root causes of radicalisation and violent extremism.

Against this background, the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality of the European Parliament has requested the Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs to commission a research paper on "Radicalisation and violent extremism: focus on women – How women become radicalised and how to empower them to prevent radicalisation". The aim of the paper is to:

- a) explore and assess the question of women's radicalisation and their involvement in violent extremism in the EU; look into the mechanisms in place to prevent women and girls from radicalisation and propose further actions, gendered policies or initiatives to tackle the issue.
- b) to identify the potential of women in preventing radicalisation and to look, in particular, into women's current role in counter-radicalisation strategies. A further aim is to analyse potential gendered approaches and best practices to counter-radicalisation.

The present paper focuses on Islamist radicalisation. The first chapter provides the background with a short description of women's role in jihadi organisations from a historical perspective, provides an overview of the current situation in the EU concerning Islamist radicalisation and violent extremism, and current EU policy in this field. Chapter two explores the possible pathways to radicalisation for women and their roles in supporting ISIS/Da'esh. A further section focuses on the important role of online radicalisation, particularly for women. It also presents a short summary of the case studies from Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. The more detailed case studies can be found in the annex of this paper. The fourth chapter focuses on the role of women in countering and preventing violent extremism and presents good practice examples. Finally, the last chapter includes conclusions and recommendations for action in the field.

# PART I

## PREVENTING RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

### 1. RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM: THE EXAMPLE OF JIHADIST RADICALISATION

#### 1.1. Radicalisation and violent extremism

##### Radicalisation

In the academic field, theories that attempt to explain radicalisation are extensive and wide-ranging. In general, research shows that there is no single path to radicalisation. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) argues that radicalisation in itself is not necessarily a threat to society *"if it is not connected to violence or other unlawful acts, such as incitement to hatred."*<sup>17</sup> *"Radicalization can actually be a force for beneficial change. For instance, the political and human rights advocates who were instrumental in the abolition of slavery, and those who championed universal suffrage were at one time considered to be radical, as they stood in opposition to the prevailing views in their societies."*<sup>18</sup> The OSCE argues that radicalisation becomes a threat to society if an individual comes to *"accept terrorist violence as a possible, perhaps even legitimate, course of action. This may eventually, but not necessarily, lead this person to advocate, act in support of, or engage in terrorism"*.<sup>19</sup>

Becoming radicalised is generally understood as a highly complex process that can differ from person to person. Different factors on the individual-, group- and macro-levels push and pull a person to or from a violent extremist group. Examples can include feelings of estrangement from society, the pull of the cause, a change in group dynamics, economic deprivation, perceived injustices and geopolitical events. The process of radicalisation can be accelerated by so-called catalysing factors and trigger events. Such factors and events affect the thinking and behaviour of an individual and can include the (unexpected) death of a loved one, a rift in a friendship or family, political events including the outbreak of a war, statements of politicians etc.<sup>20</sup>

##### Violent extremism

There is no consensus on a definition of violent extremism or terrorism, nor is there consensus on the difference between terrorism and violent extremism. In their literature review on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), Minerva Nasser-Eddine, Bridget Garnham, Katerina Agostino and Gilbert Caluya explain this is partly political, partly ideological, and

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<sup>17</sup> Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (2014), *Preventing terrorism and countering violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism: a community-policing approach*, p. 35.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 35

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>20</sup> See for more reading: Silke, Andrew (2003), *Becoming a terrorist*, in Silke, *Terrorists, victims and society: psychological perspectives on terrorism and its consequences*, pp. 29-53; Schmid, Alex (2013), *Radicalisation, de-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation: a conceptual discussion and literature review*, ICCT; Allan, Harriet, Glazzard, Andrew, Jespersen, Sasha, Reddy-Tumu, Sneha and Winterbotham, Emily (2015), *Drivers of violent extremism, hypotheses and literature review*, Royal United Service Institute (RUSI); Bakker, Edwin and Grol, Peter (2017), *Nederlandse jihadisten, van naïeve idealisten tot geharde terroristen*, p. 56-61; Feddes, Allard R., Nickolson, Lars, Doosje, Bertjan (2015), *Triggerfactoren in het radicaliseringsproces*, Expertise Unit Stabiliteit – Universiteit van Amsterdam.

partly an effect of multiple disciplines contributing to the study of terrorism.<sup>21</sup> The research paper “Radicalisation, de-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation: a conceptual discussion and literature review”<sup>22</sup>, by leading scholar Alex P. Schmid, provides some useful insights that help understand violent extremism. Schmid explains that (violent) extremist groups, movements and parties tend to have many of the following elements:

- Anti-constitutional, anti-democratic, anti-pluralist, authoritarian;
- Fanatical, intolerant, non-compromising, single-minded black-or-white thinkers;
- Rejecting the rule of law while adhering to an ends-justify-means philosophy;
- Aiming to realise their goals by any means, including, when the opportunity offers itself, the use of massive political violence against opponents.<sup>23</sup>

Schmid furthermore considers that extremists on the political left and right, those of a religious-fundamentalist orientation as well as those of ethno-nationalist political nature show a propensity to:

- Use of force/violence over persuasion;
- Uniformity over diversity;
- Collective goals over individual freedom;
- Giving orders over dialogue.

He concludes that these elements together with a strong emphasis on ideology are the main characteristics of extremists.<sup>24</sup>

Violent extremism is not bound by a certain ideology and neither is radicalisation. This study, however, focuses on Islamist radicalisation, in particular on women and jihadism. To better understand the roles of women in jihadism, this study starts with a brief exploration of women in jihad from a historical perspective.

## **1.2. Jihadist radicalisation: Women’s role in jihad from a historical perspective**

In general, women in the early years of Islam (seventh century) played a supportive role in jihad. They brought food and water to the fighters at the battlefield, took care of the wounded and encouraged their male family members to join the struggle. At that time, women were the mothers, sisters, daughters and wives of Muslim men at war. However, the Quran and *hadiths* [the traditions of the prophet] also mention how some women fought in various battles in the prophetic era. And while the prophet never commanded women to take part actively in the fighting, he was said to have praised these women for their sacrifice and bravery.<sup>25</sup> Modern influential jihadist ideologues and strategists similarly express their admiration for these women but at the same time, stress women’s role in jihad should

<sup>21</sup> Nasser-Eddine, Minerva, Garnham, Bridget; Agostino, Katerina and Caluya, Gilbert (2011), *Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Literature Review*, Australian Government, Department of Defence, p 5.

<sup>22</sup> Schmid, Alex P. (2013), *Radicalisation, de-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation: a conceptual discussion and literature review*, ICCT, pp. 8-9. Available at: <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf>.

<sup>23</sup> Schmid, Alex P. (2013), *Radicalisation, de-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation: a conceptual discussion and literature review*, ICCT, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Lahoud, Nelly (2014), *The neglected Sex: The jihadis’ exclusion of women from Jihad*, *Terrorism and political violence* 26:5, pp. 780-802.

primarily be supportive.<sup>26</sup> This ambiguity regarding women fighting in jihad provides theological space for women to participate in militant acts in the modern jihad.

Based on gender stereotyping, there are several advantages for jihadist organisations to include women in militant missions. Women are often not expected to carry out acts of violence, which provides women with a "natural cover". Furthermore, attractive women have been known to distract surveillance and security teams. In addition, violent women attract more media-attention than violent men. The perceived juxtaposition of violent women similarly sends a powerful message of intimidation. Combatants and civilians of the target population are not safe anywhere if even women can carry out violent attacks. It also underlines the seriousness of the cause if there is the perception that "even women" are prepared to engage in violence.<sup>27</sup> Also, including women in militant operations can serve as a catalyst for men to take up arms, shaming them for letting women do the fighting.<sup>28</sup>

However, despite these tactical and strategic advantages, so far it has not been common for women to fight besides men under the flag of jihad. While the introduction of suicide operations has increased the number of women engaging in violent acts, few jihadist movements have allowed women, or specifically encouraged them, to take part in these operations. There are exceptions. Between 2005 and 2009 Al Qaeda Iraq<sup>29</sup> orchestrated several suicide attacks by women. Also in the Chechen conflict women carried out suicide attacks. Between 2002 and 2004, these women, notoriously referred to as Black Widows, even carried out more attacks than their male counterparts.<sup>30</sup> Chechen women were also present in both the hostage takings in the Dubrovka theatre in Moscow in 2002 that involved 850 hostages and in the school in Beslan in 2004, in which 1,100 people were taken hostage, including 770 children.<sup>31</sup> There have also been cases of women participating in the planning and execution of violent attacks. In 2009, the American Colleen LaRose was arrested for conspiracy to commit the murder of the Swedish cartoonist Lars Vilks for his cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed.<sup>32</sup> And a female member of Hamas<sup>33</sup> played a crucial role in the planning of the suicide attack on the Sbarro pizzeria in Jerusalem in 2001 that killed 15 and left 130 people wounded.<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, it appears that generally men have predominated in the planning and carrying out of violent attacks in jihad.

This does not mean, however, that women's role in jihad has been less important. It merely means they have had a *different* role. Rima Fahri, the female representative of the political branch of Hezbollah<sup>35</sup>, argued that even though women do not take part in militant operations, they should not be seen as separate from the militant struggle. Their supportive

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Laster, Kathy and Erez, Edna (2015), *Sister in terrorism? Exploding stereotypes*, Women and Criminal Justice, 25:1-2, pp 83-99.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Al Qaeda cannot be characterised as a single group, rather it is a transnational network phenomenon. Some branches do incorporate women, while others explicitly do not. So far, only the branch in Iraq has explicitly incorporated women as suicide bombers. See for further reading: Sjoberg, Laura; Cooke, Grace D. and Reiter Neil, Stacy (2011), *Introduction, women, gender and terrorism*, in Sjoberg and Gentry eds., *Women, gender and terrorism*, Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, pp. 1-25, pp. 14-15.

<sup>30</sup> Stack, Alisa, *Zombies versus black widows*, in Sjoberg and Gentry eds., *Women, Gender and Terrorism*, pp. 83-95, p. 86.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Bruner, Mike, *Jihad Jane' gets ten-year sentence for terror plot against cartoonist*, NBC News, 6 January 2014. Available at: <http://investigations.nbcnews.com/news/2014/01/06/22202049-jihad-jane-gets-10-year-sentence-for-terror-plot-against-cartoonist?lite>

<sup>33</sup> Hamas is a Palestinian Sunni-Islamic organisation that fights for an independent Islamic Palestinian state. It was founded in 1987 during the first intifada.

<sup>34</sup> Bloom, Mia (2011), *Bombshell, women and terrorism*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 112-139.

<sup>35</sup> Hezbollah, founded in the early 1980s, is a Shi'ite-Islamic movement based primarily in Lebanon.



roles enable and facilitate the jihad.<sup>36</sup> Leading jihadist ideologues, including Osama bin Laden, also underscored the importance of women. Bin Laden acknowledged women's fundamental role in the jihad by stressing that women brought forth the generation of men fighting in Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Chechnya.<sup>37</sup> Women themselves have emphasised their importance as mothers and wives. The mother of a Hamas suicide bomber said in a television interview that it is the responsibility of mothers to constantly remind their sons that jihad is a religious duty.<sup>38</sup> The women of Hezbollah do the same and encourage their daughters to marry Hezbollah fighters.<sup>39</sup>

The supportive role of women in jihad, however, transcends their roles as mothers and wives. Particularly the internet has offered women possibilities to propagate and spread the radical, jihadist ideology. The Belgian-Moroccan Malika el-Aroud, for example, set up a jihadist online network on which she propagated the jihad in Afghanistan, sharing online texts and images to underscore atrocities inflicted upon Muslims. Also, the women within the circle of the Dutch *Hofstadgroep*<sup>40</sup> in the early 2000s were highly active in distributing such messages online, glorifying the jihad and translating and sharing inflammatory and disruptive texts.<sup>41</sup> Through online glossy magazines, female supporters of Al Qaeda have been known to propagate the jihad, reaching out to other women to support the global jihad, reminding them of their religious duties and giving them advice on how to be a good mother and wife.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to their roles as mothers and propagandists, women have facilitated the jihad by raising funds, taking care of wounded fighters and smuggling weapons, money and messages. The Saudi Heila al Quassayer, for example, raised more than USD 250,000 for Al Qaeda.<sup>43</sup> Female supporters of Hezbollah cared for wounded fighters behind enemy lines, gathered strategic information and smuggled weapons, money and explosives during the war in 2006.<sup>44</sup> Afghan women during the jihad against the Soviet Union supported the Mujahedeen by taking care of wounded fighters and serving as couriers.<sup>45</sup> Ottoman women were explicitly called upon to support the empire's military efforts against the enemies of Islam by donating money and goods for the soldiers and their families and by providing medical assistance to wounded fighters.<sup>46</sup> Women have also been known to provide jihadist movements with a more sympathetic image and to help them attract more female supporters. Female members of Hamas and Hezbollah are known to organise such social events.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Al Jazeera (2007), *Every Woman, Women of Hezbollah*. Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hpz7eAe-glg> (part 1) and

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vFCOfT24LLE> (part 2).

<sup>37</sup> Lahoud, Nelly (2014), *The neglected Sex: The jihadis' exclusion of women from Jihad*, Terrorism and political violence, 26:5, p. 783.

<sup>38</sup> MEMRI Jihad and Terrorism, *An interview with the mother of a suicide bomber*, 19 June 2002. Available at: <https://www.memri.org/reports/interview-mother-suicide-bomber>

<sup>39</sup> Al Jazeera (2007), *Every Woman, Women of Hezbollah*.

<sup>40</sup> The Hofstadgroup was an amorphous group of around 40 young Dutch Muslims, active from 2002 to 2005.

<sup>41</sup> Groen, Janny and Kranenberg, Annieke (2012), *Women warriors for Allah: An Islamist network in the Netherlands*, University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>42</sup> Huffington Post, *Al-Shamikhah, Al Qaeda Women's Magazine, Launches: Report*, 25 May 2011. Available at: [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/14/al-shamikhah-al-qaeda-womens-magazine\\_n\\_835572.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/14/al-shamikhah-al-qaeda-womens-magazine_n_835572.html)

<sup>43</sup> Spencer, Richard, *First lady of Al Qaeda' jailed for 15 years*, The Telegraph, 30 October 2011. Available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/saudi-arabia/8858301/First-Lady-of-al-Qaeda-jailed-for-15-years.html>.

<sup>44</sup> Al Jazeera (2007), *Every Woman, Women of Hezbollah*.

<sup>45</sup> De Leede, Seran (2014), *Afghan women and the Taliban: an exploratory assessment*, ICCT Policy Brief.

<sup>46</sup> Van Os, N.A.N.M. (2016), *Gendering Jihad: Ottoman Muslim women and war during the early twentieth century*, in Zürcher ed., *Jihad and Islam in World War I*, Leiden University Press.

<sup>47</sup> Abu Amer, Adnan, *Women's roles in Hamas slowly evolve*, Al Monitor, 2 March 2015. Available at: <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/02/women--role-hamas-qaza-leadership-social-mobilization.html#ixzz4SdGF5FVS>

In conclusion, women's roles in jihad have mostly been supportive and have included fundraising and providing medical assistance to wounded fighters. Furthermore, women have propagated the jihadist ideology by raising their children according to the jihadist ideology and by convincing others to join or support the violent struggle. Particularly the internet has created wider opportunities for women to propagate the jihadist cause. In addition, exploiting gender stereotypes, women have been known to smuggle weapons and money and to provide decoys and covers for male militants. Finally, although on a smaller scale, women themselves have been involved in carrying out militant operations, including suicide attacks. While women are less active on the frontlines of the jihad, this is not to say their role is of secondary importance, or subjugated to men's. Women have played a fundamental role in sustaining and propagating the jihadist ideology. Studies of global jihadism often focus particularly on violent attacks rather than on the facilitating efforts of the adherents of the ideology. This narrow approach ignores the significance of women facilitators and propagators. Women form an integral part of jihad. Their activities in the past underscore this.

### **1.3. Overview of the current situation in the EU**

Most European Union (EU) Member States have been confronted with at least some of their citizens travelling to Syria and Iraq. The ICCT study on the foreign fighters phenomenon in the EU, released in April 2016, shows that more than half of the departees (66.1%) originate from Northern and Western European countries.<sup>48</sup> Belgium, France, Germany and the United Kingdom (UK) have experienced the largest numbers of departees, whereas Belgium has faced the highest per capita rate, followed by Austria and Sweden.<sup>49</sup> With the proclamation of the Caliphate in June 2014, the number of female departees from EU Member States increased significantly. In Germany, for example, the percentage rose from 15% to 36% in the first year after the proclamation.<sup>50</sup> In the Netherlands, the number increased from around 20 women in January 2014 to over 50 in December 2015.<sup>51</sup> Other EU Member States have comparable numbers. Around 47 Belgian women are believed to reside in Syria/Iraq.<sup>52</sup> From Austria, that number is at least 17 women<sup>53</sup> and from the UK, around 145 women left for the self-proclaimed Caliphate.<sup>54</sup> France appears to have the highest number of female departees with over 200 French women and girls believed to reside in Syria/Iraq.<sup>55</sup> On average, it is estimated that around 17% of all individuals from EU Member States travelling to Syria and Iraq are women.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Van Ginkel, Bibi and Entenmann, Eva eds. (2016), *The foreign fighters phenomenon in the European Union, profiles, threats and policies*, ICCT research paper prepared for the Netherlands National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism on the occasion of the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union, p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Bundeskriminalamt, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus (2016), *Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind*, p. 60.

<sup>51</sup> Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service, *Life with ISIS: The Myth Unravelling*, 18 January 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Van Ginkel, Bibi and Entenmann, Eva eds. (2016), *The foreign fighters phenomenon in the European Union, profiles, threats and policies*, ICCT research paper prepared for the Netherlands National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism on the occasion of the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Annex 3, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> [https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/AB/AB\\_03374/imfname\\_392274.pdf](https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/AB/AB_03374/imfname_392274.pdf)

<sup>54</sup> There is no exact figure of UK females joining ISIS/Da'esh, but according to a leading expert, the estimate stands at around 145 (see Case Study United Kingdom in the annex of this report).

<sup>55</sup> Van Ginkel, Bibi and Entenmann, Eva eds. (2016), *The foreign fighters phenomenon in the European Union, profiles, threats and policies*, ICCT research paper prepared for the Netherlands National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism on the occasion of the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

### 1.3.1 Socio-demographic gender differences

Research shows there are several socio-demographic differences between male and female departees from EU Member States.<sup>57</sup> First, the percentage of converts appears to be higher for women compared to men. In Germany, one-third of all the female departees are converts, compared to 17% of the male departees.<sup>58</sup> The situation in the Netherlands is similar. According to a Dutch dataset of foreign fighters, the share of converts among women is 31% and 7% for men.<sup>59</sup> In France, female converts make up 25% of all female departees, compared to 20% for men.<sup>60</sup> For the UK, specific data on the percentage of converts are not conclusive. However, experts claim a disproportionate number of the total female British departees are white female converts.<sup>61</sup> Female departees also tend to be younger than their male counterparts. German female departees have a median age of 23.5 years, compared to 26.5 for men. The share of minors among German women is also considerably higher with 13% compared to 6% for men.<sup>62</sup> The same trend is visible in the Netherlands, where the average age of female departees is 20.3, compared to 23.8 for male departees.<sup>63</sup> In the UK, 45 of the 223 men in the dataset are between 15 to 20 years old (20%), compared to 12 of the 46 women (26%).<sup>64</sup>

The European Institute for Strategic Studies (EUISS) reports that, compared to men, women are less often known to the police. Their profiles rarely trigger law enforcement alarms and women less often hold criminal records.<sup>65</sup> The EUISS furthermore states that women are half as likely to return to their home countries as men.<sup>66</sup> While the EUISS report does not disclose its sources – making cross-referencing problematic – the findings of the German security authorities substantiate this latter conclusion. In the past year, 21% of the female departees returned, compared to 39% of the male departees.<sup>67</sup> In the case of the Netherlands, women make up a third of the total of 50 returnees.<sup>68</sup>

### 1.3.2 Gender differences in radicalisation

While few studies have focused on gender and radicalisation, findings of studies and reports on the phenomenon of ISIS/Da'esh radicalisation imply gendered differences. The German

<sup>57</sup> The German security authorities have collected and analysed data about the 910 individuals who travelled to Syria and Iraq based on Islamist motivations. Their study identifies some gender differences. Also, the European Institute for Strategic Studies, the ICCT, RUSI and a Dutch dataset on foreign fighters from the Netherlands have identified gender differences.

<sup>58</sup> Heinke, Daniel H. (2017), *The German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: The Updated Data and Its Implications*, CTC Sentinel, pp. 17–22. Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/german-foreign-fighters-in-syria-and-iraq-the-updated-data-and-its-implications>

<sup>59</sup> The database consists of 210 individuals, 156 men and 54 women. There are in total 28 converts in the database: 17 female and 11 male. The database itself is not online accessible. In personal correspondence with the author, one of the data compilers provided these details. See also: Bergema, Reinier (2017), *Jihad Joris: Dutch converts waging jihad in Syria and Iraq*, Bellingcat. Available at:

<https://www.bellingcat.com/news/mena/2017/05/17/jihad-joris-dutch-converts-waging-jihad-syria-iraq/>

<sup>60</sup> Pearson, Elizabeth and Winterbotham, Emily (2017), *Women, gender and Daesh radicalisation*, The RUSI journal, 162:3, pp. 60-72, DOI:10.1080/03071847.2017.1353251.

<sup>61</sup> With reference to Hadiya Massieh (see UK case study in the annex of this report).

<sup>62</sup> Heinke, Daniel H. (2017), *The German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: The Updated Data and Its Implications*, CTC Sentinel, pp. 17–22.

<sup>63</sup> Bergema, Reinier and Koudijs, Sander (2015), *Nederlandse jihadisten in Syrië en Irak, een analyse*, International Spectator. Available at:

<https://www.internationalespectator.nl/pub/2015/10/nederlandse-jihadisten-in-syrie-en-irak/>

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-32026985>

<sup>65</sup> Gaub, Florence and Lisiecka, Julia (2016), *Women in Daesh: jihadist 'cheerleaders', active operatives?*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Brief Issue 27.

<sup>66</sup> Gaub, Florence and Lisiecka, Julia (2016), *Women in Daesh: jihadist 'cheerleaders', active operatives?*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Brief Issue 27.

<sup>67</sup> Bundeskriminalamt, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus, "Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind", 2016, p.41.

<sup>68</sup> Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD), *Focus on returnees*, 15 February 2017. Available at: <https://english.aivd.nl/latest/news/2017/02/15/publication-focus-on-refugees>.

security authorities, for example, found that among the German individuals who left within one year of the beginning of their radicalisation process, the share of women was significantly higher (27% versus 18%).<sup>69</sup> Also, they report that radicalisation of women appears to be less visible<sup>70</sup>, a conclusion supported by a RUSI study on women, gender and Da'esh radicalisation by Elizabeth Pearson and Emily Winterbotham.<sup>71</sup> Pearson and Winterbotham argue that this difference in visibility resonates with traditional, cultural gender norms and gender expectations. These norms confine women's access to the public space, which results in different enabling factors for men and women. Their study shows for example that the recruitment of boys and men can more easily occur face-to-face in the street or in and around mosques, while the recruitment of women and girls will take place in the private sphere and online.<sup>72</sup> Gender expectations also help explain why women are more likely to travel with their families or in all-female groups.<sup>73</sup> Second, the authors argue, gender expectations account for the image of women being groomed or brainwashed and the assumption that women are predominantly passive in their radicalisation. While there are examples of women being groomed, they argue, this is not necessarily always the case.<sup>74</sup>

### 1.3.3 Arrests

In its Terrorism Situation and Trend Reports of 2016 and 2017, Europol states that the number of women arrested on suspicion of jihadist terrorism-related offences has increased in the EU in the last years from 6 (2013), to 52 (2014), 128 (2015) and 187 (2016).<sup>75</sup> Europol also reports women have increasingly assumed more operational roles.<sup>76</sup> On February 2016 for example, a 15-year-old girl attacked a police officer in Hanover (Germany). In early September of the same year, a cell consisting of three women was dismantled in Paris. The women were suspected of having planted gas bottles in a car close to the Notre-Dame Cathedral.<sup>77</sup> A study by the EUISS warns that as the male contingent is thinning out and being placed under increased supervision by law enforcement authorities, in the future, women may increasingly be involved in operational roles. The study points to other cases where a group was on the defensive, which sparked increased involvement of women, such as in Chechnya. In addition, it points to the pool of female supporters who never made it to the Caliphate but could still seek a way to engage, possibly by using violence.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>69</sup> Heinke, Daniel H. (2017), *The German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: The Updated Data and its Implications*, CTC Sentinel, pp. 17–22. Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/german-foreign-fighters-in-syria-and-iraq-the-updated-data-and-its-implications>

<sup>70</sup> Bundeskriminalamt, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus (2016), *Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind*, p 61.

<sup>71</sup> Pearson, Elizabeth and Winterbotham, Emily (2017), *Women, gender and Daesh radicalisation*, The RUSI journal, 162:3, 60-72, DOI:10.1080/03071847.2017.1353251.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> From Germany for example 54% of the women travelled with their family members, compared to 22% of men. See: Bundeskriminalamt, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus (2016), *Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind*, p. 40.

<sup>74</sup> Pearson, Elizabeth and Winterbotham, Emily (2017), *Women, gender and Daesh radicalisation*, The RUSI journal, 162:3, 60-72, DOI:10.1080/03071847.2017.1353251.

<sup>75</sup> Europol (2016), *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2016*, p. 11. Available at: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2016>; Europol (2017), *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2017*, p. 22. Available at: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/eu-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2017>

<sup>76</sup> Europol (2017), *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2017*.

<sup>77</sup> Europol (2017), *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2017*, p. 26.

<sup>78</sup> Gaub, Florence and Lisiecka, Julia (2016), *Women in Daesh: jihadist 'cheerleaders', active operatives?*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Brief Issue 27.

### 1.3.4 Legislation

The legislation regarding female departees in the legal systems of EU Member States is incoherent. The EUISS reports that this ambiguity stems, in part, from the equivocality surrounding the nature of female membership in ISIS/Da'esh. While each male fighter must pledge allegiance to the group and its leader, women rarely undergo any formal rite of passage.<sup>79</sup> In addition, women's role within ISIS/Da'esh is more obscure and to what extent women's actions can be treated as criminal offences is less evident. This is underscored by the EUISS report that argues "only nine EU Member States have made travelling to conflict zones a criminal offence in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2178, which requires states to criminalise travel for terrorism-related acts, or for the financing, organisation or facilitation of such acts".<sup>80</sup> Consequently, sentences for female departees can vary widely. The EUISS reports that women returning from Syria or Iraq have been punished with comparatively soft measures, such as the confiscation of their passports or limitations on access to social benefits, or they have been acquitted. If women are convicted at all, it is usually for child abuse (because they took their children to a war zone) rather than for supporting a terrorist organisation.<sup>81</sup> In the UK, on the other hand, several returnees as well as women and girls who have attempted to travel to Syria or Iraq have received prison sentences (up to fifteen years) for endangering their children, providing material support to a terrorist organisation and proselytization.<sup>82</sup>

Also in Belgium, women have been sentenced to prison for their involvement with ISIS/Da'esh. In May 2015, a court in Antwerp convicted seven women for supporting ISIS/Da'esh and for recruiting young women to go to Syria and marry fighters of the militant organisation. Four of the seven women – who were believed to still be in Syria – were given five-year prison sentences for their activities within the female battalions of ISIS/Da'esh, "including patrolling and guarding entrances to towns and cities in Syria."<sup>83</sup> The three women who were present in court received prison sentences of between 20 and 30 months for "facilitating the departure of IS recruits and collecting money for organisations aiming to radicalise young girls".<sup>84</sup>

The roles of women in jihadist organisations and their motives to join them are very diverse. Chapter 2 will explore these roles and motives in more detail.

## 1.4. Overview of EU Policy on PVE/CVE

Internal security, and thus also fighting violent extremism, is the primary responsibility of the Member States. The EU, however, provides an important framework to help coordinate national policies, share information and determine and exchange good practices. This section provides a brief overview of EU policy in relation to preventing/countering violent extremism (PVE/CVE).

The basis of the EU's prevention work concerning radicalisation and violent extremism is the **EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism**<sup>85</sup>, adopted in 2005 and revised in 2008 and 2014. The strategy calls for the development of (i)

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid; Davis, Jessica (2017), *Women in modern terrorism, from liberation wars to global jihad and the Islamic State*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, London, p. 127.

<sup>83</sup> Reuters, *Belgium convicts seven women for supporting Islamic State*, 18 May 2015. Available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-belgium-verdict-idUSKBN0031C420150518>

<sup>84</sup> Reuters, *Belgium convicts seven women for supporting Islamic State*, 18 May 2015.

<sup>85</sup> Council of the European Union (2014), *Revised EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism*, 9956/14, Brussels. Available at: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9956-2014-INIT/en/pdf>

awareness-raising programmes and sector-specific training modules for first line practitioners; (ii) the involvement of and drawing on resources and expertise within civil society and the private sector to build resilience; (iii) the exchange of best practices and experience with a view to developing exit programmes; (iv) acquiring know-how and re-integrating former terrorists; (v) steering research to understand the phenomenon of radicalisation in an ever-evolving context; (vi) ensuring coordination between inter alia academics and first line practitioners; and (vii) informing future policy decisions, including in the area of exit strategies and programmes. While the 2014 Draft Guidelines<sup>86</sup>, which complemented the Revised Strategy, did not explicitly mention gender aspects, this changed in the Draft Revised Guidelines proposed in May 2017,<sup>87</sup> which mention "*gender aspects of radicalisation*" as an issue to be considered (p.4). The Guidelines further call for integrating a gender dimension into counter-radicalisation efforts. Proposed measures include "*conducting specific research on the role of women within targeted regions/countries/communities to understand their role and identify areas women's organisations could contribute to building greater resilience to radicalisation*".

The **EU Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL/Da'esh Threat**<sup>88</sup>, from March 2015, foresees a mix of political and diplomatic engagement, communication work and practical support measures. It highlights the empowerment and active participation of women as essential for ensuring the effectiveness and sustainability of all PVE/CVE actions. Moreover, the Strategy states that the "*EU will integrate women's empowerment and their full and effective participation as a key objective in all efforts which will be supported under the strategy...*" Regarding preventing violent extremism, the Strategy stresses the EU's commitment to supporting de-radicalisation programmes and radicalisation prevention.

The **European Agenda on Security 2015-2020**<sup>89</sup> highlights that EU actions against terrorism should address the root causes of extremism through preventive measures and that a strong and determined counter-narrative is crucial to eliminate terrorism's support base. There is, however, no specific gender reference in the Agenda.

In its **Resolution of 25 November 2015 on the Prevention of radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations**<sup>90</sup>, the European Parliament drew specific attention to the gender aspects of radicalisation. While referring to research on the growing number of young women who had become radicalised and recruited by terrorist organisations, the Parliament called on the EU and the Member States to take gender into account in developing prevention strategies and to support programmes aiming at empowering young women and providing support networks. The Parliament also stressed the importance of the role of women in the prevention of radicalisation.

In order to improve its ability to fight online recruitment and radicalisation by extremist groups, the European Commission launched the **EU Internet Forum** in December 2015. The

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Council of the European Union (2017), *Draft Revised Guidelines for the EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism*, 10855/17. Available at: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-10855-2017-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>88</sup> Council of the European Union (2015), *Council Conclusions on the EU Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL/Da'esh threat*, 7267/15. Available at: [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2015/03/st07267\\_en15\\_pdf/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2015/03/st07267_en15_pdf/)

<sup>89</sup> European Commission (2015), *Communication from the Commission, The European Agenda on Security*, COM(2015) 185 final, 28 April 2015. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/eu\\_agenda\\_on\\_security\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/sites/antitrafficking/files/eu_agenda_on_security_en.pdf)

<sup>90</sup> European Parliament (2015), *Resolution of 25 November 2015 on the prevention of radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations* (2015/2063(INI)), P8\_TA(2015)0410. Available at: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P8-TA-2015-0410+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>

Forum brings together governments, Europol and technology and social media companies to ensure that illegal content, including terrorist propaganda, is removed and to better make use of the internet to challenge extremist rhetoric and ideology through the development and dissemination of counter-narratives.

In the same year, the **Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence** was established. The Centre is the European hub and platform to exchange experiences, pool knowledge, identify good practices and develop new initiatives in tackling radicalisation. It engages different actors (including psychologists, educators, social workers, community leaders and NGOs together with police, prison and probation officers as well as representatives from different ministries and administrations) in all relevant areas ranging from enhancing resilience against extremist propaganda on the internet, radicalisation in prison as well as in the educational environment with a particular focus on youth. The Centre is closely linked with the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN),<sup>91</sup> which has been in operation since 2011.

The **Communication from the Commission on “Supporting the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism”**<sup>92</sup> from 2016 identifies seven specific areas where work at the EU level could strengthen the effectiveness of EU Member States’ national policies to tackle radicalisation. Under the first area “*supporting research, evidence building, monitoring and networking*”, the Communication specifically mentions “*women and very young people from different social backgrounds*” as new target audiences who become “*inspired by violence-inciting ideologies*”. The 7<sup>th</sup> area addresses the international dimensions of violent extremism and radicalisation. Here the Communication refers to the EU funded package of activities “*Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism*” (STRIVE)<sup>93</sup> that was “*the precursor to the development of an increasing number of initiatives aimed at identifying drivers for youth extremism, empowering women, promoting community dialogue, strengthening local actors or improving the media and education capacities to counter radicalising ideologies.*”

Also in its conclusions on **EU External Action on Counter-terrorism**<sup>94</sup>, from June 2017, the Council of the European Union stresses the need to address the root causes of radicalisation, to support social and economic development, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights and acknowledges the importance of addressing the situation of women and girls in this regard.

In 2017, the European Parliament published a **study on “The European Union’s Policies on Counter-Terrorism”**<sup>95</sup>, assessing the policy architecture of the EU in combating terrorism. The study, furthermore, sets out recommendations and policy options for the future direction of EU counter-terrorism policy. These include, for instance, the recommendation to the EU to invest more in the relevant tools already in place, to focus on

<sup>91</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network_en)

<sup>92</sup> European Commission (2016), *Communication from the Commission, Supporting the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism*, COM(2016)379 final, 14 June 2016. Available at : [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/library/publications/2016/communication-preventing-radicalisation\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/publications/2016/communication-preventing-radicalisation_en.pdf)

<sup>93</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/strive-development-strengthening-resilience-violence-and-extremism\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/strive-development-strengthening-resilience-violence-and-extremism_en)

<sup>94</sup> Council of the European Union (2017), General Secretariat of the Council, *Council Conclusions on EU External Action on Counter-terrorism*, 10384/17, 19 June 2017. Available at : [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/06/pdf/Read-the-full-text-of-the-Council-conclusions\\_pdf\(4\)/](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2017/06/pdf/Read-the-full-text-of-the-Council-conclusions_pdf(4)/)

<sup>95</sup> European Parliament (2017), *The European Union’s Policies on Counter-Terrorism. Relevance, Coherence and Effectiveness*. Available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/583124/IPOL\\_STU\(2017\)583124\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/583124/IPOL_STU(2017)583124_EN.pdf)

evidence-based policy and law-making and the involvement of citizens and stakeholders, to commission foresight studies assessing future risks and threats and to increase the oversight role of the European Parliament in the field. The study also suggests that the EU sets up an institutionalised system to regularly monitor and evaluate counter-terrorism policies and measures in place.



## 2. WOMEN'S JIHADIST RADICALISATION AND THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM

### 2.1. Western women supporting jihadist organisations

The overtly misogynistic and violent characteristics of ISIS/Da'esh have generated astonishment at the phenomenon that women travelled to the so-called Caliphate in such large numbers and have incited a persistent narrative that these women have been brainwashed or groomed. References to These women are referred to as "jihadi brides", which further feeds into this narrative. While some women might indeed be groomed, this narrative in general offers little understanding of the complex multiplicity of motivations for women to support or join ISIS/Da'esh and leads to simplistic explanations – often based on gender stereotypes. It fails to acknowledge that women are not a homogenous group, affected by their social, cultural and political environment. Nor does it offer insight into what rhetoric resonates with these women and for what reason. An attempt to understand why women join or support ISIS/Da'esh needs to acknowledge this.

#### 2.1.1. Pathways to radicalisation

The process of radicalisation is generally understood as a highly complex process that can differ from person to person. It is often considered a combination of different factors that can push and pull a person to or from a violent extremist group.<sup>96</sup> Such factors can help explain why a person becomes more susceptible to the rhetoric of extremists. Examples include feelings of estrangement from society, the pull of the cause, a change in group dynamics, economic deprivation, perceived injustices, such as for example the atrocities of the regime of President Bashar al-Assad or geopolitical events, such as the invasion of Iraq in 2003.<sup>97</sup> A review of existing studies of Western women in the IS<sup>98</sup> resulted in the following inventory of relevant push and pull factors:

- a search for identity and belonging - particularly 9/11 and the rise of Islamophobia in the West have incited feelings of social and cultural exclusion and marginalisation;
- ISIS/Da'esh-territory is presented as a place where pious women are respected and where they can live honourably regardless of their national or cultural background;

<sup>96</sup> Silke, Andrew (2003), *Becoming a terrorist*, in Silke, *Terrorists, victims and society: psychological perspectives on terrorism and its consequences*, pp. 29-53; Schmid, Alex (2013), *Radicalisation, de-radicalisation, counter-radicalisation: a conceptual discussion and literature review*, ICCT; Allan, Harriet, Glazzard, Andrew, Jespersen, Sasha, Reddy-Tumu, Sneha and Winterbotham, Emily (2015), *Drivers of violent extremism, hypotheses and literature review*, Royal United Service Institute (RUSI).

<sup>97</sup> Allan, Harriet, Glazzard, Andrew, Jespersen, Sasha, Reddy-Tumu, Sneha and Winterbotham, Emily (2015), *Drivers of violent extremism, hypotheses and literature review*, Royal United Service Institute (RUSI).

<sup>98</sup> Bakker, Edwin and de Leede, Seran (2015), *European female jihadists in Syria: exploring an under-researched topic*, ICCT; Saltman, Erin Marie and Smith, Melanie (2015), *Till martyrdom do us part, gender and the ISIS phenomenon*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue and ICSR; Perešin, Anita (2015), *Fatal attraction, Western Muslimas and ISIS*, Perspectives on Terrorism, 9:13; Patel, Sofia (2017), *The sultanate of women, exploring females roles in perpetrating and preventing violent extremism*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute; The Carter Center (2017), *The women in Daesh: Deconstructing complex gender dynamics in Daesh recruitment and propaganda*; Pearson, Elizabeth and Winterbotham, Emily (2017), *Women, gender and Daesh radicalisation*, The RUSI journal; Navest, Aysha, de Koning, Martijn and Moors, Annelies (2016), *Chatting about marriage with female migrants to Syria, agency beyond the victim versus activist paradigm*, Anthropology today, Vol. 32, No. 2 April 2016; Spencer, Amanda N. (2015), *The hidden face of terrorism, an analysis of the women in Islamic State*, Journal of Strategic Security 9:3; Strommen, Ester E.J. (2017), *Jihadi brides or female foreign fighters? Women in Daesh – from recruitment to sentencing*, PRIO Center on Peace and Security, Policy Brief January 2017.

- the perception that the Islamic community – *Ummah* – is being threatened and/or that the West is waging a war against Islam and a desire or a sense of duty to defend their Muslim brothers and sisters. Binary language further encourages these feelings of estrangement and divides the world into two opposing entities. One woman for example tweeted: “*Two camps in the world either with the camp of Imam [belief] or camp of kufar [disbelief]. No in between.*”<sup>99</sup> Such rhetoric makes supporting the Caliphate and its resistance against Western imperialism a moral duty;
- the aspiration to help build, and be part of, a utopian Caliphate and a desire to live in the Caliphate under Sharia law;
- a sense of adventure;
- the prospect of marriage;
- the desire to be part of something bigger and divine. The superficiality of the materialistic goals and achievements that are sought after in the Western World is juxtaposed with the spiritual and divine element that ISIS/Da'esh claims as the foundation for the Caliphate.

In its study on gender dynamics in ISIS/Da'esh recruitment and propaganda, the Carter Center demonstrates how ISIS/Da'esh taps into these motivations by offering women an alternative vision of freedom and empowerment. They argue that ISIS/Da'esh portrays Western feminism as “*an exclusionary model of emancipation for elite white women at the expense of minority women groups*”.<sup>100</sup> It offers women agency inspired by Islamic ideals, stressing the roles of men and women are not competitive, but complementary and cooperative. In an unofficial manifest for women,<sup>101</sup> it is explained that the roles ascribed to each gender in the West are based on superficial and materialistic principles that have deviated from the roles intended by God.<sup>102</sup> By migrating to ISIS/Da'esh, women can free themselves from what is forced upon them by the West and reclaim their true identity.<sup>103</sup> For women who feel marginalised by Western ideals of female empowerment, this may sound appealing.<sup>104</sup> The Carter study also refers to an article in the *Dabiq* magazine where women were told to free themselves from ignorance and to learn the matters of their religion so they could enter the fierce battle between truth and falsehood.<sup>105</sup> By employing phrases like “*you are the hope of the Ummah and the Ummah will not rise without your help*”, women are persuaded they play a critical role in the state-building efforts of ISIS/Da'esh.<sup>106</sup> Particularly with women who feel ignored or not heard, this message might resonate.

Research so far suggests that there is no common profile for female departees. While most women are young, socio-demographic characteristics are too wide-ranging to make

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<sup>99</sup> Saltman, Erin Marie and Smith, Melanie (2015), *Till martyrdom do us part, gender and the ISIS phenomenon*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue and ICSR, p. 12.

<sup>100</sup> The Carter Center (2017), *The women in Daesh: Deconstructing complex gender dynamics in Daesh recruitment and propaganda*, p. 5.

<sup>101</sup> Prepared in Arabic by women in IS and translated and analysed by Charlie Winter for the Quilliam Foundation.

<sup>102</sup> Patel, Sofia (2017), *The sultanate of women, exploring females roles in perpetrating and preventing violent extremism*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, p. 13 referring to Winter, Charlie (2015), *Women of the Islamic State, a manifesto on women by the Al Khansaa Brigade*, Quilliam Foundation.

<sup>103</sup> Patel, S., *The sultanate of women, exploring female roles in perpetrating and preventing violent extremism*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI), February 2017, p. 13.

<sup>104</sup> The Carter Center (2017), *The women in Daesh: Deconstructing complex gender dynamics in Daesh recruitment and propaganda*, p. 5.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6 referring to Winter, Charlie (2015), *Women of the Islamic State, a manifesto on women by the Al Khansaa Brigade*, Quilliam Foundation.

sustainable generalisations.<sup>107</sup> Some indicators of female radicalisation, however, can be identified. It should be considered that while these signals can point to radicalisation, they do not necessarily have to lead to radicalisation, nor can they be treated as prerequisites for radicalisation. Nonetheless, the following signs, or a combination thereof, have been identified in the case of women who travelled to Syria and Iraq or who have attempted to do so. Changes in clothing such as wearing a *niqab*; change in friendships; a (new) interest in politics; justifying actions of ISIS/Da'esh; trying to convert family members to their interpretation of Islam; isolation; sharing (inflammatory) political and religious material on social media; ceasing hobbies and habits deemed un-Islamic; disengaging from contact with the opposite sex; expressions of homophobia and anti-semitism; and attending radical mosques.<sup>108</sup>

### 2.1.2. Roles of women supporting ISIS/Da'esh

When unmarried women arrive in the Caliphate, they are brought to an all-female safe house, known as the *maqar*. This house serves two purposes: a matchmaking service and a place where women are prepared for their duties by receiving training including in first aid, social media marketing and computer programming, Islamic law, firearms and explosives and domestic affairs.<sup>109</sup> In the Caliphate, the responsibilities of women are foremost to be good wives, maintain the household and raise children. Therefore, most women in ISIS/Da'esh have largely taken up domestic roles. However, research shows women's role transcends that of motherhood. There have been accounts of women in professional roles such as doctors, administrators and teachers, of women active in the recruitment of other women and the dissemination of propaganda and increasingly, of women who have taken up more operational roles. In the following section, these different roles are explored in more detail.

#### Domestic roles

ISIS/Da'esh propaganda and social media posts of female supporters of ISIS/Da'esh depict a traditional role for women as mothers and wives. For example, one woman, who calls herself Umm Ubaydah, writes on Twitter that the role of the *muhajirah* [women who travelled to the Caliphate] is to support their husbands and the jihad and to increase the *Ummah*. "*The best thing a man can do is jihad, and the best thing for a woman is to be a righteous wife and to raise righteous children*".<sup>110</sup> And Umm Layth writes on her Tumblr account that:

*"We are created to be mothers and wives – as much as the western society has warped your views on this with a hidden feminist mentality... you may gain more ajr [religious merit] by spending years of sleepless nights by being a mother and raising your children with the right intentions and for the sake of Allah than by doing a martyrdom operation."*<sup>111</sup>

Women, as mothers have the responsibility of raising their sons and daughters according to the ideology of ISIS/Da'esh. They play a crucial role in maintaining and spreading

<sup>107</sup> Bakker, Edwin and de Leede, Seran (2015), *European female jihadists in Syria: exploring an under-researched topic*, ICCT, p. 4; Perešin, Anita (2015), *Fatal attraction, Western Muslimas and ISIS*, Perspectives on Terrorism, 9:13, p. 22; Saltman, Erin Marie and Smith, Melanie (2015), *Till martyrdom do us part, gender and the ISIS phenomenon*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue and ICSR, p. 5.

<sup>108</sup> Based on: Pearson, Elizabeth and Winterbotham, Emily (2017), *Women, gender and Daesh radicalisation*, The RUSI journal, 162:3, 60-72, DOI:10.1080/03071847.2017.1353251, p. 68.

<sup>109</sup> Spencer, Amanda N. (2015), *The hidden face of terrorism, an analysis of the women in Islamic State*, Journal of Strategic Security 9:3, p. 79.

<sup>110</sup> Hoyle, Carlyne; Bradford, Alexandra and Frenett, Ross (2015), *Becoming Mulan? Female Western migrants to ISIS*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, pp. 31-32.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., p. 32 and p. 46, footnote 116.

ISIS/Da'esh beliefs.<sup>112</sup> In addition, women care for their husbands and make sure they stay motivated and focused.<sup>113</sup> ISIS/Da'esh refers to Quranic scriptures to support their claim that women's main purpose is the divine duty of motherhood and of providing for their families.<sup>114</sup>

### Professional roles

With the proclamation of the Caliphate, ISIS/Da'esh commenced its state-building efforts for which it required not only fighters but also skilled professionals. While ISIS/Da'esh does not permit contact between women and unrelated males, they also need skilled female professionals such as doctors, nurses and teachers.<sup>115</sup> These women are permitted to work outside the home. There are also reports of women working in law enforcement and in administrative and welfare activities including orphanages.<sup>116</sup> In the manifest for women drafted by female members of ISIS/Da'esh, it is outlined that a woman's independent duties may not exceed three days a week so that she is not too long away from home. A woman's duties as a mother should not suffer from her employment, so in the case of illness of children or a husband's absence, employers must grant her leave. The manifest also states that women are entitled to a two-year maternity leave and employers must provide day-care for children until they go to school.<sup>117</sup>

### Recruiters/propagandists

Women have been known to disseminate actively the jihadi ideology. In online posts, they glorify the jihadi struggle, reject and denounce Western society and exacerbate the (perceived) stigmatisation of Muslims worldwide. They propagate the view that the West is waging a war against Islam and glorify and encourage the use of violence against the "enemies of Islam". Zehra Duman, for example, called upon her followers on Twitter to *kill the kuffar* [non-believers].<sup>118</sup> Umm Layth also encouraged her followers to use violence. She wrote to "*follow the example of the brothers from Woolwich, Texas and Boston.*"<sup>119</sup> Women who made *hijra* [migration to the Caliphate] themselves call upon others to do the same. The British Zahra Halane points to the religious duty of waging jihad, emphasising there is no excuse not to participate in the jihadist struggle.<sup>120</sup> Women give advice on how to make the trip. The Dutch Fatima, who left her hometown Tilburg to travel to Raqqa at the age of seventeen, gave advice to the fifteen-year old Imane from The Hague.<sup>121</sup> The British Aqsa Mahmood uploaded a detailed manual for women and girls considering the trip on her Tumblr

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<sup>112</sup> The Carter Center (2017), *The women in Daesh: Deconstructing complex gender dynamics in Daesh recruitment and propaganda*, p.7.

<sup>113</sup> Bakker, Edwin and de Leede, Seran (2015), *European female jihadists in Syria: exploring an under-researched topic*, ICCT.

<sup>114</sup> Spencer, Amanda N. (2015), *The hidden face of terrorism, an analysis of the women in Islamic State*, Journal of Strategic Security 9:3, p. 82.

<sup>115</sup> Patel, Sofia (2017), *The sultanate of women, exploring females roles in perpetrating and preventing violent extremism*, Australian Strategic Policy Institute., p. 15; Spencer, Amanda N. (2015), *The hidden face of terrorism, an analysis of the women in Islamic State*, Journal of Strategic Security 9:3, p. 86.

<sup>116</sup> Spencer, Amanda N. (2015), *The hidden face of terrorism, an analysis of the women in Islamic State*, Journal of Strategic Security 9:3, pp. 86-87.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87; Winter, Charlie (2015), *Women of the Islamic State, a manifesto on women by the Al Khansaa Brigade*, Quiliam Foundation., p. 25.

<sup>118</sup> Saltman, Erin Marie and Smith, Melanie (2015), *Till martyrdom do us part, gender and the ISIS phenomenon*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue and ICSR, p. 35.

<sup>119</sup> Khaleeli, Homa (2014), *The British women married to jihad*, The Guardian, 6 September 2014. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/06/british-women-married-to-jihad-isis-syria>

<sup>120</sup> Saltman, Erin Marie and Smith, Melanie (2015), *Till martyrdom do us part, gender and the ISIS phenomenon*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue and ICSR, p. 22.

<sup>121</sup> Alberts, Jaco and Lensink, Harry (2015), *Seks en de jihad, Nederlandse moslima's vallen voor strijders*, Vrij Nederland, 25 April 2015.

page. She advised them on what to bring, what to leave at home and how to prevent getting caught. Her list was shared at least twenty-seven times.<sup>122</sup>

Women who did not travel to Syria/Iraq are also active in the propagation of the jihadist ideology and violence. They organise so-called study groups for women where they glorify the jihad and express anti-Western and anti-democratic views. A documentary by Channel Four reveals how such groups operate in the United Kingdom.<sup>123</sup> The number of women attending these meetings ranged from eight to around twenty and there were often (very small) children present. Many of these women were also known to be highly active online where they propagated the jihadist ideology.<sup>124</sup>

Other countries also report the existence of networks in which women are involved. In its situation and trend report of 2016, Europol reports the arrests of several women in Spain who were involved in networks that recruited men and women for the jihad in Syria/Iraq.<sup>125</sup> Also in Belgium, it is known that women are engaged in recruitment activities. Fatima Aberkan (56), mother of seven children, has been long involved in jihadism. Already in early 2000, she was associated with Malika el-Aroud<sup>126</sup>, who was sentenced to eight years of prison in 2009 for her involvement in the foundation, operation and financing of a terrorist network.<sup>127</sup> Aberkan herself was a prominent member of the so-called Zerkani network, which centred on the Moroccan Khalid Zerkani. Several high-profile jihadists such as Abdelhamid Abaaoud (one of the leading figures of the Paris attack of 13 November 2015) have been linked to this network. Aberkan has been held responsible for recruitment for jihad in Syria/Iraq. She travelled to Syria several times and brought her daughters (then 14 and 16) with her. Her sons also travelled to the ISIS/Da'esh territory multiple times and introduced new recruits. In April 2016, Aberkan received a fifteen-year prison sentence.<sup>128</sup>

### Propaganda value

Western women supporting and joining ISIS/Da'esh constitute a powerful propaganda asset for the group. By committing themselves to ISIS/Da'esh, women explicitly denounce the Western way of living and declare their preference to live under Sharia law.<sup>129</sup> In addition, their presence feeds ISIS/Da'esh rhetoric that they are not a terrorist organisation but a legitimate state where women and families can live according to the laws of Islam.<sup>130</sup> Furthermore, the involvement of women in violent attacks has additional propaganda value when the willingness of women to use violence is used to shame men into participating in the jihad. *Dabiq* for example writes that because men fail to take their responsibility in jihad, women carry out attacks in their place.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Crooks, Lauren (2015), *Runaway British Jihadi bride writes shocking suitcase checklist for schoolgirls wanting to join ISIS*, *Mirror*, 2 August 2015. Available at: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/runaway-british-jihadi-bride-writes-6179441>

<sup>123</sup> Channel Four (2015), *ISIS, the British women supporters unveiled*.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Europol (2016), *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2016*, p. 11.

<sup>126</sup> El-Aroud operated an online network and grew to become the face of Al Qaeda in Belgium and an icon in the so-called internet jihad. Until today, she is highly revered in jihadist circles. See for further reading: De Leede, Seran (2017), *Westerse vrouwen en meisjes in het mondiaal jihadisme van Islamitische Staat*, National Coordinator Terrorism and Security. Soon available online.

<sup>127</sup> De Leede, Seran (2017), *Westerse vrouwen en meisjes in het mondiaal jihadisme van Islamitische Staat*, National Coordinator Terrorism and Security.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Perešin, Anita and Cervone, Alberto (2015), *The Western Muhajirat of ISIS*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 38:7, p. 6.

<sup>130</sup> Blasic, Peter (2014), *Schokkend, IS werft jonge vrouwen voor jihad via sociale media*, *HP de Tijd*, 27 October 2014. Available at: <http://www.hpdetijd.nl/2014-10-27/schokkend-werft-jonge-vrouwen-voor-jihad-via-social-media/>

<sup>131</sup> *Dabiq* Issue 13, p. 3. Accessible through the Clarion Project: <https://www.clarionproject.org/factsheets-files/Issue-13-the-rafidah.pdf>

## Facilitators

There are also cases of women facilitating the jihad in Syria and Iraq, for instance by raising funds for the jihad. For example, a group of women from the United States purchased military equipment and shipped it to international fighters in Syria/Iraq.<sup>132</sup> The previously mentioned Fatima Aberkan was involved in facilitating the jihad in various ways. She allegedly assisted Salah Abdeslam – wanted for his possible involvement in the attack in Paris of 13 November 2015 – in finding refuge. She is also allegedly responsible for the transport of money and goods within the network.<sup>133</sup> According to a study by the EUISS, women manage information flows and contacts between local fighters and operatives abroad.<sup>134</sup>

## Operational roles

Several women have expressed their willingness to take part in the fighting. The British Khadijah Dare for example wrote on her Twitter account "*I wna b da 1st UK woman 2 kill a UK or US terrorist!*"<sup>135</sup> The 47-year old British Sally Jones created a kill list and wrote that she wanted to behead Christians.<sup>136</sup> A Dutch girl wrote of her aspiration to die a martyr, and since she could not join the front, she hoped to be killed in an airstrike.<sup>137</sup> EUISS reports that many female supporters of Daesh regret not being able to carry out executions or join their "brothers" on the battlefield.<sup>138</sup> While women do receive a basic training in firearms, this is only for emergencies and self-defence. The closest women in the Caliphate can come to a militant role is as a member of an all-female brigade, such as the Al Khansaa Brigade. This brigade was formed in early 2014 and is responsible for regulating moral behaviour and general conduct. Members of the brigade patrolled the streets, armed with AK-47's and have been known to carry out harsh physical sentences against women who violated the strict rules imposed by ISIS/Da'esh. The brigade has also been known to report spies or other enemies of the Caliphate.<sup>139</sup> To what extent Western women have been involved is not completely clear.<sup>140</sup> Melanie Smith from the ICSR argues that there are British women in the brigade, and Dutch scholars believe there are also Dutch women involved.<sup>141</sup>

From early 2016, women have increasingly taken up operational roles both in ISIS/Da'esh territory as well as in the West. In February 2016, female militants and suicide bombers were deployed in Libya.<sup>142</sup> In the battle for Mosul in July 2017, there were reports of female suicide bombers.<sup>143</sup> It is not known if these attacks also involved Western women. On 26 February

<sup>132</sup> Alexander, Audrey (2016), *Cruel intentions, female jihadists in America*, Program on extremism, The George Washington University, p. 12.

<sup>133</sup> De Leede, Seran (2017), *Westerse vrouwen en meisjes in het mondiaal jihadisme van Islamitische Staat*, National Coordinator Terrorism and Security.

<sup>134</sup> Gaub, Florence and Lisiecka, Julia (2016), *Women in Daesh: jihadist 'cheerleaders, active operatives?*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Brief Issue 27.

<sup>135</sup> Baker, Aryn (2014), *How ISIS is recruiting women from around the world*, Time, 6 September 2014. Available at: <http://time.com/3276567/how-isis-is-recruiting-women-from-around-the-world/#3276567/how-isis-is-recruiting-women-from-around-the-world/>

<sup>136</sup> Channel Four (2015), *ISIS, the British women supporters unveiled*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6e49yfPI7s>.

<sup>137</sup> Gaub, Florence and Lisiecka, Julia (2016), *Women in Daesh: jihadist 'cheerleaders, active operatives?*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Brief Issue 27.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Spencer, Amanda N. (2015), *The hidden face of terrorism, an analysis of the women in Islamic State*, Journal of Strategic Security 9:3., pp. 83-84.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Culzac, Nathasha (2014), *Isis: British women led by Aqsa Mahmood 'running sharia police unit for Islamic State in Syria'*, Independent, 8 September 2014. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-british-women-running-sharia-police-unit-for-islamic-state-in-syria-9717510.html>; Weggemans, Daan, Peters, Ruud, Bakker, Edwin and de Bont, Roel (2016), *Bestemming Syrië, een exploratieve studie naar de leefsituatie van Nederlandse 'uitreizigers' in Syrië*, University of Leiden and University of Amsterdam, p. 52.

<sup>142</sup> Stoter, Brenda (2016), *As IS loses power, will group tap women jihadis to fight?*, Al Monitor, 16 November 2016.

<sup>143</sup> BBC News (2017), *Battle for Mosul: fierce clashes as IS uses suicide bombers*, 4 July 2017. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-40489816>

2016, the then fifteen-year-old German/Moroccan Safia S. stabbed a police officer with a kitchen knife at Hanover train station.<sup>144</sup> In September of that same year, four women, Ornella Gilligmann (29), Inès Madani (19), Amal Sakaou (39) and Sarah Hervouet (23) were arrested for planning an attack in Paris. During their arrest on 9 September, both Madani and Hervouet tried to stab the arresting officer, who was slightly wounded.<sup>145</sup> Several reports argue that as ISIS/Da'esh is losing territory and fighters, women's position will shift and women will increasingly take part in operational roles. As argued in section 1.1 of this report, women have the theological space to do so. Since October 2017, reports are circulating that ISIS/Da'esh has called on women to take up arms.<sup>146</sup> At the time of writing, the consequences of this call are unclear.

## 2.2. Online radicalisation

The internet offers jihadist groups several opportunities. First, it enables them to disseminate radicalising material, instruction manuals (for example how to build bombs), videos and online magazines (such as Al Qaeda's magazine *Inspire* or ISIS/Da'esh propaganda magazines *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*). It also offers the like-minded the possibility to share and discuss their views in relatively secure and anonymous settings. Research suggests that this anonymity can lead to individuals avoiding responsibility for their virtual statements, which may have the consequence that such groups become more hostile and potentially prone to violence.<sup>147</sup> The internet also offers jihadist groups the possibility of broadcasting visual imagery to an audience worldwide. The internet furthermore provides recruiters with a pool of potential followers. The emergence of social media has created opportunities for violent extremist groups as it offers the possibility to create a micro-community in which a potential recruit can be isolated from opposing views.<sup>148</sup>

In 2017, the ICSR, King's College and VoxPol issued an overview of research perspectives on online radicalisation. The authors extensively reviewed the literature on the topic published between 2006 and 2016 and came to the following findings. First, they conclude that while scholars generally agree that the internet can facilitate or catalyse processes of radicalisation, scholars are still divided on the extent to which online interactions and propaganda affect such processes and to what extent online (social) networks can have the same influence on individuals as real-life social and kinship networks. They point out that while some scholars claim individuals can radicalise solely by the consumption of online media, others argue that individuals use the internet to select messages in which they are already interested and reason that the mere existence or availability of material does not inherently mean it reaches or affects all audiences.<sup>149</sup> This signifies that individuals already need to have an interest in the material – or a cognitive opening – to be affected by it. Based on the literature reviewed

<sup>144</sup> BBC News (2017), *German girl jailed for IS attack in Hanover*, 26 January 2017. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38757039>

<sup>145</sup> Chrisafis, Angelique (2016), *Cell of French women guided by ISIS behind failed Notre Dame attack*, The Guardian, 9 September 2016. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/sep/09/cell-of-french-women-radicalised-by-isis-behind-failed-notre-dame-attack>

<sup>146</sup> See for example Dearden, Lizzie (2017), *ISIS calls on women to fight and launch terror attacks for the first time*, Independent, 6 October 2017. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-war-syria-iraq-women-call-to-arms-islamic-state-terror-attacks-propaganda-change-ban-frontline-a7986986.html>

<sup>147</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander and Kaderbhai, Nick (2017), *Research perspectives on online radicalisation, a literature review 2006-2016*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College London, VoxPol, pp. 43,44. See also: Koehler, Daniel (2014/2015), *The radical online: individual radicalization processes and the role of the Internet*, Journal for deradicalization, No.1, pp. pp. 116-134, p. 118.

<sup>148</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander and Kaderbhai, Nick (2017), *Research perspectives on online radicalisation, a literature review 2006-2016*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College London, VoxPol, p. 7.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., pp. 17, 25, 26 and 28.

on this topic, they conclude that there is not yet enough research to support or refute the hypothesis that an individual can radicalise solely by internet activities.<sup>150</sup>

### **The case of Roshonara Choudhry**

The British Roshonara Choudry is often brought up as an example of a “true lone wolf”, as she appears to have radicalised solely by her activities online, rather than by interactions with co-ideologues in the physical world.<sup>151</sup> On May 14 2010, Choudry attacked local Member of Parliament (MP) Stephen Timms in his constituency office in London. She later told the police she stabbed him as a “punishment” for his parliamentary vote in favour of the 2003 Iraq War. Before her radicalisation, Choudhry was studying English and communications at King’s College, London. She was fluent in Arabic, French and Bengali. On weekends, she volunteered for an east London Islamic school, helping Muslim pupils overcome educational disadvantages.<sup>152</sup> With her attack, Choudhry became the first would-be assassin linked to Al Qaeda in the United Kingdom and the first British woman convicted of a violent Islamist attack in the UK.<sup>153</sup> She received a life sentence, with a minimum of fifteen years, for her assassination attempt.<sup>154</sup>

### **ISIS/Da'esh online**

Charlie Winter analysed ISIS/Da'esh propaganda output from June 2014 to June 2015. His study shows that the propaganda has generated a comprehensive brand that offers an alternative way of living.<sup>155</sup> While other jihadist groups produce propaganda, he argues that the scale of the ISIS/Da'esh propaganda operation is unprecedented.<sup>156</sup> ISIS/Da'esh has three propaganda video production branches and broadcasts daily radio bulletins in different languages including Russian, English and French. They also disseminate essays and videos showing brutal executions, scenes from daily life, religious training and military efforts<sup>157</sup> and produce the online magazines *Dabiq* and *Rumiyah*.<sup>158</sup> Aside from this official propaganda, supporters from around the world contribute by circulating propaganda material.<sup>159</sup> Winter states that, contrary to the dominant image, the message circulated by ISIS/Da'esh is not solely one of violence. Brutality is just one of six themes. The other five are mercy, victimhood, war, belonging and utopianism.<sup>160</sup> A related study by Milton shows a similar picture: in over 9,000 visual releases analysed in the study, more than half focused on governance, justice, the importance of religious practice and life in the Caliphate. Brutality featured only in around 9% of the propaganda sample.<sup>161</sup> This underscores the previous

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>151</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander and Kaderbhai, Nick (2017), *Research perspectives on online radicalisation, a literature review 2006-2016*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King’s College London, VoxPol, p. 31.

<sup>152</sup> Dodd, Vikram (2010), *Profile Roshanara Choudhry*, The Guardian, 2 November 2010. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/nov/02/profile-roshonara-choudhry-stephen-timms>

<sup>153</sup> Pearson, Elizabeth (2016), *The Case of Roshonara Choudhry: Implications for Theory on Online Radicalization, ISIS Women, and the Gendered Jihad*, Policy and Internet, Volume 8, Issue 1, March 2016, pp. 5–33.

<sup>154</sup> Dodd, Vikram and Topping, Alexandra (2010), *Roshonara Choudhry jailed for life over MP attack*, The Guardian, 3 November 2010. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/nov/03/roshonara-choudhry-jailed-life-attack>

<sup>155</sup> Winter, Charlie (2015), *The virtual 'caliphate', understanding Islamic State's propaganda strategy*, The Quilliam Foundation, p. 6.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>158</sup> *Dabiq* was issued between July 2014 and July 2016 in Arabic, English, German and French. *Rumiyah* was first issued in September 2016. The most recent issue at the time of writing was released in August 2017. The magazine is translated in English, French, German, Russian, Indonesian and Uyghur.

<sup>159</sup> Winter, Charlie (2015), *The virtual 'caliphate', understanding Islamic State's propaganda strategy*, The Quilliam Foundation, p. 18.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., pp. 22–31.

<sup>161</sup> Milton, Daniel (2016), *Communication breakdown: unravelling the Islamic State's media efforts*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, United States Military Academy, p. iv.



statement that individuals supporting ISIS/Da'esh are also driven by the idea of being part of the building of an Islamic, utopian society.

### Online recruitment tactics by ISIS/Da'esh

For most individuals travelling to the Caliphate, social media played some part in their recruitment and/or radicalisation. In their study for the Brookings Institute, J.M. Berger and J. Morgan describe how from September through December 2014, at least 46,000 Twitter accounts were operative on behalf of ISIS/Da'esh.<sup>162</sup> In a related study, Berger explains how ISIS/Da'esh-recruiters operate. First, they monitor online communities to find receptive individuals. This could mean that the recruiter actively seeks out a target or that a recruiter responds to a target that shows interest/curiosity in ISIS/Da'esh. Second, by maintaining constant contact and by submerging the recruit with messages, the recruiter(s) create(s) a micro-community to isolate the recruit from any opposing views. The recruit is invited to private message platforms such as Telegram where he/she is encouraged to act, for example, to make *hijra* or to carry out attacks.<sup>163</sup>

As mentioned before, the (online) recruitment of women by ISIS/Da'esh is gendered. Jihadist traditional gender norms and gender segregation affect women's ability to participate in the Islamist public space. Referring to Sageman<sup>164</sup> and Briggs & Strugnell,<sup>165</sup> Elizabeth Pearson argues therefore that the internet can prove especially relevant in female Islamist radicalisation.<sup>166</sup> In addition, ISIS/Da'esh approaches women differently than men. Women are called to fulfil their (divine) roles as mothers and wives, and to help build the Caliphate. As pointed out earlier, there is also often a distinct anti-Western feminism message. The official propaganda aimed at women is "traditionally feminine" with purple and pink backgrounds, pictures of sunsets and landscapes.<sup>167</sup> However, this is not to say women are not attracted to the brutal and violent imagery also distributed by ISIS/Da'esh. Some women are known to retweet violent imagery and have responded to beheadings with comments such as:

*"I was happy to see the beheading of that kaafir [non-believer], I just rewinded to the cutting part..."*<sup>168</sup>

### Countering online radicalisation

Two approaches can be distinguished in countering online radicalisation: a hard approach and a soft approach. The hard approach includes censorship and technical and judicial solutions. In July 2015 for example, the EU established within Europol an Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU),<sup>169</sup> charged with coordinating the identification of violent extremist material online and to ensure its removal. Meleagrou-Hitchens and Kaderbhai discuss some of the pitfalls of this hard approach in their literature review on online radicalisation. First, they

<sup>162</sup> Berger, J.M. and Morgan, Jonathon (2015), *The ISIS Twitter Census*, The Brookings Institute, p. 2.

<sup>163</sup> Berger, J.M. (2015), *Tailored online interventions: The Islamic State's recruitment strategy*, Combating Terrorism Center (CTC).

<sup>164</sup> Sageman, Marc (2008), *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century*, 1st ed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>165</sup> Briggs, Rachel, and Strugnell, Alex (2011), *PPN Working Paper: Radicalisation: The Role of the Internet*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue. Available at: <https://www.counterextremism.org/resources/details/id/11>

<sup>166</sup> Pearson, Elizabeth (2016), *The Case of Roshonara Choudhry: Implications for Theory on Online Radicalization, ISIS Women, and the Gendered Jihad*, Policy and Internet, Volume 8, Issue 1, March 2016, p. 18.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>168</sup> Hoyle, Carolyne; Bradford, Alexandra and Frenett, Ross (2015), *Becoming Mulan? Female Western migrants to ISIS*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue, p. 29.

<sup>169</sup> Europol, *EUROPOL's Internet Referral Unit to Combat Terrorist and Violent Extremist Propaganda*, 1 July 2015. Available at: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/europol-s-internet-referral-unit-to-combat-terrorist-and-violent-extremist-propaganda>; <https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-documents/eu-internet-referral-unit-year-one-report-highlights>

refer to scholars who point out that there is no consensus on what constitutes extremist material and who argue that this makes the censoring of the material problematic and impractical.<sup>170</sup> Second, they refer to scholars who warn that regulating online content could infringe on civil liberties.<sup>171</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens and Kaderbhai also discuss the effectiveness of hard measures. They point out that on the one hand, scholars question the effectiveness of such hard measures by arguing that censored material quickly re-emerges somewhere else on the internet.<sup>172</sup> On the other hand, they refer to a study by Berger and Perez<sup>173</sup> that shows that the suspension of Twitter accounts did have a significant effect on the reach of its users that diminished with each suspension.<sup>174</sup>

The soft approach includes the dissemination of counter-narratives that challenge and oppose the rhetoric spread by violent extremist groups. Meleagrou-Hitchens and Kaderbhai point out that there remains a lack of understanding about if and how counter-narratives work and how they should be effectively disseminated.<sup>175</sup> Some scholars argue that, for example, the theological justification for violence needs to be attacked, while others question the effectiveness of these measures, as some recruits are attracted to the violence or accept the use of force as necessary to establish the Caliphate.<sup>176</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens and Kaderbhai refer to the Sakinah project in Saudi Arabia that uses the tactics of extremists online to engage with those who seek religious knowledge online. After engaging with them on an open platform, the Sakinah operative suggests a private platform and directs the conversation towards moderate teachings of Islam, at the same time pointing out inconsistencies in the rhetoric of extremists.<sup>177</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens and Kaderbhai also refer to initiatives from the private sector to tackle violent extremism online. They mention the Jigsaw initiative that helped set up the "Redirect Method" that uses an online advertising algorithm to redirect people who are actively looking for extremist content and connections to pre-existing content that offers different worldviews.<sup>178</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens and Kaderbhai conclude that while the effectiveness of counter-narratives remains unclear, there are signs that a more sophisticated approach is beginning to take shape.<sup>179</sup>

Furthermore, there has been some debate on the responsibilities of social networks and internet service providers in cases of spreading hatred and incitement to violence. It seems that, so far, very few EU Member States regulate the liability of social networks and service providers in that respect. Only Finland has specific legislation while a new bill adopted by the *German Bundestag* on 30 June 2017 foresees that illegal content should be removed or access locked by the social network within 24 hours following the reception of the complaint. If not, the networks risk being fined.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander and Kaderbhai, Nick (2017), *Research perspectives on online radicalisation, a literature review 2006-2016*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College London, VoxPol, pp. 56, 57.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid, p. 58.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid referring to: Berger, J.M and Perez, Heather (2016), *The Islamic State's Diminishing Returns on Twitter: How Suspensions are Limiting the Social Networks of English-speaking ISIS Supporters*, George Washington University Program on Extremism, Washington D.C.

<sup>175</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander and Kaderbhai, Nick (2017), *Research perspectives on online radicalisation, a literature review 2006-2016*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College London, VoxPol, p. 64.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., pp. 65, 66.

<sup>177</sup> Meleagrou-Hitchens, Alexander and Kaderbhai, Nick (2017), *Research perspectives on online radicalisation, a literature review 2006-2016*, International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, King's College London, VoxPol, pp. 61 - 62.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 62. See for further reading: <https://jigsaw.google.com/vision/> and <https://redirectmethod.org>.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>180</sup> See: European Parliament (2017), *Spotlight on Parliaments in Europe*, Issued by the EP Directorate for Relations with National Parliaments, N° 16, July 2017. Available at:

### 3. WOMEN'S ROLE IN PVE/CVE EFFORTS AND RELATED INITIATIVES

#### 3.1. The role of women in countering radicalisation

From 2005 onwards, it has increasingly become recognised that a comprehensive counter-terrorism approach should include addressing factors deemed conducive to radicalisation and violent extremism, as opposed to military and intelligence strategies alone.<sup>181</sup> International cooperation on different levels and between various fields such as development, civil society and security are increasingly recognised as indispensable in effectively curbing violent extremism. The role of women and women's organisations in this wider approach and the question whether women's organisations should link their efforts to the security agenda is part of an on-going international discussion. Advocates refer to the valuable role women's organisations can play and the overlap their programmes often have with the PVE/CVE agenda and critics point out the risks for women's organisations when linking their efforts to the security agenda.<sup>182</sup> This section explores the role of women in preventing and countering Islamist radicalisation and violent extremism in European Member States.

It is often argued that women, as mothers, are ideally situated to recognise early warning signs of radicalisation and to transfer ideals of inclusion to the next generation and that therefore, women can play a crucial role in preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism.<sup>183</sup> However, as pointed out by Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Sara Zeiger and Rafia Bhulai in their study on the role of women in countering terrorism and violent extremism, the existing literature on this topic is still limited and there are differing viewpoints as to whether women indeed have a *unique* role.<sup>184</sup> Nevertheless, regardless of the question whether their role is unique or not, most experts agree involving women and including a female perspective optimises the effectiveness of PVE/CVE efforts. Most emphasise, however, that it should be acknowledged that women are not a homogenous group<sup>185</sup> and that women are not inherently more peaceful than men.<sup>186</sup> They furthermore advise against framing women as mothers and victims who, because of that condition, can

[http://www.epgencms.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/upload/79f6e43d-b5e8-4112-adeb-18c3a66a3554/N\\_16\\_Spreading\\_hatred\\_and\\_incitement\\_to\\_violence\\_through\\_social\\_networks.pdf](http://www.epgencms.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/upload/79f6e43d-b5e8-4112-adeb-18c3a66a3554/N_16_Spreading_hatred_and_incitement_to_violence_through_social_networks.pdf)

<sup>181</sup> Frazer, Owen & Nünlist, Christian (2015), *The Concept of Countering Violent Extremism*, Centre for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, p. 2. Available at: <http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/special-interest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/pdfs/CSSAnalyse183-EN.pdf>; de Leede, Seran (2016), *Women's rights initiatives in countering and preventing violent extremism*, HIVOS – Women on the Frontline Project.

<sup>182</sup> See for example: *ibid.*; Geuskens, Isabelle, Van Broekhoven, Lia, Boyd Tomasović, Carolyn and Ara Begum, Anjuman (2015), *Counterterrorism measures and their effects on the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security agenda*, Women Peacemakers Program, Human Security Collective, Ecumenical Women's Initiative, Women in Governance; Ní Aoláin, Fionnuala (2015), *Counter-Terrorism Committee: Addressing the Role of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, Just Security, 17 September 2015; Huckerby, Jayne (2015), *The Complexities of Women, Peace, Security and Countering Violent Extremism*, Just Security, 24 September 2015.

<sup>183</sup> Schläffer, Edit and Kropiunigg, Ulrich (2015), *Can Mothers Challenge Violent Extremism? Mothers' perceptions and attitudes of violent extremism and radicalization*, Women without borders; Idris, Iffat and Abdelaziz, Ayat (2017), *Women and countering violent extremism*, GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1408, University of Birmingham, referring to Majoran, Andrew (2015), *Mothers & Wives: Women's Political Role in Countering Violent Extremism*, The Mackenzie Institute; Calfas, Amy (2016), *Why Women are the Missing Link in Countering Extremism*, Fair Observer; Interview with Karima Sahla, Director of Steunpunt Sabr and Oumnia Works.

<sup>184</sup> Chowdhury Fink, Naureen, Zeiger, Sara and Bhulai, Rafia eds. (2016), *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, Hedayah and The Global Center on Cooperative Security, p. 11.

<sup>185</sup> Panel discussion on the role of women in countering violent extremism, hosted by the UAE mission to the United Nations, the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security and UN Women on 27 October 2014. A summary of the outcome of this discussion can be found on:

<https://giwps.georgetown.edu/sites/giwps/files/Women%20and%20Countering%20Violent%20Extremism.pdf>

<sup>186</sup> European Parliament Briefing (2016), *Radicalisation and counter-radicalisation, a gender perspective*. Available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/581955/EPRS\\_BRI\(2016\)581955\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/581955/EPRS_BRI(2016)581955_EN.pdf)

be valuable assets in countering radicalisation and violent extremism<sup>187</sup> and recommend women's role should not be confined to that of concerned family member<sup>188</sup> but that women's involvement extends to other capacities including policy shapers, educators, community members and activists.<sup>189</sup>

Existing literature refers to various reasons why including women and a female perspective can optimise PVE/CVE efforts. First, as Chantal de Jonge Oudraat stresses, women bring different perspectives to discussions and plans affecting security.<sup>190</sup> Second, Erin Saltman and Ross Frenett point out that the growing trend of violent extremist propaganda targeting women "*highlights the need for better mechanisms and infrastructure for female-specific prevention and de-radicalisation programmes*".<sup>191</sup> Third, as stated by the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF):

*"Family and community relationships are critical determinants in the process of radicalization and both men and women are part of that dynamic process. CVE efforts should pay attention to the gender of participants and the social norms and societal expectations associated with belonging to a particular gender in their societies. Paying attention to the ways that gender norms shape people's lives is likely to improve CVE programming aimed at women, and it is likely to add a dimension of understanding and responsiveness to CVE programming aimed at men as well."*<sup>192</sup>

The GCTF also argues that practitioners have observed that women are often seen as the gatekeepers in their communities and as such, women should be involved in creating and maintaining CVE initiatives. The GCTF refers to related fields, such as gang recruitment, where the involvement of women has been shown to help reduce recruitment.<sup>193</sup>

Different studies discuss various ways in which women can be involved in preventing radicalisation and countering violent extremism. First, women can assist in drawing up effective counter-narratives challenging violent extremism.<sup>194</sup> Erin Saltman and Ross Frenett point out that since women and girls join or support jihadist groups, such as ISIS/Da'esh, specific gendered counter-narratives should be developed. They tell us that female role models, either as public figures or celebrities, or as youth can be involved in campaigns aimed

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid; Chowdhury Fink, Naureen, Zeiger, Sara and Bhulai, Rafia eds. (2016), *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, Hedayah and The Global Center on Cooperative Security, p. 11 referring to OSCE (2013), *Women and Terrorist Radicalization*, Final Report Vienna. Available at: <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/99919?download=true>.

<sup>189</sup> European Parliament Briefing (2016), *Radicalisation and counter-radicalisation, a gender perspective*; RAN (2015), *The role of gender in violent extremism*, RAN Issue Paper 4 December 2015. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-papers/docs/issue\\_paper\\_gender\\_dec2015\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_gender_dec2015_en.pdf)

<sup>190</sup> Gaudry Haynie, Jeannette and de Jonge Oudraat, Chantal (2017), *Women, Gender and Terrorism: Policies and Programming*, Women in International Security, Policy Brief January 2017. Available at: <http://wiisglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/Women-Gender-and-Terrorism-Policies-and-Programming.pdf>

<sup>191</sup> Saltman, Erin Marie and Frenett, Ross (2016), *Female radicalization ISIS and the role of women in CVE*, in Chowdhury Fink, Naureen, Zeiger, Sara and Bhulai, Rafia eds. (2016), *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, Hedayah and The Global Center on Cooperative Security, p. 154.

<sup>192</sup> Global Counterterrorism Forum – GCTF (2016), *Good practices on women and countering violent extremism*, 29 March 2016, p. 2.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., pp. 8, 9.

<sup>194</sup> Idris, Iffat and Abdelaziz, Ayat (2017), *Women and countering violent extremism*, GSDRC Heldesk Research Report, University of Birmingham; RAN (2015), *The role of gender in violent extremism*, RAN Issue Paper 4 December 2015. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-papers/docs/issue\\_paper\\_gender\\_dec2015\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_gender_dec2015_en.pdf)

at undermining extremist values.<sup>195</sup> They also explain that a discourse analysis from social media posts of Western women in Syria and Iraq shows a common narrative whereby young women and girls express the difficulties they faced when leaving their families, in particular their mother. Saltman and Frenett argue “*the voice of the mother as a counter narrative to the process of radicalization is an important one if adequately informed*”.<sup>196</sup> The GCTF suggests that alternative narratives that explicitly speak to women and girls and emphasise evidence of attacks, abuses and restrictions imposed against women and girls in the Caliphate might help contradict violent extremist narratives that offer “*a panacea for women and girls*”.<sup>197</sup> The GCTF also reminds us that former female violent extremists could help formulate credible counter-narratives.<sup>198</sup>

Other scholars point out that prevention activities should target specific push and pull factors that make women and girls vulnerable for recruitment and radicalisation and that CVE programming should specifically address the needs of women and girls.<sup>199</sup> As the GCTF emphasises, since violent extremist groups increasingly target women and girls to support them by exploiting their grievances and assumptions about men and women’s roles, an effective response requires distinct programming that addresses those grievances and needs.<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, a combined study of the ICCT, the Global Center on Cooperative Security and the GCTF points out that former violent extremists who step into the role of mentors for troubled youth have been known to successfully encourage juveniles to reflect on their worldviews.<sup>201</sup> Including female former violent extremists can prove beneficial for de-radicalisation efforts for women and girls.<sup>202</sup> Other scholars are convinced that in some cases, women are better able to intervene due to gender differences and cultural expectations.<sup>203</sup>

In the next section some examples of successful prevention initiatives are presented to outline the variety of possible approaches.

### 3.2. Good practice examples of PVE/CVE initiatives<sup>204</sup>

#### Mothers for Life<sup>205</sup>

“Mothers for Life” is a unique global network of mothers who have experienced violent jihadist radicalisation in their own families. The German Institute on Radicalisation and De-radicalisation Studies<sup>206</sup> (GIRDS) in Berlin runs the network. It has Muslims among its members and sought advice from Islamic scholars to challenge the religious arguments put forward by extremists. Women involved in this network are very active in raising awareness

<sup>195</sup> Chowdhury Fink, Naureen, Zeiger, Sara and Bhulai, Rafia eds. (2016), *A Man’s World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, Hedayah and The Global Center on Cooperative Security, p. 155.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>197</sup> Global Counterterrorism Forum – GCTF (2016), *Good practices on women and countering violent extremism*, 29 March 2016, p. 6.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., p 6.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 181; RAN (2015), *The role of gender in violent extremism*, RAN Issue Paper 4 December 2015; Global Counterterrorism Forum – GCTF (2016), *Good practices on women and countering violent extremism*, 29 March 2016, p 5.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p 3.

<sup>201</sup> Global Center on Cooperative Security (2016), *Rehabilitating Juvenile Violent Extremist Offenders in Detention Advancing a Juvenile Justice Approach*, ICCT, GCTF, December 2016, p. 8.

<sup>202</sup> Global Counterterrorism Forum – GCTF (2016), *Good practices on women and countering violent extremism*, 29 March 2016, p 6.

<sup>203</sup> Idris, Iffat and Abdelaziz, Ayat (2017), *Women and countering violent extremism*, GSDRC Heldesk Research Report, University of Birmingham, p 7.

<sup>204</sup> For more initiatives on de-radicalisation and prevention (from Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK) please see the case studies in the annex of this report.

<sup>205</sup> <http://www.mothersforlife.org/en>

<sup>206</sup> <http://girds.org/mothersforlife/mothers-for-life-network>

and supporting parents; they also aim to create strong and convincing counter-narratives. The counter-narrative campaign was designed by GIRDS in cooperation with mothers from around the world.

In 2015 and 2016 Mothers for Life released two open letters<sup>207</sup> to ISIS/Da'esh on various social media sites and throughout the world, news outlets transmitted reports about the letters, which were translated into several languages. The letters contained strong messages and proved to be a powerful warning and preventive tool reaching out widely to parents, youth and the general public.

Currently 12 countries are represented in the Mothers for Life network: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Tunisia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

### **The Women and Extremism (WaE) network**

The Women and Extremism (WaE) programme was launched by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)<sup>208</sup> in January 2015. It is dedicated to studying the active and counteractive aspects of women and extremism. The WaE network<sup>209</sup> brings together policy-makers, academics and activists to develop a relevant research agenda and launches initiatives to address the presence of women within violent extremist organisations.

WaE also aims at prevention. It pioneers programmes to work with women and their unique roles within a community and to help inoculate young people from being susceptible to radicalisation. The network involves eminent female experts from different regions and sectors in an effort to enhance the role of women in countering and preventing violent extremism. Furthermore, WaE provides resources on countering violent extremism, among them for example, the CVE Toolkit<sup>210</sup>. The Toolkit contains valuable information on international good practices on CVE.

### **The Mothers School**

In Austria Women without Borders (WWB)<sup>211</sup> and its global "SAVE - Sisters Against Violent Extremism" campaign established the world's first female counter-terrorism platform. Based on the findings of the study, which was focusing on the perceptions of women living in communities immersed in violent extremism, WWB developed the Mothers School Against Extremism Model.

The Mothers School is based on a grassroots approach. It presents a unique tool to empower women to take an active role in safeguarding their families against the threat of violent extremism. The Mothers School curriculum and workshops offer concerned mothers training in personal, communication and parenting skills so they can recognise and react to early warning signs of possible radicalisation in their children. Mothers learn to provide counter narratives and offer alternatives that foster positive youth development and resilience.

*"The curriculum, implemented through trusted community partners, includes specific exercises that facilitate dialogue, exchange information and use critical reflection through context-based techniques that apply to participants' daily*

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<sup>207</sup> <http://girids.org/mothersforlife/open-letter-to-our-sons-and-daughters>

<sup>208</sup> The Institute for Strategic Dialogue is based in London, <https://www.isdglobal.org/>

<sup>209</sup> <http://www.waenetwork.org/>

<sup>210</sup> <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/cve-tool-kit>

<sup>211</sup> WWB is a Vienna-based NGO, run by Austrian sociologist Edit Schaffer: <http://www.women-without-borders.org/aboutus/>

*lives. This model creates a formalised space for mothers to improve their knowledge of early-warning signs and strategies how to be effective barriers to radical influences. Together they can deconstruct social barriers and have open dialogue about their children’s struggles, as well as their own... Mothers are provided with specific instruction on recognising and reacting to the early warning signs of radicalisation, including instruction on the role the Internet plays in spreading extremist messages, as well as how to engage fathers in looking out for, and addressing concerning behaviour”.*<sup>212</sup>

The Mothers School model proved to be sustainable and transferable. The feedback received from trainees has been overwhelmingly positive. Initially launched in Tajikistan and in a number of Asian and African countries, the Mothers School project is now also active in Europe. Since 2015 it is operating in Belgium and Austria to address the on-going recruitment of young foreign fighters to ISIS/Da'esh. The programme is still growing, with additional schools taking root in England, Sweden, France, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Germany.<sup>213</sup>

### **‘Can mothers challenge extremism?’ project**

Women without Borders/SAVE developed an applied research project to collect evidence on mothers’ potential to protect at-risk youth. The three-stage project was designed to (i) collect, (ii) analyse and (iii) apply data from mothers living in Nigeria, Pakistan, Northern Ireland, Israel and Palestine — regions affected by violent extremism. Several key issues were explored:

- how mothers see their role in reducing the attraction of extremist ideologies;
- who they would turn to in a situation characterised by confusion, fear and alarm;
- what they need to be effective in recognising and responding to the warning signs of radicalisation.

The findings of this study show that there is significant potential for mothers to prevent their children from violent extremism. In their unique position of access and proximity to their children, mothers are an unrecognised source for deepening our understanding of risk factors and a key partner in developing preventative, counter-violence strategies. This study served as the foundation for the Mothers School against Extremism Model, which sensitises and trains mothers at the front lines to effectively combat the threat of violent extremism.

### **SAVE and the film ‘Your Mother’**

The film “Your Mother” (2012) captures the stories of mothers in France, UK and Palestine whose children have committed acts of violent extremism or intended to do so. These women discuss how their children’s choices have destroyed their own and their families’ lives. The film aims to empower mothers to take action to protect their families, to prompt meaningful conversations at a grassroots level around terrorism, radicalisation, and the importance of women in preventing it. It is intended as a tool for those in communities who are able to drive change in a tangible and effective way, as it is often the case that women hold key strategic positions in their communities, as mothers, educators, and community activists and leaders.

<sup>212</sup> Schläffer, Edit and Kropiunigg, Ulrich (2015), *Mothers Against Terror: Families are best placed to address radicalization before it escalates into violence*, *Women without Borders*, pp. 24-25. Available at: [http://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/mcdocs/files/College/F\\_Publications/perConcordiam/pC\\_V6N4\\_en.pdf](http://www.marshallcenter.org/mcpublicweb/mcdocs/files/College/F_Publications/perConcordiam/pC_V6N4_en.pdf)

<sup>213</sup> <http://oursecurefuture.org/blog/fighting-extremism-starts-mothers>

### **“Stop jihadism” website in France**

In France the Stop-jihadism campaign and the official French Government anti-radicalisation alert line<sup>214</sup> were launched in 2015. The aims are to prevent and combat terrorism. The website targets the general public, those close to young people on the path to radicalisation (teachers, associations) as well as young people themselves. It provides practical tools (e.g. infographics, video testimonies, clips and informational posters) and online resources to educate citizens to better understand the issues and to spot and prevent radicalisation.

One of the examples is a fast-paced two-minute video montage, in which an unnamed recruiter approaches a potential jihadist on Facebook and asks if he would like to join friends fighting “over there”. It then shows a series of jihadist recruitment statements superimposed over footage of Islamist militants celebrating, which are then contradicted by statements of the “reality” laid over footage of executions, crucifixions, children suffering and women crying. “They tell you: *Sacrifice yourself at our side and you’ll defend a noble cause. In reality, you will discover hell on earth and will die alone, far from home,*” the statement reads.<sup>215</sup>

The website attracted more than one million visitors in less than three months. At the same time, the number of calls made to the anti-terrorist alert line that was advertised has more than doubled in a year.

### **« Mme Déradicalisation » and her techniques to prevent radicalisation**

An anthropologist and an expert on at-risk youth, Dounia Bouzar has elaborated her own innovative de-radicalisation method and techniques, which draw on emotion, childhood memory, music and even smells. The method does not appeal to reason, but rather to feelings.<sup>216</sup> Being a Muslim woman herself, Dounia Bouzar involves the mothers whose children were radicalised to reach and turn young people away from militant Islam. She launched the Centre for the Prevention of Sectarian Trends Linked to Islam (CPDSI)<sup>217</sup>, which conducts research on countering violent extremism through collaboration with former jihadists and families of radicalised youth. The CPDSI website provides resources – films, videos, research articles, etc. Since 2014, Dounia Bouzar has published several books, including *How to escape from the Jihadist Grip*, which received several awards.

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<sup>214</sup> [Stop-djihadisme.gouv.fr](http://stop-djihadisme.gouv.fr)

<sup>215</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-france-mideast-video/france-unveils-anti-jihad-campaign-with-video-and-web-site-idUSKBN0L11VT20150128>

<sup>216</sup> <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-france-jihad-insight/to-tackle-jihadis-french-activist-says-ditch-reason-idUSKCN0SS14W20151103>

<sup>217</sup> <http://www.cpdsi.fr/>



## 4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

It is a common misconception that women, solely based on their gender, form a homogenous group. They do not. And neither do the women and girls supporting ISIS/Da'esh. Research shows the women who joined ISIS/Da'esh have different socio-demographic profiles and background stories. Their motivations range from a quest for belonging, the aspiration to help build a utopian Islamic state, to belong to something bigger and divine and a (perceived) moral duty to support their Muslim brothers and sisters, to a sense of adventure, the prospect of marriage, or a combination thereof. Another misconception is that female radicalisation can be explained as a single-causal process, predominantly fed by emotional or personal factors. It has long been acknowledged that radicalisation is a complex, multi-causal phenomenon. Understanding and responding to female radicalisation requires the same multi-layered approach. In addition, where men are mostly considered active players in their radicalisation, women are reduced to passive actors. Their radicalisation is perceived as a situation that happens to them, rather than a process they are a part of. These gender-misconceptions hinder an adequate response to the phenomenon of female radicalisation. Any serious attempt to prevent or counter female radicalisation must acknowledge the diversity of women and should avoid generalisations and oversimplifications.

In addition, gender misconceptions and gender stereotypes affect the space for women to contribute to PVE/CVE programmes and related initiatives. Often, women are included in these programmes as mothers, sisters and wives, based on their supposed ideal position to signal early warning signs of radicalisation. While women can be valuable assets in prevention and intervention programmes in this capacity, it reinforces gender stereotypes and ignores women's capabilities to contribute in many other areas. Different studies and experts point out that women can play a vital role as policy shapers, educators, community members and activists.<sup>218</sup>

### Recommendations for policy-makers on including women in their programming:

- **Facilitate and stimulate local, grassroots initiatives.** In general, it has been acknowledged that bottom-up prevention efforts are more effective than top-down approaches. Local, grassroots initiatives are aware of the situation in their communities and enjoy the trust of the communities they are part of. Therefore, such initiatives are often better positioned to identify community grievances, making them potential key-partners in (drawing up) effective prevention programmes. On the other hand, local initiatives can benefit from existing (academic) expertise on radicalisation. An alliance between local initiatives and government institutions optimises prevention efforts;<sup>219</sup>
- **Avoid demonising specific groups.** The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) has three suggestions how to accomplish this. First, the focus of prevention efforts should have a multi-ethnic approach rather than engaging with specific ethno-religious groups to avoid labelling. Second, prevention efforts should strictly be led by civil society organisations, with no connection to security or intelligence operations. Security-led interventions should be reserved for countering initiatives.<sup>220</sup> The specific

<sup>218</sup> See for example: Chowdhury Fink, Naureen, Zeiger, Sara and Bhulai Rafia eds. (2016), *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, Hedayah and The Global Center on Cooperative Security.

<sup>219</sup> Interview with Karima Sahla, director of Steunpunt Sabr, a Dutch non-profit organisation that focuses on supporting women and their families in need of care for social and psychological problems. The interview was held on 16 October 2017.

<sup>220</sup> Patel, Sofia (2017), *The Sultanate of women, exploring female roles in perpetrating and preventing violent extremism*, The Australian Strategic Policy Institute, February 2017, pp. 34-35.

relevance of this is also underscored in the UK case study, where it is explained how the government-led PREVENT initiative received criticism for singling out Muslim communities and was even accused of spying on Muslim citizens. Third, prevention programmes are more effective if they have an objective that is wider than solely countering or preventing violent extremism. A focus on building strong, inclusive and resilient communities and addressing issues that concern them helps create a solid base of support for the programme;<sup>221</sup>

- **Offer training to all professionals working with Islamist radicalised women and girls.** Radicalisation is a complex phenomenon. All professionals dealing with radicalised Islamist women and girls should be aware of the multifaceted dynamics of (female) radicalisation, how to best approach radicalised females and their families, and how to offer support and counselling. Training should take place in the form of case studies and speaking directly with experts who have dealt with multiple cases. There should be a helpline for all working with extremists so they can discuss difficult cases with experts and make correct decisions;
- **Stimulate and facilitate cooperation between existing initiatives in an (online) support network.** Organisations from different European Member States working on preventing female radicalisation can learn from each other's experiences. However, social infrastructure often differs between Member States. Therefore, it is not always possible to transfer successful approaches. It is possible to learn from successes but they cannot necessarily be transferred;<sup>222</sup>
- **Encourage women to partake in prevention efforts.** Women can be valuable contributors to PVE/CVE efforts as mentors, community organisers, intervention officers, mothers, sisters, policy advisors, educators and health care professionals. Policies and programming should encourage women, provide them with the necessary space, and offer (additional) training to support them in their efforts;
- **Safeguard the quality of prevention and intervention programming.** The number of organisations working on prevention and intervention has rapidly increased. In order to safeguard the quality of such programmes, it is vital to ask questions such as: is the programme substantiated by academic findings? Is it evaluated? Is it registered? These questions need to be seriously examined in order to ensure the target group is offered the correct and most appropriate support.<sup>223</sup>

### **Recommendations and considerations for prevention and intervention programmes aimed at women:**

- **Target female specific push and pull factors that put women at risk of radicalisation and recruitment.** ISIS/Da'esh has produced a highly-gendered narrative in which women are offered alternative concepts of freedom and empowerment, based on Islamic virtues. In this narrative, Western feminism is portrayed as imperialist and exclusively advantageous for white women, leaving little to no room for Islamic women and their values. ISIS/Da'esh promises women the opportunity to free themselves from the superficial and materialistic principles that are imposed on them by the West and to reclaim their true identity as intended by God. By stating that women are the hope of the *Ummah*, ISIS/Da'esh feeds this rhetoric and promises women perspective, meaning and self-worth. This propaganda

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>222</sup> Interview with Esmá Salama on 18 October 2017. Esmá Salama is the designer of DIAMANT, a highly valued Dutch de-radicalisation programme.

<sup>223</sup> Interview with Esmá Salama on 18 October 2017.

message, which resonates with different women and girls, suggests that a search for belonging and for meaning in life is important driving factors in the radicalisation of different women and girls. Prevention and intervention efforts should incorporate this in their programming;

- **Address female specific vulnerabilities that can increase the exposure of women and girls to radicalisation.** A Dutch practitioner argues for example that girls in search of answers about their sexuality within Islam have an increased risk of being targeted by recruiters, especially if such issues are not addressed within the family sphere.<sup>224</sup> Programming aimed at answering such questions and raising awareness among parents about this increased exposure could help obviate this vulnerability;
- **Recognise female specific enabling factors.** Research shows that women and girls experience different enabling factors in their radicalisation than their male counterparts. A study by Pearson and Winterbotham reports for example that Islamist women, due to their choice of attire, have an increased risk of experiencing discrimination, which can cause feelings of exclusion.<sup>225</sup> This could spiral into an increased vulnerability to radicalisation. Prevention and interventionist strategies and programmes aiming at identity and resilience should take this gender difference into account;
- **Account for female specific issues in intervention and reintegration programming.** In line with findings of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), intervention efforts should be tailor-made, meeting the requirements of each specific individual. In general, such an approach will include individual coaching, family support and psychological and religious counselling. RAN raises awareness that quite often, women and girls who have joined or attempted to join ISIS/Da'esh have troubled family relationships and histories of abuse and/or sexual violence. In addition, in the case of women or girls returning to their families, issues including those related to honour and shame need to be addressed. In those cases, RAN recommends a risk assessment to establish whether it is safe for those women or girls to return home;<sup>226</sup>
- **Raise awareness of women's increased exposure to online recruitment and of female specific online recruitment tactics.** It is generally agreed that the internet can play a crucial enabling factor in radicalisation processes. Studies suggest Islamic women and girls experience an increased vulnerability to online radicalisation, as traditional gender norms and gender expectations affect how women engage in the public sphere.<sup>227</sup> Consequently, it is important to raise awareness of recruitment tactics used on social media and how to respond in an early stage, for example through education;
- **Make use of the opportunity that the Internet can provide.** The internet can be an important tool to spread counter-narratives and to tackle radicalisation by deploying the same tactic as recruiters. Effective counter-narratives require addressing female specific issues. In addition, programmes exist that can help identify women and girls searching for answers online. An operative can reach out to these

<sup>224</sup> Interview with Esma Salama on 18 October 2017.

<sup>225</sup> Pearson, Elizabeth and Winterbotham, Emily (2017), *Women, gender and Daesh radicalization*, The RUSI journal, 162:3, 60-72.

<sup>226</sup> RAN (2015), *The role of gender in violent extremism*, RAN Issue Paper 4 December 2015. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-papers/docs/issue\\_paper\\_gender\\_dec2015\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_gender_dec2015_en.pdf)

<sup>227</sup> See for example Pearson, Elizabeth and Winterbotham, Emily (2017), *Women, gender and Daesh radicalization*, The RUSI journal, 162:3, pp. 60-72.

women and eventually invite them to a closed network where she/he can attempt to move the woman or girl away from extremist messaging.

## PART II

# CASE STUDIES – GERMANY, THE NETHERLANDS, SPAIN AND THE UNITED KINGDOM

## 5. OVERVIEW OF THE CASE STUDIES

Part II of this study contains detailed case studies from Germany, the Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom with the aim to:

- provide a short overview on the country situation in relation to jihadist radicalisation;
- describe the profiles of women and girls who are in danger of becoming radicalised or have already been radicalised;
- explore the role of online radicalisation and identify any gender-related specificities as regards to the use of the internet as a means of radicalisation;
- present good practices of preventing and countering the radicalisation of women and girls;

The following sub-sections provide brief summaries of these case studies, while more detailed information on the respective countries can be found in the subsequent chapters of this report.

### 5.1 Germany

By the end of June 2016, 784 individuals had left (or tried to leave) Germany for Syria or Iraq due to Islamist motivations and 21% of the departees were women.<sup>228</sup> The peak in 2014 coincided with the proclamation of the Caliphate in Syria and Iraq and was followed by a significant decline in the number of departures. This, however, does not mean that the ISIS/Da'esh ideology has lost its attraction. In Germany, in particular Salafist institutions and actors are using the conflict in Syria and Iraq to spread extremist ideology and to recruit new followers. Their numbers have significantly increased over the past years. While in 2011 the number of followers was approximately 3,800, it increased to 10,300 by September 2017.<sup>229</sup> The share of women who are active in the Salafist scene is estimated to be about 10% (although the number is likely to be much higher given that women are usually not very visible in the scene).<sup>230</sup>

There are significant differences between the way men and women become radicalised, calling for gender-specific prevention: women tend to become radicalised more quickly and in social environments that are less publicly accessible ("private sphere"). For those women who left Germany, influence from their immediate social environment was much more important for the start of radicalisation (75% compared to 61% for men). Furthermore, 54% of women compared to only 22% of men travelled with family members.<sup>231</sup>

<sup>228</sup> Bundeskriminalamt, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus (2016), *Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind. Fortschreibung 2016.*

<sup>229</sup> <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/arbeitsfelder/af-islamismus-und-islamistischer-terrorismus/was-ist-islamismus/salafistische-bestrebungen>

<sup>230</sup> Ministerium für Inneres und Kommunales des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (2015), *Extremistischer Salafismus: Ursachen, Gefahren und Gegenstrategien*, Verfassungsschutz Nordrhein-Westfalen.

<sup>231</sup> Bundeskriminalamt, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus (2016), *Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind. Fortschreibung 2016.*

Also the internet constitutes an important factor for radicalisation. The most vulnerable group for internet radicalisation seems to be young women. However, women are not only victims of internet propaganda but often are also actively involved in spreading it. There are several cases of German women who glorify their life under the rule of the Islamic state on the internet, attempting to attract other women to join them and come to Syria. They offer advice and support for the departure to Syria as well as the search for a "suitable" husband. In their role as propagandists, women mostly talk about everyday life under the Islamic State. They portray the picture of a functioning state where Muslim women can live free from discrimination. Marriage with a jihadist fighter is glorified as a romantic life goal for each devoted Muslim woman.<sup>232</sup>

Good practice initiatives from Germany include: HAYAT-Germany<sup>233</sup>, the Violence Prevention Network<sup>234</sup>, the project "Die Freiheit die ich meine"<sup>235</sup> (the freedom that I mean), the initiative "Frauen stärken Demokratie"<sup>236</sup> (Women strengthen democracy) and the "WomEx"<sup>237</sup> project.

## 5.2 The Netherlands

The Dutch jihadist scene consists of at least several hundred individuals who interact on both open social media platforms as well as on applications that cannot, or only with much difficulty, be intercepted.<sup>238</sup> As a movement, the jihadist scene in the Netherlands has a relatively low degree of organisation with little hierarchy and is characterised by family or friendship relations.<sup>239</sup> Since the beginning of the conflict, 280 Dutch individuals have successfully travelled to ISIS/Da'esh controlled territory (the most recent numbers are from February 2017).<sup>240</sup> The latest estimates put the number of Dutch women in the territory at around 70.<sup>241</sup> Around a third of the returnees are women.<sup>242</sup> The Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism warns that as ISIS/Da'esh is under increased pressure due to the loss of territory, women might also become involved in attacks.<sup>243</sup>

Most studies on Western women and girls travelling to Syria and Iraq conclude that there is no single profile of female jihadists.<sup>244</sup> A review of the profiles of the Dutch women and girls who travelled to Syria and Iraq, or attempted to do so, offers a similar conclusion. There are examples of dominant, highly visible women but also examples of young, naïve girls, many of whom have been approached by other women and persuaded to travel to the Caliphate. Between these two extremes, the stories and backgrounds of Dutch female jihadists are very diverse.

<sup>232</sup> Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (2015), *Jihadistinnen und ihre Rolle bei der Anwerbung von Frauen für den „Islamischen Staat“ (IS)*.

<sup>233</sup> HAYAT-Deutschland: <http://hayat-deutschland.de/english/>

<sup>234</sup> Violence Prevention Network: <http://www.violence-prevention-network.de/en/>

<sup>235</sup> Die Freiheit die ich meine: <http://www.gesichtzeigen.de/angebote/die-freiheit-die-ich-meine/>

<sup>236</sup> Frauen stärken Demokratie: <http://www.utamara.org/index.php/de/projekte/195-utamara-startet-neues-projekt>

<sup>237</sup> Women/girls in violent extremism – WomEx: <http://www.womex.org/en/about/the-womex-project/>

<sup>238</sup> National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (June 2017), *Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 45*.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) (February 2017), *Focus on Returnees*; National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (June 2017), *Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 45*.

<sup>241</sup> General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) (February 2017), *Focus on Returnees*.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (June 2017), *Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 45*.

<sup>244</sup> Bakker, Edwin and de Leede, Seran (2015), *European female jihadists in Syria: exploring an under-researched topic*, ICCT; Perešin, Anita and Cervone, Alberto (2015), *The Western Muhajirat of ISIS*, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 38:7; Saltman, Erin Marie and Smith, Melanie (2015), *Till martyrdom do us part, gender and the ISIS phenomenon*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue & ICSR.

Similar to their counterparts elsewhere within the EU, Dutch women and girls are also highly active online. From Syria and Iraq, Dutch women give other women and girls advice on how to make the trip.<sup>245</sup> Also inside the Netherlands, women disseminate inflammatory material, try to convince others to support the jihadi cause and give each other practical tips on how to stay undetected. But even though social media and the internet can play an important role in the process of radicalisation of women and girls, it does not mean offline contacts cannot be just as important in female radicalisation. Jihadi women are often very active. They are involved in volunteer and community work and organise lectures, both in mosques and in their homes. Jihadi women approach girls who they feel might be susceptible to their message and invite them to such events.

Good practice initiatives from the Netherlands include: Nisa for Nisa<sup>246</sup>, the SIPI Diamant method<sup>247</sup> and the Oumnia Works programme by the NGO *Steunpunt Sabr*<sup>248</sup>.

### 5.3 Spain

For Spanish residents, ISIS/Da'esh has a specific recruitment message in the form of a mandatory fight to recover the historic Islamic territory of "al-Andalus", through the reconquest of parts of Spain and Portugal, which formerly constituted the Emirate of Cordoba (756-929). The Spanish jihadist network mainly consists of Spanish citizens of Moroccan origin and Moroccan immigrants. Moreover, the Spanish territories of Ceuta and Melilla and Tétouan in northern Morocco have been hotspots of jihadism,<sup>249</sup> exporting the ideology to the Spanish mainland.

According to a study on female jihadists, 21 Spanish women have left the country since 2013<sup>250</sup> to join ISIS/Da'esh in Syria or Iraq. The number of women who departed corresponds to 10% of the total number of 208 individuals who have travelled from Spain to Syria or Iraq. The average age of 75% of the women was between 19 and 28 years and 45% were single.<sup>251</sup>

In comparison with male jihadists, women's radicalisation predominantly takes place on the internet. In Spain 55.6% of the arrested women were radicalised online compared to only 30.8% of men.<sup>252</sup> The online female jihadist community is bonded by common goals, ideology and by the symbolism given to their *nom de guerre*, "Umm" [mother in Arabic].<sup>253</sup> For these women, the "Digital Umm" represents a community of mothers, or future mothers, brought together online by the violent goal of educating their children to accept the jihadist ideology. Their online kinship is the recognition of themselves as online sisters who share the same violent narrative.<sup>254</sup> Through this (mis-)construction of a religious discourse, the leading female recruiters form the building blocks of trust and guarantee their status as a legitimate religious online authority. This high status enables them to conduct a successful jihadist mobilisation. Female jihadists have a crucial recruiting role within the Spanish networks and

<sup>245</sup> Alberts, Jaco and Lensink, Harry (2015), *Seks en de jihad, Nederlandse moslima's vallen voor strijders*, Vrij Nederland, 25 April 2015.

<sup>246</sup> Nisa for Nisa: <http://nisa4nisa.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Jaarverslag-2016-Nisa-voor-Nisa.pdf>

<sup>247</sup> Foundation for Intercultural Participation and Integration: <http://www.s-ipi.nl/diamant/>

<sup>248</sup> Oumnia works: <http://www.oumniaworks.nl>

<sup>249</sup> Keeney, Michael (2011), *Hotbed of Radicalization or Something Else?: An Ethnographic Exploration of a Muslim Neighborhood in Ceuta*, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 4, 537-559.

<sup>250</sup> Carvalho, Claudia (2017), *Kids in the green lands of the Khilafat – A Tumblr case study of imagery within the Jihad 3.0 narrative*, Leuven University Press.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Carvalho, Claudia (Forthcoming), *i-Imams, studying Female Islamic authority online*.

<sup>254</sup> Carvalho, Claudia (2014), *Okhti Online. Spanish Muslim Women engaging online Jihad? a Facebook case study*. Online, Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet, Vol. 6. Available at: <http://heup.uniheidelberg.de/journals/index.php/religions/article/view/17358>

they achieve it through their bridging, brokerage and bonding functions. They transform online social capital into an effective method of online jihadist recruitment.

Spanish good practice initiatives include: PEN-LCRV<sup>255</sup>, New Programme for the Prevention of Radicalisation in the Penitentiary System, the Strong Cities Network<sup>256</sup> (e.g. the Spanish city of Malaga is for instance participating in the Network), the Catalanian local intervention plan "Islamic Radicalisation Detection Procedures"<sup>257</sup> and the private initiative Preter-IS<sup>258</sup>.

## 5.4 The United Kingdom

Since 2014 when ISIS/Da'esh declared their state, an estimated 850 individuals<sup>259</sup> left to join them from the UK of whom around 17% were women.<sup>260</sup> There are no exact figures but it is estimated that around 145 UK females have left to join ISIS/Da'esh. The women that left were from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, with a disproportionate number being white female converts.<sup>261</sup> Both the UK "Prevent Programme"<sup>262</sup>, with its goal of tackling and preventing extremism in all forms, and community and voluntary organisations work with schools and Muslim communities to address radicalisation. There is, however, also a certain backlash as these organisations are sometimes accused of targeting and spying on innocent Muslims. This has been meant that Muslim communities do not engage with anti-radicalisation initiatives and has thus made it difficult to address the problem within Muslim communities.<sup>263</sup>

Vulnerable or radicalised female Islamists may particularly include: (i) high-achieving university and secondary school students; (ii) young girls in care; (iii) women with diagnosed mental health issues; and (iv) converts and newly observant Muslims. There are several reasons why extremist recruiters target these women including that they (i) show interest in the Islamic faith; (ii) have experienced Islamophobia; (iii) experience an identity crisis; (iv) are feeling aggrieved by Western foreign policies.<sup>264</sup>

The majority of recruitments take place online so any young Muslim woman researching her religion, on social media in particular, is at risk of coming into contact with online recruiters. Propaganda directed towards women is distinctly different to that aimed at men, as it is very stylised, romantic, and generally depicts ISIS/Da'esh as a place of adventure, not too far from a fairy tale. Women are also often used to promote ISIS/Da'esh propaganda online through poetry, which is used in both encrypted messaging and publicly on social media

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<sup>255</sup> National Strategic Plan of Fight against violent radicalisation (PEN-LCRV): <http://www.interior.gob.es/documents/642012/5179146/PLAN+ESTRATÉGICO+NACIONAL.pdf/d250d90e-99b5-4ec9-99a8-8cf896cb8c2f>

<sup>256</sup> Strong Cities Network: <http://strongcitiesnetwork.org>

<sup>257</sup> Islamic Radicalisation Detection Procedures: <http://educacio.gencat.cat/documents/PC/ProjectesEducatius/PRODERAI-CE.pdf>

<sup>258</sup> Preter-IS: <http://www.ucjc.edu/2013/07/campus-de-paz-proyecto- invitado-por-la-ue-y-el-ministerio-de-eslovenia-a-un-foro-internacional-contra-la-violencia/>

<sup>259</sup> BBC News (2017), *Who are Britain's jihadists*. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-32026985>

<sup>260</sup> International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - ICCT (2016), *The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union - Profiles, Threats & Policies*. Available at : <https://www.icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report-Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU-1-April-2016-including-AnnexesLinks.pdf>

<sup>261</sup> Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> UK PREVENT Programme: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf)

<sup>263</sup> BBC News (2017), *Prevent criticism 'stems from ignorance*, 7 August 2017. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-40845911>

<sup>264</sup> UK Channel Programme: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/425189/Channel\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_April\\_2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425189/Channel_Duty_Guidance_April_2015.pdf)



platforms as a means of emotional enticement to win support from those who may already be inclined to ISIS's/Da'esh's ideas.<sup>265</sup>

UK good practices include actions by voluntary organisations such as Inspire<sup>266</sup>, the Woman Against Radicalisation Network (WARN)<sup>267</sup>, the Henna Foundation<sup>268</sup>, the National Muslim Women's Advisory Group (NMWAG), as well as government programmes such as PREVENT<sup>269</sup> and the UK Channel initiatives<sup>270</sup>.

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<sup>265</sup> Creswell, Robyn and Haykel, Bernard (2015), *Battle Lines. Want to understand the jihadis? Read their poetry*, The New Yorker, June 8 & 15, 2015 Issue. Available at: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/08/battle-lines-jihad-creswell-and-haykel>

<sup>266</sup> Inspire: <https://wewillinspire.com/>

<sup>267</sup> Woman Against Radicalisation Network (WARN): <http://warn.org.uk/>

<sup>268</sup> Henna Foundation: <http://www.hennafoundation.org/>

<sup>269</sup> UK PREVENT Programme: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf)

<sup>270</sup> UK Channel Programme: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/425189/Channel\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_April\\_2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425189/Channel_Duty_Guidance_April_2015.pdf)

## 6. CASE STUDY: GERMANY

### 6.1. Introduction

By the end of June 2016, 784 individuals had left (or tried to leave) Germany for Syria or Iraq due to Islamist motivations, according to official data.<sup>271</sup> A peak in 2014 that coincided with the proclamation of the Caliphate in Syria and Iraq was followed by a significant decline in the number of departures (after July 2015 the numbers fell from almost 100 to only approximately 5 departures per month) which may be attributed to ISIS/Da'esh military defeats and also to the call to the group's followers to stay at home and carry out attacks there.

The decline in the number of departures, however, does not mean that the ISIS/Da'esh ideology has lost its attraction. In Germany, Salafist institutions and actors in particular are using the conflict in Syria and Iraq to spread extremist ideology and to recruit new followers. Their numbers have significantly increased over the past years. While in 2011 the number was approximately 3,800, it had risen to 10,300 by September 2017.<sup>272</sup>

According to the Salafist doctrine, men and women are of equal value but do not have equal rights due to their "different physical and mental" conditions. Women are largely confined to roles as housewives and mothers and there is strict gender segregation in the social sphere. Despite this misogynist ideology, young women are also active in the Salafist milieu. It is estimated that they represent approximately 10% of the total (although the number is likely to be much higher given that women are usually not very visible in the milieu). Moreover, some women are active in the violence-oriented jihadist milieu in Germany, primarily by using the internet for spreading propaganda and radical content, raising funds and facilitating the departure of female jihadists to Syria/Iraq.<sup>273</sup> The Salafist ideology is regarded as the breeding ground for radicalisation towards militant jihad and thus poses a major safety concern for German authorities. This is made evident by the fact that almost all departures to Syria/Iraq (96%) are persons considered part of the Salafist spectrum.<sup>274</sup>

There are also a few other outstanding features that the great majority of persons who depart seem to have in common: almost two-thirds have been born in Germany and 81% have some migrant background. Furthermore it seems to be a predominantly urban phenomenon: roughly 90% of persons who departed lived in urban areas with just 13 cities as the place of residence of nearly half of them.

The security authorities were aware of 56 minors who had left Germany by June 2016, accounting for about 7% of the total number of individuals who departed. There is, however, a significant gender difference as the share of women among minors is 39% and relatively large (compared to only 20% in the group 18 years and older).

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<sup>271</sup> Unless specified otherwise, data in this section is based on: Bundeskriminalamt, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus (2017): Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind. Fortschreibung 2016.

<sup>272</sup> <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/arbeitsfelder/af-islamismus-und-islamistischer-terrorismus/was-ist-islamismus/salafistische-bestrebungen>

<sup>273</sup> Ministerium für Inneres und Kommunales des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen (2015), *Extremistischer Salafismus: Ursachen, Gefahren und Gegenstrategien*, Verfassungsschutz Nordrhein-Westfalen.

<sup>274</sup> Bundeskriminalamt, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus (2017): Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind. Fortschreibung 2016.

Several factors are relevant for the start and process of radicalisation. In Germany, the most relevant ones at the start of the radicalisation seem to be friends (54%), contacts in relevant mosques (48%) and the internet (44%), followed by so-called Islamist seminars (27%), Quran distribution activities (24%) and family members (21%). The figures are similar for the further process of radicalisation. There are, however, some differences over time: the importance of contacts in relevant mosques seems to have decreased somewhat. Also the internet has become, in general terms, slightly less relevant for radicalisation, although it remains a decisive factor, particularly for young women, as will be described in more detail in section 3. Thus, in general terms, direct personal contact with like-minded persons appears more important in many cases than the consumption of extremist internet propaganda. Radicalisation largely takes place in the real social environment. Salafist institutions, personalities and propaganda constitute decisive factors for Islamist radicalisation of persons who travel from Germany to Syria and Iraq.

When it comes to the length of time elapsing from the start of radicalisation until departure, more than one-fifth were sufficiently radicalised within six months to leave Germany and nearly half left within one year. Significant gender differences can be observed: 56% of women left within less than 12 months compared to 43% of men.

One-third of those who left Germany have returned to date. They are under surveillance as they may engage in propaganda activities and concrete attempts to recruit new followers as well as plan and carry out terrorist crimes. One-quarter of returnees cooperate with the authorities while about half returned to the Salafist/extremist milieu. For those of whom the reason for their return is known, 10% have returned due to disillusionment and/or frustration and 10% due to pressure from family members. German authorities believe that 8% returned for tactical reasons (e.g. receiving or collecting money) and that a further 6% returned due to illness or health problems. There is a much larger share of returnees among men (39%) than among women (21%). It can be assumed that it is easier for men to return to Germany than for women considering that women need a male guardian when travelling through ISIS/Da'esh-controlled territory. Another explanation may be that men have a greater motivation to return, for example due to traumatic experiences in combat regions, while fewer women return due to family ties such as marriage.

## 6.2 Profiles of women

In total, 21% of those who departed and included in the official German data are female. Their share rose significantly after the proclamation of the Caliphate, from 15% to 36% in the first year after the proclamation and since then has dropped again (to 27%). Looking only at the group of those who left Germany after the Caliphate was declared, 34% of them were women.<sup>275</sup>

### The case of Sarah O.

One of the first German women departing for Syria was 15-year old Sarah O. who, in October 2013, did not return home from school in the German city of Konstanz. She was reported missing by her father two days later. Soon after her disappearance, she claimed that she had joined Al Qaida and posted pictures of herself on various social-media sites holding a machine gun, dressed in a *burqa* and black gloves. She said she was being

<sup>275</sup> Bundeskriminalamt, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus (2017), Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind. Fortschreibung 2016.

trained to use the gun, and that her day consisted of "Sleeping, eating, shooting, learning, listening to lectures."<sup>276</sup>

It is noteworthy that the majority of women who left for the Caliphate already had children (55% compared to 41% of men). Thus, it seems that the hypothesis that women with children would be less likely to travel to Syria and/or Iraq does not hold.

### **The case of Andrea B.**

Andrea B. was already a mother of two daughters from a former relationship, at the time she became familiar with Islam through friends and by 2012 she had converted to Islam. Only a few years before, she had been baptised. On the internet she met like-minded people who had already travelled to Syria. A woman from Frankfurt told her about her new life in Aleppo and suggested that Andrea B. become the second wife of her husband. In 2014, shortly before her 29<sup>th</sup> birthday, Andrea B. departed with her two young children to Syria. The children's father, up until that moment unaware of the departure plans, turned to the police. Andrea B. would later cite humanitarian grounds and the desire to help as reasons for her departure. From Syria she sent messages and pictures glorifying the jihad. "If Assad's forces arrive, I will blow ourselves up", she wrote. The increasing fighting finally prompted her to flee and to return to Germany. Back in Germany she was sentenced to 1.5 years for parental child abduction but acquitted of preparing a serious act of violent subversion.<sup>277</sup>

Also noticeable is the larger share of converts among women: whereas only 17% of men were converts, one-third of women had converted, probably often as the result of marriage to Muslims.<sup>278</sup>

As already indicated, there are significant differences between the way men and women become radicalised, calling for gender-specific prevention: women tend to become radicalised more quickly and in social environments that are less publicly accessible ("private sphere"). For those women who left Germany, influence from their immediate social environment was much more important for the start of radicalisation than for men (75% compared to 61% for men). Furthermore, 54% of women but only 22% of men travelled with family members.

Men and women also differ in their motives for departure: whereas more than half of the men who left for Syria/Iraq wanted to participate in combat, this was true for only 18% of women and there are only isolated indications of women actually participating in combat. For women, their motives for leaving tended to be more socially and family oriented such as the desire to live in a different/new Islamic society, the desire to marry or a humanitarian motivation to help on the ground. By contrast, Islamist-jihadist motivation was found much more often among men (61% compared to 26% of women).

<sup>276</sup> The Guardian (2014), *Schoolgirl jihadis: the female Islamists leaving home to join Isis fighters*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/29/schoolgirl-jihadis-female-islamists-leaving-home-join-isis-iraq-syria> as well as Wehner, Markus (2014), *Immer mehr deutsche Frauen im Dschihad*, Frankfurter Allgemeine, 8 March 2014. Available at: <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/syrien-krieg-immer-mehr-deutsche-frauen-im-dschihad-12837534.html>

<sup>277</sup> Haneke, Alexander (2015), *Nicht ohne ihre Töchter*, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 25 February 2015.

<sup>278</sup> Heinke, Daniel (2017), *German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: The updated Data and its Implications*, CTC Sentinel, Volume 10, Issue 2, March 2017. Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/german-foreign-fighters-in-syria-and-iraq-the-updated-data-and-its-implications>

Although there is no universal type of a female jihadist, the Federal Domestic Intelligence Service (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz*) distinguishes several “ideal types”,<sup>279</sup> describing relevant patterns of behaviour and motives for radicalisation. The first distinction is made between the “passive type of women” and the “active type of women”.

Women belonging to the “passive profile” are characterised by a pronounced traditional and conservative understanding of their role, which is largely confined to those of mothers raising their children to become *mujahedeen*, motivating fighters for jihad, caring for injured persons and carrying out auxiliary activities. They are usually travelling together with, or are following, their husbands to join the jihad.

Women belonging to the “active profile” on the other hand act independently from male influence. They claim an active role in jihad, which is not limited to the traditional role of women. Their activities mostly include propaganda, the call for armed battle, missionary work, logistical support and fundraising. The “active type of women” includes three sub-types. Firstly, self-confident women for whom the concept of being an active combatant is a real option since they seek their self-fulfilment in jihad. The second type consists of adolescent women in search of their identity. The third type includes women with a sense of mission, eager to devote themselves to a cause. They regard themselves as role models and defenders of the “true Islam”.

### **The case of Safia S.**

On the 26 February 2016, Safia S., at the time 15-years old, stabbed and seriously wounded a policeman during an identity check at Hanover central station. She had been active in the Salafist milieu for years and was already known to the authorities for her attempt to travel to Syria in January 2016, to join her brother. After her arrival in Istanbul, she had been recovered by her mother and brought back to Germany. However, Safia S. remained in contact with ISIS/Da'esh as the analysis of her mobile data later showed. The authorities found messages with clear instructions on how to commit the knife attack. The police therefore regarded the incident as the first attack directly ordered by ISIS/Da'esh in Germany. In January 2017, Safia S. was sentenced to six years' imprisonment for attempted murder, aggravated battery, and supporting a foreign terrorist organisation.<sup>280</sup> A few months later, her older brother was also convicted for attempted murder in seven cases. He had thrown two Molotov-cocktails at the main entrance of a shopping mall in Hanover.

The share of minors among females departing is considerably higher compared to that of males (13% versus 6%).<sup>281</sup> The question arises as to what convinces German girls to give up their previous life in order to join a terrorist militia. Clearly, there are no easy explanations as there is a wide range of possible reasons for radicalisation, some of them directly interconnected. For instance, conflicts within the family or feelings of discrimination or alienation are often cited.<sup>282</sup>

<sup>279</sup> Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (2011), *Frauen in islamistisch-terroristischen Strukturen in Deutschland*, BfV-Themenreihe.

<sup>280</sup> <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/inland/angriff-auf-polizisten-lange-haftstrafe-fuer-safia-s-14760609.html>

<sup>281</sup> Heinke, Daniel (2017), *German Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: The updated Data and its Implications*, CTC Sentinel, Volume 10, Issue 2, March 2017. Available at: <https://ctc.usma.edu/posts/german-foreign-fighters-in-syria-and-iraq-the-updated-data-and-its-implications>

<sup>282</sup> Dantschke, Claudia and Köhler, Daniel (2013), *Angehörigenberatung und Deradikalisierung. Theoretische und praktische Implikationen, sowie erster inhaltlicher Bericht über die Eratungsstelle Hayat*, Journal EXIT-Deutschland, Issue 1/2013.

Some women become involved due to their already radicalised partner while others have failed (or have the feeling of having failed) in their private and professional life. Tired of taking decisions, adolescents in particular are then willing to subordinate themselves. Such young women may search for strong men who take decisions for them and take care of them.<sup>283</sup> It can thus be a refuge for those who feel overwhelmed by the complexity of modern life and feel unjustly treated. Out of feelings of insecurity and isolation they turn to extremism.<sup>284</sup> Through their departure for jihad they gain a new social status.

For others, embracing radical Islamism constitutes an act of self-assertion and emancipation. If they choose to wear a *niqab*, it is not because they are forced but in order to distance themselves from their parents or liberal forms of religion. For teenagers, it is the ultimate way to rebel.

And yet others might indeed be groomed, particularly on the internet, and fall for the romanticised idea of marrying a jihadist fighter, who are presented as heroic martyrs and upright Muslims. There is, in fact, a veritable "pop-culture of jihadism" on the internet. That this motivation is strong among minors is also evidenced by the statistics: marriage was a motivation for leaving Germany for nearly one-third of minors (29%) but only for 4% of older persons.<sup>285</sup>

### **The case of Linda W.**

In July 2017, 16-year-old Linda W. was discovered by Iraqi troops in Mosul with a group of 20 other suspected foreign female ISIS/Da'esh members.<sup>286</sup> She had departed to join ISIS/Da'esh a year before. Linda W. grew up in a Protestant family and had not shown any interest in religion until a few months before her disappearance when she started learning Arabic, taking the Quran to school, wearing conservative clothing and becoming fascinated with Islam.

Linda W. claims that she had been persuaded to convert to Islam by a woman with whom she had begun chatting on a jihadist forum. This woman later introduced her to a former ISIS/Da'esh fighter and the two also began chatting. She told him about problems she was having at home and he convinced her to run away, promising to marry her if she joined ISIS/Da'esh. He also told her how she could get the travel documents she needed to travel to Turkey. Once in Turkey the two married and travelled to Mosul where he was killed three months later.<sup>287</sup> Currently Linda W. is in an Iraqi prison where she either faces years in prison or even the death penalty, if she is not extradited to Germany.<sup>288</sup>

<sup>283</sup> Mrkaja, Deana (2015), *Eine Rückkehr gibt es für sie nicht: Warum sich deutsche Mädchen dem Islamischen Staat anschließen*, Focus, 18 December 2015.

<sup>284</sup> Jürgs, Alexander (2016), *Was junge Frauen in den Dschihad zieht*, Welt, 4 June 2016.

<sup>285</sup> Bundeskriminalamt, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus (2017), *Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind*. Fortschreibung 2016.

<sup>286</sup> Kabisch, Volkmar, Mascolo, Georg and Musawy, Amir (2017), *Vom Kinderzimmer in Pulsnitz nach Mossul in den Dschihad*, Süddeutsche Zeitung, 23 July 2017. Available at : <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/fall-linda-w-vom-kinderzimmer-in-pulsnitz-nach-mossul-in-den-dschihad-1.3599976>

<sup>287</sup> Roberts, Rachel (2017), *German teenage 'Isis bride' who faces death penalty in Iraq 'was groomed'*, Independent, 5 October 2017. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/german-isis-bride-death-penalty-hanging-iraq-groomed-teenager-linda-wenzel-a7984171.html>

<sup>288</sup> N24 (2017), *Linda W. droht im Irak die Todesstrafe*, 16 September 2017. Available at: <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article168711892/Linda-W-droht-im-Irak-die-Todesstrafe.html>

When it comes to how young women are enticed, recruiters frequently tell them that they have the opportunity to help shape a new state and to be part of an elite community. They feel they are being specially chosen. This is a strong narrative. They are furthermore convinced that Western women are sexualised and that no up-right Muslim life would be possible in the West – only in the *Ummah* of ISIS/Da'esh.<sup>289</sup>

Moreover, recruiters repeatedly show pictures of atrocities against Muslims, particularly women and children, and thus portray the West as the enemy. Thereby they call upon the sense of justice and morality of the young women.<sup>290</sup>

Following the first contact, inner group dynamics can promote radicalisation: the growing group interaction coupled with a simultaneous disengagement from former contacts leads to a change in values: in-group love thus increases out-group hate.<sup>291</sup> The internet plays a decisive role in this dynamic.

### 6.3. The role of online radicalisation

There is now sufficient evidence that, in many cases, internet propaganda was a relevant factor in the radicalisation process. Nonetheless, the question arises as to whether internet propaganda can initiate radicalisation, or whether the internet simply complements other radicalisation factors. The available German data indicate that, for 249 persons (out of the 784 who have left – or tried to leave – Germany for Syria or Iraq), the internet seems to have been a relevant influence at the start of their radicalisation. The internet is the only known deciding factor at the start of radicalisation for 17% of these persons; for the remaining individuals, there are indications that other factors also had a decisive influence, such as friends, contacts at (relevant) mosques and so-called Islamist seminars. It is, however, often difficult to say if and how much of the radicalisation process can be attributed to the internet.<sup>292</sup> Moreover, studies show that it is not enough to be merely exposed to extremist or even violent internet content in order to become radicalised. There has to be a prior affinity coupled with an active search for such content. Thus, passive consumption does not seem to be enough; active perception is required in order to become radicalised.<sup>293</sup>

What seems to be certain is that the internet plays a more important role for certain groups compared to others. There seems, for instance, to be an urban - rural divide. While for only a quarter of those who left from hot spots (13 German cities), the internet is thought to have been a relevant factor for the start of radicalisation, this figure is much higher for those who lived in rural areas (42%).<sup>294</sup>

For minors, the internet is nearly as important as friends for becoming radicalised and, generally speaking, the internet is more relevant for the radicalisation process for women than for men. Thus, the most vulnerable group for internet radicalisation seems to be young women.

<sup>289</sup> Mrkaja, Deana, Eine Rückkehr gibt es für sie nicht: Warum sich deutsche Mädchen dem Islamischen Staat anschließen, Focus, 18 December 2015.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Herding, Maruta, Langner, Joachim, Glaser, Michaela (2015), *Junge Menschen und gewaltorientierter Islamismus – Forschungsbefunde zu Hinwendungs- und Radikalisierungsfaktoren*, Bundeszentrum für politische Bildung.

<sup>292</sup> Bundeskriminalamt, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus (2017), *Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind*. Fortschreibung 2016.

<sup>293</sup> Deutsches Institut für Vertrauen und Sicherheit im Internet (2016), *Radikalisierung Jugendlicher über das Internet? Ein Literaturüberblick*, DIVSI, Hamburg.

<sup>294</sup> Bundeskriminalamt, Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz und Hessisches Informations- und Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus (2017), *Analyse der Radikalisierungshintergründe und -verläufe der Personen, die aus islamistischer Motivation aus Deutschland in Richtung Syrien oder Irak ausgereist sind*. Fortschreibung 2016.

### **Radicalisation through the internet: experiment by a German journalist**

In 2016, a journalist from the German broadcasting station NDR set out to explore why extremist organisations seem to be so attractive for adolescents on the internet. After having set up a fake profile on Facebook of an 18-year-old girl, she liked the website of the well-known German Islamist preacher Pierre Vogel. This very quickly led to contact with numerous individuals – women and men – who made her compliments, offered to answer any questions she might have, and generally conveyed a sense of community. She received friend requests on Facebook by people who displayed themselves with veils, masks and weapons. They told her about their own conversion, taught her new rules to live by (such as for instance to wear a veil and not listen to music anymore) and sent her propaganda videos idealising the life under ISIS/Da'esh and depicting atrocities by "the West". Finally, she was invited to come to Syria and was promised support to get there. From the first contact to the invitation to come to Syria it took only two weeks.<sup>295</sup>

The "ideal type" of internet radicalisation can be characterised in four phases: after a short *orientation phase* with rather ordinary user behaviour, the *steering towards Salafist content* starts. This phase is characterised by joining Salafist Facebook groups and websites, a significant growth of Islamist "Facebook friends" and a related change of the profile picture and articulation of interests. In the third phase, *violent Salafism is explicitly supported*. Friends and contacts that do not fit into the new ideology are rejected and pictures and videos depicting Muslims as victims of the West are shared. This is followed by the last phase, the *jihadist alignment*, characterised by the active call to participate in jihad and to live under the Sharia.<sup>296</sup>

However, women are not only victims of internet propaganda, but also are often actively involved in spreading it. There are several cases of German women who describe their life under the rule of the Islamic state on the internet and thus try to attract other women to join them and come to Syria. They offer advice and support for the departure to Syria as well as the search for a "suitable" husband. In their role as propagandists, women mostly talk about everyday life under the Islamic State. They display the picture of a functioning welfare state where Muslim women can live free from discrimination. Marriage with a jihadist fighter is glorified as romantic life goal for each pious Muslim woman.<sup>297</sup>

### **Women blogging from ISIS/Da'esh territory**

One example of internet propaganda specifically targeting women is a blog written by a German who calls herself "Muhajira" [emigrant].

Under the heading "A True Heroine," she writes about her life "*at the foundation of jihad, at the foundation of honour.*" She reports that her trip to Syria was "*like a fairy-tale*". "*The feeling is indescribable*", she states. "*Finally, I am free to wear my niqab as I like without seeing and hearing ridicule.*" The blogger is also open about helping to find girls for fighters. "*Because there are a lot of unmarried mujahedeen here, we will find the right brother,*" she wrote in one entry. One bride whom she helped was particularly

<sup>295</sup> The coverage is available (in German) at: <http://www.ardmediathek.de/tv/Panorama-3/Angeworben-im-Netz-der-Dschihadisten/NDR-Fernsehen/Video?bcastId=14049184&documentId=33155922>

<sup>296</sup> Deutsches Institut für Vertrauen und Sicherheit im Internet (2016), *Radikalisierung Jugendlicher über das Internet? Ein Literaturüberblick*, DIVSI, Hamburg.

<sup>297</sup> Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (2015), *Jihadistinnen und ihre Rolle bei der Anwerbung von Frauen für den „Islamischen Staat“ (IS)*.



happy, Muhajira reports. "Her sisters are now eager to come here and marry a Mujahedeen as well."<sup>298</sup>

There are also, albeit fewer, descriptions of war experiences and handling weapons. Yet, these experiences are not portrayed as being very unsettling, rather as a latent risk with little impact on daily routine and merely an "inconvenience" resulting in having to move to other houses or cities.<sup>299</sup>

Such descriptions on social media play an important role in persuading other women to depart.

#### 6.4. Good practice initiatives

There are numerous initiatives in Germany aiming at prevention and/or countering extremism with a focus of Islamist fundamentalism. Some of them have a broad focus, including women; some are specifically targeted at women. A few examples are described in more details below.

##### **HAYAT-Germany<sup>300</sup>**

Hayat (Turkish and Arabic for "Life") is the first German counselling programme for persons involved in radical Salafist groups or on the path of a violent jihadist radicalisation, including those travelling to Syria and other combat zones. HAYAT is also available to the relatives of radicalised persons. Since January 2012, HAYAT has been the partner of the German Federal Office for Immigration and Refugee Affairs. Once the counsellor gains a clear picture of the concrete situation, an individual counselling process and step-by-step plan is designed, including various measures to prevent further radicalisation or to stop and reverse the process.

##### **Violence Prevention Network (VPN)<sup>301</sup>**

The VPN is a group of specialists with experience in anti-violence work and the prevention of extremism. VPN has identified a way to address people who have affiliated themselves with anti-democratic structures without humiliating them, thus facilitating their reinsertion in the democratic community. Activities include prevention of radicalisation, work with those endangered by radicalisation, counselling for parents in the context of Islamism, work within the penal system with people motivated by ideology or extremism, work with radicalised parties (prospective emigrants and returnees from Syria), international work and further education, research and monitoring and issuing publications. The VPN maintains numerous projects all over Germany. One project particularly targeted at young women is MAXIMA<sup>302</sup>. The project's goal is to provide education about extremism and recruitment strategies as well as to develop strategies for girls and young women when signs of radicalisation arise in their peer groups. Other objectives are to demystify the phenomenon of jihadism and to increase the ability of girls and young women to distance themselves from extremism.

<sup>298</sup> Diehl, Jörg, Gude, Hubert, Schmid, Barbar and, Schmid, Fidelius (2015), *Daughters of Jihad. The German Women of Islamic State*, Der Spiegel, 13 February 2015. Available at:

<http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/a-wave-of-women-are-leaving-germany-to-join-islamic-state-a-1017571.html>

<sup>299</sup> <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/aktuelles/schlaglicht/schlaglicht-2015-07-frauen-im-jihad>

<sup>300</sup> <http://hayat-deutschland.de/english/>

<sup>301</sup> <http://www.violence-prevention-network.de/en/>

<sup>302</sup> <http://www.violence-prevention-network.de/en/projects/maxima>

### **Die Freiheit die ich meine (the freedom that I mean)<sup>303</sup>**

The project aims at empowering Muslim girls and young women and turning them into multipliers within their family, community, social environment or friends. They are encouraged to live their religion self-confidently without denigrating others with a different faith. In doing so, their own experiences of discrimination and inequality due to their ethnic or religious origin are also addressed. Starting from the findings of the causes of the radicalisation processes of young women and girls, needs-oriented and target group-specific concepts of political education as well as prevention are developed. The programme is based on three pillars: workshops with student groups, educational courses and thematic events.

### **Frauen stärken Demokratie (women strengthen democracy)<sup>304</sup>**

The project is committed to the prevention of gender-specific violence and, in particular, of cultural, religious and tradition-based violence, and in this framework, implements projects and education with and for women, mainly from countries of the Middle East. The project is especially directed at mothers of young people from religious communities, mosques or prayer houses. The project focuses on the potential and responsibility of women in their role as mothers and as political, active subjects of a democratic society. It aims to sensitise and strengthen women, to convey democratic values and attitudes in their families and in the community, to enable them to actively counteract the risk of the radicalisation of young people through Salafist organisations, in both an individual and socially responsible way. The project also aims to contribute to a gender-differentiated perspective in research and the development of action strategies for prevention of violent Islamist radicalisation.

### **The "WomEx" project<sup>305</sup>**

The two-year project "Women/girls in violent extremism – WomEx" focussed more generally on analysing the gender aspects of violent extremism, thus not particularly on Islamist fundamentalism. Some of the findings of the project nevertheless also apply to Islam. Actions under this project included interviews with experts and female ex-offenders/at-risk young people about the patterns of female radicalisation, the function of girls/women in violent extremist milieus, and disengagement experiences; producing case study materials about successful interventions, good practice and lessons learned, developing guidelines for de-radicalisation and anti-hate crime work with girls/women, acquiring female 'de-radicalising narratives' from girls/women who disengaged and cooperate with website tools of de-radicalising narratives and cooperating with the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) inaugurated by the EC, DG Home Affairs.

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<sup>303</sup> <http://www.gesichtzeigen.de/angebote/die-freiheit-die-ich-meine/>

<sup>304</sup> <http://www.utamara.org/index.php/de/projekte/195-utamara-startet-neues-projekt>

<sup>305</sup> <http://www.womex.org/en/about/the-womex-project/>

## 7. CASE STUDY: THE NETHERLANDS

### 7.1. Introduction

Every quarter, the Dutch National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) releases a public update on developments concerning extremism in the Netherlands. In the June 2017 update, the threat level remained at level 4, with 5 being the highest. This means that while there exists a chance of an attack, there is no concrete evidence an attack is being planned in the Netherlands.<sup>306</sup> Jihadist movements currently pose the most substantial threat in the Netherlands. The Dutch jihadist milieu consists of at least several hundred individuals who interact on both open social media platforms as well as on applications that cannot, or only with great difficulty, be intercepted. As a movement, the jihadist scene in the Netherlands has a relatively low degree of organisation with little hierarchy and is characterised by family or friendship relations. So far, the National Coordinator believes that there are no clear signals that Dutch jihadists are moving towards using violence. However, the return of jihadists from Syria and Iraq might change this dynamic.<sup>307</sup>

Both the NCTV and the Dutch Intelligence Service (AIVD) report that since the beginning of 2016, the number of individuals leaving the Netherlands for Syria and Iraq has dropped<sup>308</sup> and now has ended.<sup>309</sup> Since the beginning of the conflict, 280 Dutch individuals successfully travelled to ISIS/Da'esh controlled territory (most recent numbers are from February 2017).<sup>310</sup> Around 190 Dutch individuals with Jihadist intentions are still believed to reside in Syria/Iraq.<sup>311</sup> The AIVD reports that most Dutch jihadists joined ISIS/Da'esh and a small group has joined Tahrir al-Sham (formerly Jabhat al-Nusra).<sup>312</sup> Dutch individuals have been known to carry out violent attacks<sup>313</sup> and there is reason to believe that some have relatively important positions.<sup>314</sup>

A total of 45 Dutch individuals have been reported deceased.<sup>315</sup> Since the beginning of 2017, reports of the death of Dutch, mostly male, individuals have increased. In total, around 50 Dutch individuals have returned.<sup>316</sup> The AIVD reports that most of these people returned prior to 2015. The AIVD treats returnees as part of the domestic jihadist threat, as they resided in the conflict area, received military training, have combat experience and access to an extended jihadist network.<sup>317</sup>

The latest estimates put the number of Dutch women in the territory at around 70.<sup>318</sup> The AIVD reports that at least 80 children live in ISIS/Da'esh territory, and it is believed that around half of those were born there; and that around 80% are under the age of nine. Around

<sup>306</sup> National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (June 2017), *Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 45*.

<sup>307</sup> National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (June 2017), *Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 45*.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.; General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) (February 2017), *Focus on Returnees*.

<sup>309</sup> General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) (February 2017), *Focus on Returnees*.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.; National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (June 2017), *Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 45*.

<sup>311</sup> National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (June 2017), *Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 45*.

<sup>312</sup> General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) (February 2017), *Focus on Returnees*.

<sup>313</sup> There have been reports of Dutch fighters involved in suicide missions. See for example: Zech, Maxime (2014), *Dutch suicide attacks in Iraq and Syria*, NLTimes.nl. Available at: <https://nltimes.nl/2014/04/23/dutch-suicide-attacks-iraq-syria>

<sup>314</sup> Weggemans, Daan, Peters, Ruud, Bakker, Edwin and De Bont, Roel (2016), *Bestemming Syrië, een exploratieve studie naar de leefsituatie van Nederlandse 'uitreizigers' in Syrië*, Universiteit Leiden, Universiteit Amsterdam, 3 January 2016, p. 51.

<sup>315</sup> National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (June 2017), *Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 45*.

<sup>316</sup> National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (June 2017), *Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 45*.

<sup>317</sup> General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) (February 2017), *Focus on Returnees*.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid.

a third of the returnees are female.<sup>319</sup> The National Coordinator warns that as ISIS/Da'esh is under increased pressure due to the loss of territory, women too might be involved in attacks.<sup>320</sup>

## 7.2. Profiles of women

Most studies on Western women and girls travelling to Syria and Iraq conclude that there is no single profile of female jihadists.<sup>321</sup> A review of the profiles of the Dutch women and girls who travelled to Syria and Iraq, or attempted to do so, offers a similar conclusion. There are examples of dominant, highly visible women. Some of them have been accused of recruitment and proselytization, such as Shukri and Imane. Both women have been very active online, disseminating inflammatory and violent material.<sup>322</sup> Police investigations show Shukri was in close contact with several young girls who later attempted to travel to Syria. Also, her first and second husbands travelled to the Caliphate. Shukri was charged with recruitment but was acquitted due to a lack of evidence. However, she was sentenced to six months' probation for disseminating inflammatory material.<sup>323</sup> On the other side of the spectrum are examples of young, naïve girls, many of whom have been approached by other women and persuaded to travel to the Caliphate. The fifteen-year old Moezdalifa attempted to travel to Syria after being recruited by two women from Belgium, who convinced her that she could have a perfect life in Syria and get married. Moezdalifa was stopped at Dusseldorf Airport.<sup>324</sup>

Between these two extremes, the stories and backgrounds of Dutch female jihadists are very diverse. There are cases of women and girls with a history of abuse or addiction and a troubled childhood. Many of the women and girls discussed in a study of Dutch and Belgian converts travelling to Syria and Iraq had experienced domestic and/or sexual abuse and grew up in broken families.<sup>325</sup> There are girls who appear to be just normal teenagers, with an ordinary childhood, such as the girls discussed in an article in *Vrij Nederland* on radicalised girls.<sup>326</sup> There are cases of women who travelled to the ISIS/Da'esh territory with their husbands to live with their families under Islamic rule. Meryam most likely travelled to Syria with her husband and children because she wanted to live in the Islamic State.<sup>327</sup> And there are examples of women who claim to have been forced, or tricked. Laura H., who managed to escape ISIS/Da'esh-territory with her two children, claimed her abusive husband tricked

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (June 2017), *Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 45*.

<sup>321</sup> Bakker, Edwin, and De Leede, Seran (2015), *European female jihadists in Syria: exploring an under-researched topic*, ICCT; Perešin, Anita & Cervone, Alberto (2015), *The Western Muhajirat of ISIS*, Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, 38:7; Saltman, Erin Marie and Smith, Melanie (2015), *Till martyrdom do us part, gender and the ISIS phenomenon*, Institute for Strategic Dialogue & ICSR.

<sup>322</sup> Bakker, Edwin & Grol, Peter (2017), *Nederlandse jihadisten, van naïeve idealisten tot geharde terroristen*, *Hollands Diep*, pp. 206-208; Bakker, Edwin, and De Leede, Seran (2015), *European female jihadists in Syria: exploring an under-researched topic*, ICCT.

<sup>323</sup> <https://www.rechtspraak.nl/Organisatie-en-contact/Organisatie/Gerechtshoven/Gerechtshof-Den-Haag/Nieuws/Paginas/Veroordelingen-door-hof-Den-Haag-in-zaak-Syriegangers.aspx>

<sup>324</sup> Bakker, Edwin and De Leede, Seran (2015), *European female jihadists in Syria: exploring an under-researched topic*, ICCT.

<sup>325</sup> Van San, Marion (2015), *Lost souls searching for answers? Belgian and Dutch converts joining the Islamic State*, Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol. 9, No. 5. Available at:

<http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/460/912>

<sup>326</sup> Alberts, Jaco and Lensink, Harry (2015), *Seks en de jihad, Nederlandse moslima's vallen voor strijders*, *Vrij Nederland*. Available at:

<https://www.vn.nl/seks-en-de-jihad-waarom-nederlandse-moslimas-op-religieuze-strijders-vallen/>

<sup>327</sup> Bakker, Edwin and Grol, Peter (2017) *Nederlandse jihadisten, van naïeve idealisten tot geharde terroristen*, *Hollands Diep*, pp. 209-210.

her into travelling to Syria.<sup>328</sup> She is still under criminal investigation and suspected of being part of a terrorist organisation.<sup>329</sup>

In sum, the personalities, socio-demographic profiles and backgrounds of the women who travelled to Syria and Iraq are too wide-ranging to draw up a workable profile. However, this does not necessarily mean that it is not possible to identify factors that can possibly increase the risk of radicalisation. In the literature on the phenomenon of radicalisation, several such factors or situations have been identified. These theoretical findings help to explain the radicalisation of many of the Dutch women and girls and can provide insights for (future) prevention efforts.

First, most of the female departees are young. Their average age is 20.3 years old.<sup>330</sup> Research shows that in the phase of adolescence, individuals are more susceptible to radicalisation. In this phase, individuals form their identity. Their search for belonging makes them more vulnerable to extremist messages.<sup>331</sup> In addition, adolescents are less capable of dealing with negative emotions, less capable of handling stressful situations and are more vulnerable to developing delinquent and antisocial behaviour.<sup>332</sup> Furthermore, adolescents are more vulnerable to propaganda over the internet and on social media, as they often regard the internet as a viable source of religious education and information.<sup>333</sup>

Second, research shows that particularly adolescents with a hybrid identity can be vulnerable.<sup>334</sup> Among Dutch jihadists, this is also noticeable, as a substantial part of the Dutch departees have dual nationality. A database with the details of 158 Dutch departees shows that almost 45% also had Moroccan nationality and 12% Turkish nationality. Around 20% were autochthonous Dutch.

Third, different female departees (mostly converts) had a history of abuse, criminal behaviour, acting out and/or came from broken families.<sup>335</sup> Scholars argue that while further systematic study on this possible nexus is required<sup>336</sup>, its plausibility is underscored by the jihadi discourse that emphasises ISIS/Da'esh welcomes everyone and offers a “clean slate” and a route to salvation.<sup>337</sup>

Fourth, research shows the experience of social, economic and political exclusion and discrimination can increase an individual’s vulnerability to radicalisation.<sup>338</sup> Pearson and Winterbotham argue that because of Muslim women’s choice of attire (headscarf, *burqa* or

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., pp. 210-214.

<sup>329</sup> Dupuy, Lisa (2017), *Terrorismeverdachte Laura H. voorlopig vrij*, NRC.nl. Available at: <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/07/26/terrorismeverdachte-laura-h-uit-voorlopige-hechtenis-a1567960>

<sup>330</sup> Bergema, Reinier and Koudijs, Sander (2015), *Nederlandse jihadisten in Syrië en Irak, een analyse*, International Spectator. Available at: <https://www.internationalespectator.nl/pub/2015/10/nederlandse-jihadisten-in-syrie-en-irak/>

<sup>331</sup> Feddes, Allard R., Nickolson, Lars, Doosje, Bertjan (2015), *Triggerfactoren in het radicaliseringsproces*, Expertise Unit Stabiliteit – Universiteit van Amsterdam, p. 25.

<sup>332</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>335</sup> Weenink, Anton W. (2015), *Behavioral problems and disorders among radicals in police files*, Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol. 9 No. 2. Available at: <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/416/html>; Van San, Marion (2015), *Lost souls searching for answers? Belgian and Dutch converts joining the Islamic State*, Perspectives on Terrorism, Vol. 9, No. 5. Available at: <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/460/912>

<sup>336</sup> Feddes, Allard R., Nickolson, Lars, Doosje, Bertjan (2015), *Triggerfactoren in het radicaliseringsproces*, Expertise Unit Stabiliteit – Universiteit van Amsterdam, September 2015, p. 27.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., p. 27, referring to: NCTV *Het mondiale jihadisme, een fenomeenanalyse en een reflectie op radicalisering*. Available at: <http://www.nctv.nl>.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., p. 38; Pearson, Elizabeth and Winterbotham, Emily (2017), *Women, gender and Daesh radicalization*, The RUSI journal, 162:3, p. 64.

*niqab*), they are more likely to experience discrimination or perceive exclusion based on their religious expressions. Their study shows that different women and girls explained rejection of pious clothing as a factor in their radicalisation process.<sup>339</sup> Pearson and Winterbotham furthermore argue that women and girls who do not feel heard or recognised could potentially be more vulnerable to radicalisation.<sup>340</sup>

Finally, many of the Dutch female departees seemed to have known each other. There are cases of women and girls radicalising together, some under the influence of family members who had already made the trip to Syria or Iraq.<sup>341</sup> Research shows that friends can have a significant impact on a person's vulnerability to radicalisation.<sup>342</sup> Having friends or relatives that support ISIS/Da'esh or have already made the trip to the Caliphate appears to increase their vulnerability to radicalisation.

As argued by different scholars, caution is advised when translating findings regarding increased vulnerability for radicalisation into policies and programmes. Labelling certain groups as more vulnerable to radicalisation can be counter-effective as it can increase stigmatisation and feelings of estrangement.<sup>343</sup>

### **7.3. The role of online radicalisation**

The Dutch National Coordinator of Security and Counterterrorism reports that, increasingly, Dutch jihadists are active in closed groups on applications almost impossible to intercept.<sup>344</sup> One of these applications is Telegram. Telegram is a messaging app that allows individual message content to be transmitted to an unlimited number of subscribed users. The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) describes how ISIS/Da'esh has created several "Channels" on Telegram for sharing their content to thousands of followers.<sup>345</sup> By joining a channel, users stay informed of updates from that specific group. MEMRI reports that ISIS/Da'esh and its supporters share content on these channels that include tutorials on manufacturing weapons and launching cyber attacks and calls for targeted killing and lone-wolf attacks. The web addresses used in these channels are shared and promoted on other social media such as Twitter.<sup>346</sup>

Similar to women and girls from other EU Member States, Dutch women and girls are also highly active online. From Syria and Iraq, Dutch women give other women and girls advice on how to make the trip.<sup>347</sup> In the Netherlands, women also disseminate inflammatory material, try to convince others to support the jihadi cause and give each other practical tips on how to stay undetected. The Dutch magazine *Vrij Nederland* got access to a confidential file of the criminal investigation into Dutch jihadists and reports that many of the (under-

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>341</sup> Alberts, Jaco and Lensink, Harry (2015), *Seks en de jihad, Nederlandse moslima's vallen voor strijders*, Vrij Nederland.

<sup>342</sup> Feddes, Allard R., Nickolson, Lars, Doosje, Bertjan (2015), *Triggerfactoren in het radicaliseringsproces*, Expertise Unit Stabiliteit – Universiteit van Amsterdam, p. 54.

<sup>343</sup> Ibid., p. 72; Huckerby, Jayne, *Women, Gender and the U.K. Government's CVE Efforts: Looking Back and Forward*, in Chowdhury Fink, Naureen, Zeiger, Sara and Bhulai Rafia eds.(2016), *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, Hedayah and The Global Center on Cooperative Security, p. 85.

<sup>344</sup> National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (June 2017), *Dreigingsbeeld Terrorisme Nederland 45*.

<sup>345</sup> Website of the Middle East Media Research Institute. Available at: <http://cjlaboratory.org/latest-reports/jihadis-shift-to-using-secure-communication-app-telegrams-channels-service/>

<sup>346</sup> <http://cjlaboratory.org/latest-reports/jihadis-shift-to-using-secure-communication-app-telegrams-channels-service/>

<sup>347</sup> Alberts, Jaco and Lensink, Harry (2015), *Seks en de jihad, Nederlandse moslima's vallen voor strijders*, Vrij Nederland, 25 April 2015.

aged) girls who departed from the region knew each other. They maintained contact via Facebook and WhatsApp. Girls that successfully made the trip told their friends who were still in the Netherlands how great their lives in the Caliphate were and how close they all lived to each other, trying to convince the others to make the trip as well and giving them advice.<sup>348</sup>

But even though social media and the internet can play an important role in the process of radicalisation of women and girls, it does not mean offline contacts cannot be just as important in female radicalisation. Esma Salama, developer of a highly valued Dutch de-radicalisation programme, explains jihadi women are often very active: they are involved in volunteer and community work and organise lectures, both in mosques and in their homes. Jihadi women approach girls who they feel might be susceptible to their message and invite them to such events. So even though girls are less visible in the public domain, they too, like their male counterparts, can be approached and introduced into jihadi networks this way.<sup>349</sup>

#### 7.4. Good practice initiatives

The **Dutch Action Programme on Jihadism** includes three pillars: to protect democracy and the constitutional state, to challenge jihadist movements and to reduce the breeding ground for radicalisation.<sup>350</sup> The Dutch government facilitates prevention efforts by offering organisations that deal with radicalisation, programmes to increase their expertise on the phenomenon.<sup>351</sup> The prevention of radicalisation in the Netherlands is to a large extent organised on a municipal level and consists of both a broad approach and an individual approach. In most cases, civil society organisations, community workers, mosques and government institutions work closely together. As different municipalities experience different levels of radicalisation in their communities, the approach and the number of programmes offered varies.<sup>352</sup>

There are different programmes in the Netherlands aimed at preventing radicalisation that focus on and include women and girls. Most programmes work to increase the resilience and self-worth of women and girls and to avert their isolation from society. In addition, programmes invest in the training of professionals and volunteers working with women and girls to help them recognise signs of radicalisation. The Amsterdam-based organisation **Nisa for Nisa**<sup>353</sup>, for example, offers activities aimed at increasing the resilience of women and girls with a migration background and assists in finding professional help if required. Nisa for Nisa also offers awareness-raising sessions on radicalisation and polarisation and cooperates with the Amsterdam Strategic Network Radicalisation and Polarisation (SNRP).

#### SIPI – DIAMANT method

The Foundation for Intercultural Participation and Integration (SIPI) offers research, consulting, training and education in the field of integration, reintegration, education and youth on a national level. It has developed a programme that provides support for young

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Interview with Esma Salama on 18 October 2017.

<sup>350</sup> National Coordinator Security and Counterterrorism (2014), *Actieprogramma integrale aanpak jihadisme, overzicht maatregelen en acties*, 29 August 2014. Available at:

<https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2014/08/30/actieprogramma-integrale-aanpak-jihadisme>

<sup>351</sup> Inspectorate of Security and Justice (2017), *Evaluatie van het actieprogramma integrale aanpak jihadisme*, p. 9. Available at:

<https://www.inspectievenj.nl/Publicaties/rapporten/2017/09/06/evaluatie-van-het-actieprogramma-integrale-aanpak-jihadisme>

<sup>352</sup> Website of the Dutch Association of Municipalities. Available at:

<https://vng.nl/onderwerpenindex/veiligheid/aanpak-radicalisering/nieuws/actieprogramma-heeft-aanpak-radicalisering-verbeterd>

<sup>353</sup> Website of Nisa for Nisa. Available at: <http://nisa4nisa.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Jaarverslag-2016-Nisa-voor-Nisa.pdf>

individuals with hybrid identities that are considered vulnerable to criminal behaviour and/or radicalisation. This DIAMANT method offers a prevention programme and an intervention/de-radicalisation programme, DIAMANT-PLUS. The programme works only with professional, registered coaches with a pedagogical background. So far, the method has reached over 500 young individuals and is offered in different Dutch municipalities including Amsterdam, The Hague and Rotterdam. Academic studies on the effectiveness of the DIAMANT-PLUS method show that the de-radicalisation programme increases the resilience of radicalised young individuals on the emotional, cognitive and behavioural level in the face of extremist influences.<sup>354</sup>

#### *Gender-specific approach*

The preventive and the interventionist programmes include training specifically for women and girls. Esma Salama, creator of the DIAMANT programme and expert on mediation and diversity at SIPI, explains the need for this gender focus. She explains that adolescent girls with a Muslim background deal with different issues compared to their male counterparts and are consequently exposed to radicalisation in a different way. Many girls with a Muslim background are subjected to a strict upbringing and are taught to obey their parents. Issues around sexuality are not discussed and as their (sexual) behaviour is directly linked to the family honour, contact with boys is prohibited. When girls have questions about their identity and their sexuality within Islam, they can become vulnerable to recruiters. This specific exposure does not apply to boys. Salama points out how recruiters exploit this vulnerability. There are cases in which girls, some as young as thirteen, were told by recruiters that in Islam, women too have the possibility to explore their sexuality. Through informal marriages, they were told, women can have physical contact with men. However, after the consummation of such a marriage, the girls found themselves in a problematic situation. Having lost their virginity, the girls realised they could be disowned by their families, or worse. As a consequence, some of these girls became even more isolated, and ended up more deeply involved in the jihadi network as it offered them guidance, friendship, security and purpose. Some of them ended up trying to travel to Syria/Iraq.<sup>355</sup>

#### *Prevention training*

The DIAMANT prevention training is a group training that focuses on resilience, self-image and awareness. It is offered to both boys and girls, mostly in separate groups. Participation is on a voluntary basis. Some come of their own accord, while concerned community workers, teachers or mosques refer others to the programme. The boys and girls in the programme are often young – minors – who are involved in a radical network but are not radicalised themselves. By undertaking activities, answering questions, discussing sensitive topics including sexuality and by providing a safe environment, trainers provide the boys and girls with alternative life visions. The training also offers a programme for so-called ambassadors, where young individuals learn how to recognise radicalisation in their environment and how they can respond.

#### *Intervention and de-radicalisation programme*

The DIAMANT-PLUS de-radicalisation programme is an interventionist trajectory in which an allocated coach offers 24/7 intensive personal coaching and family support. The de-radicalisation programme focuses on resilience and identity and is offered to girls (minors) who have attempted to travel to Syria and Iraq. Girls participating in the programme are often radicalised to such an extent that low-key or regular support is not sufficient. They require 24/7 intensive support and guidance. These radicalised girls are given the choice

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<sup>354</sup> Website of the Foundation for Intercultural Participation and Integration. Available at: <http://www.s-ipi.nl/diamant/>

<sup>355</sup> Interview by author with Esma Salama on 18 October 2017.



between confinement in a closed juvenile facility and participation in the DIAMANT-PLUS trajectory. A commitment to the trajectory entails strict conditions. The participant is not allowed to have contact with her radical network, her online activities are severely restricted and school attendance is obligatory. Families play an important role and are closely involved in the programme. So far, fifteen girls have participated in the programme. For most girls, the programme seems to be effective. In one case, it was decided the programme did not align with the required support or care needed for that specific girl. In another case, the participant had turned eighteen and decided to leave the trajectory. Under Dutch law, the programme can only be legally enforced in the case of minors. DIAMANT had no other mechanism to keep her in the programme.<sup>356</sup>

The one-year intervention programme offers counselling on three levels: emotional, cognitive and behavioural. The programme involves both counselling for the girl as well as her family. Parents are made aware of the need to set boundaries and the importance of school attendance. They are also offered guidance in pedagogical and communication skills. The girl is under strict supervision to ensure that she does not regain contact with her former network. The coach maintains close contact with the school and, at least in the first few weeks, spends every day with the girl and her family. As the programme progresses, identity issues are introduced. Adolescents often confine their identity to the group they belong to. By discovering that her personality transcends her religious identity, the girl can develop a different perspective. The final phase of the programme discusses religious issues and is centred on increasing the ability of the girl to critically assess her worldviews.<sup>357</sup>

### **Steunpunt Sabr – Oumnia works**

*Steunpunt Sabr* is a Dutch non-profit organisation that focuses on supporting women and their families in need of care for social and psychological problems. In response to the radicalisation of many young men and women, *Steunpunt Sabr* developed, together with mothers and experts in the fields of psychology and theology, a radicalisation awareness programme for mothers: Oumnia Works. Director Karima Sahla stresses the need to include mothers in prevention efforts. First, she explains how different mothers of radicalised boys and girls told *Steunpunt Sabr* that they had suspected something was wrong, but that they ignored it. Some mothers hoped the problem would solve itself; others tried to deal with the issue by talking to family or the local Imam. They said if they had been aware of the dangers of radicalisation, or if they had known whom to turn to with their concerns, they would have responded differently. Second, mothers with first-hand insight into the radicalisation of their children are often reticent about talking to authorities. Consequently, their valuable insights are not incorporated in programmes aimed at preventing radicalisation. As a local, community-based, bottom up organisation, *Sabr* is very well positioned to bring both parties together.<sup>358</sup>

Oumnia Works was launched in November 2015 and is offered in ten municipalities in the Netherlands. The programme works closely with community workers, teachers and local police officers. So far, it has reached over 1,000 mothers. The programme is developed in close cooperation with mothers of departees and the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security. It is easily accessible and tailored to specific cultural and ethnic backgrounds of participants of the groups. The programme consists of seven modules. The first module is an introduction in which participants are made aware of the danger of radicalisation. The second is an interactive, educative game in which mothers are familiarised with radicalisation and discuss possible responses. The subsequent model provides pedagogical tools for dealing with

<sup>356</sup> Interview by author with Esma Salama on 18 October 2017.

<sup>357</sup> Interview by author with Esma Salama on 18 October 2017.

<sup>358</sup> Interview by the author with Karima Sahla on 16 October 2017.

adolescent children. Social media are discussed in the fourth module and the fifth module familiarises mothers with existing support facilities. An Islamic theorist offers the sixth module that covers hybrid identities and Islamic identity in Dutch society. In the final module, mothers can give feedback on the programme and have the possibility to discuss any remaining questions. The programme ensures continuity of support by offering a 24/7 helpdesk and follow-on activities.<sup>359</sup>

Participants of the programme state their knowledge on the issue of radicalisation and parenting has increased significantly. They are often more involved with their communities, are better aware of where to turn with their concerns and have more trust in local authorities and support facilities.

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<sup>359</sup> Interview by the author with Karima Sahla on 16 October 2017.

## 8. CASE STUDY: SPAIN

### 8.1. Introduction

For its Spanish audience, ISIS/Da'esh has a specific message based on the mandatory fight to recover the historic Islamic territory of "al-Andalus", through the re-conquest of those parts of Spain and Portugal, which were formerly the Emirate of Córdoba (756-929). This theme features predominantly in the radicalisation process<sup>360</sup> and it formed part of the ideology behind the 11 March 2004 and the 17 August 2017 attacks.

The Spanish jihadist network mainly consists of Spanish citizens of Moroccan origin and Moroccan immigrants. Thus, it is important to examine the Moroccan milieu in order to understand some of the social, economic and political grievances that motivate engagement with extremism. Moreover, the Spanish territories of Ceuta and Melilla, and Tétouan in northern Morocco have been "hotspots" of jihadism,<sup>361</sup> exporting the ideology to the Spanish mainland.

Individuals of Moroccan origin have considerable influence in the Spanish jihadist networks.<sup>362</sup> For that reason, it is important to understand the historic background to the social, cultural, political and economic exchanges between the two countries. The most significant exchanges started in the 1970s with the first Moroccan migration to Spain. The rapid economic development of the 1980s, following Spain's accession to the European Economic Community, increased the demand for workers and created the conditions for the new wave of Moroccan migrants, who also brought their families with them.

Once in Spain, female Moroccan immigrants followed similar lifestyles and roles to those in their home country. They also kept in contact with relatives who had remained in Morocco and those who migrated to other countries.<sup>363</sup> In general, the growth of technological communication devices facilitated the task of connecting people in different geographic locations. In particular, social media platforms like Facebook or WhatsApp created a digital space which Muslim women could easily join and therefor access a range of contents from daily activities to religious debates.<sup>364</sup>

The autonomous government of Catalonia received the highest number of Moroccan workers. The number of Muslims in Spain increased with the demographic expansion of the Moroccan population and the migration routes were also the routes of Salafism into Spain. In subsequent years, the presence of jihadist cells in the country became a reality.

The impact of these jihadist cells in Spain was felt on the fatal morning of 11 March 2004 in Madrid, when the capital's commuting trains were targeted by Al Qaeda's explosives. This attack altered the nature, composition and structure of both the terrorist threat and the terrorist networks involved in the attacks.<sup>365</sup> It also led to a transformation of the legal framework in order to penalise specific jihadist activities through the courts. Besides the

<sup>360</sup> Reinares, Fernando, (2016), *Al-Qaeda' Revenge: The 2004 Madrid Train Bombings*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; New York: Columbia University Press, p.14.

<sup>361</sup> Keeney, M. (2011), *Hotbed of Radicalization or Something Else?: An Ethnographic Exploration of a Muslim Neighborhood in Ceuta*, *Terrorism and Political Violence* 23, no. 4, 537-559.

<sup>362</sup> Reinares, Fernando; García-Calvo, Carola (2016), *El Estado Islámico en España*. Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, pp. 15, 65, p.p 70-71.

<sup>363</sup> Carvalho, Claudia (2016), *The importance of Web 2.0 for Jihad 3.0: Female Jihadists coming to grips with religious violence on Facebook*, *Online Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet*, Vol.11, p.58. Available at: <http://heiu.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/index.php/religions/article/view/23627>

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Reinares, Fernando (2010), *The Madrid Bombings and Global Jihadism*, *Survival*. 52 (2): 83-104, p.100.

criminalisation of jihadism-related acts (financing, propaganda, recruitment, training), the new laws addressed migration with the goal of participating in terrorist organisations and/or assaults.<sup>366</sup>

There is not much possibility to explore offline sources of the jihadist narrative in Spain. The heavily controlled Spanish mosques, Imams and "*khutbas*" [sermons] issue politically correct and coordinated statements that openly condemn jihadist discourses and activities. In fact, they are so similar that they can be considered as a "single narrative" of countering jihadism. Thus, offline mobilisation is easier in Morocco than in Spain. This also means that new ways of mobilisation had to be found. Neumann and Rogers reached this same conclusion in their report about European mosques and hubs of radicalisation.<sup>367</sup> It is striking that counter-terrorism forces are still following the protocol of keeping mosques and the Imams under strict surveillance. Instead of reducing jihadist mobilisation, this strategy is just relocating it to the other side of the Mediterranean, where jihadist organisations such as ISIS/Da'esh have more freedom of movement.

Hence it is important to design new, flexible counter-terrorism measures during this phase of jihadist mobilisation. With that in mind, on the 23 March 2015, the Moroccan government presented its new anti-terrorist strategy supported by new infrastructure and a new highly skilled team of security and defence professionals. The new "*Bureau central d'investigation judiciaire*" (Central Office of Judicial Investigation)<sup>368</sup> is located in Sale, close to Rabat, next to the state prison and a courthouse that only hears terrorist-related cases. The Office's Director General will now have important instruments to fight terrorism and above all to engage in actions against the growing ISIS/Da'esh jihadist networks in the North African region.

These institutional developments in Morocco regarding counter-terrorism activities have had an impact in European counter-terrorism programmes, given the social contacts between Moroccan and European jihadist networks and the role of certain Islamic scholars and mosques located in the Maghreb region as sources of jihadist mobilisation.

## 8.2. Profiles of women

According to a study on female jihadists, since 2013, 21 Spanish women have left the country to join ISIS/Da'esh in Syria or Iraq.<sup>369</sup> This figure corresponds to 10% of the 208 individuals, who have travelled from Spain to the area of conflict. In terms of age, 75% of the women were between 19 to 28 years old and 45% were single.<sup>370</sup>

Another study conducted by Pearson and Winterbotham indicates that, in comparison with male jihadists, women are most likely to engage with processes of radicalisation online.<sup>371</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Van Ginkel, Bibi, Entenmann, Eva eds. (2016), *The foreign fighters phenomenon in the European Union, profiles, threats and policies*. ICCT research paper prepared for the Netherlands National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism on the occasion of the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union, p. 39. Available at: [https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report\\_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU\\_1-April-2016\\_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf](https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU_1-April-2016_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf)

<sup>367</sup> Neumann, Peter, Rogers, Brooke (2007), *Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Militant Movement in Europe*, King's College London for the European Commission (Directorate General for Justice, Freedom and Security). Available at: [http://icsr.info/publications/papers/1234516791ICSREURResearchReport\\_Proof1.pdf](http://icsr.info/publications/papers/1234516791ICSREURResearchReport_Proof1.pdf)

<sup>368</sup> Bureau central d'investigations judiciaires - <https://www.bladi.net/bureau-central-investigation-judiciaire.html>

<sup>369</sup> García-Calvo, Carola (2017, April), *There is no Life without Jihad and no Jihad without Hijrah: The Jihadist Mobilisation of Women in Spain, 2014-16*. (ARI 34/ 2017). Available at: [http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano\\_en/contenido?WCM\\_GLOBAL\\_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano\\_in/zonas\\_in/ari34-2017-qarciacalvo-jihadist-mobilisation-women-spain-2014-2016](http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/ari34-2017-qarciacalvo-jihadist-mobilisation-women-spain-2014-2016)

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Pearson, Elizabeth; Winterbotham, Emily (2017), *Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation*, The RUSI Journal, 162:3, 60-72.

The results in Spain are in this sense clear: 55.6% of the women arrested were radicalised online compared to only 30.8% of men.<sup>372</sup> The following cases reflect the profiles and pathways of Spanish female jihadists.

### The case of Silvia Celestin<sup>373</sup>

Silvia Celestin was arrested at the age of 44 in the island of Lanzarote (Canary Islands) where she worked as a cleaner at a local hotel. She had converted to Islam when she was 16-years old and living in her hometown of Cadiz where she had been married to a Moroccan citizen. It is believed she started her own process of radicalisation after moving to Mauritania. Soon she became an online jihadist recruiter aiming her propaganda at young girls. She would select potential candidates on Facebook (where she had at least two active accounts under a fake name) and direct the contacts to more secretive platforms, like Telegram and WhatsApp. On Facebook, a woman revealed in a public discussion that Celestin had approached her some time ago: *"She practically invited me to go to Syria, she defended al-Baghdadi [the leader of the Islamic State] and ISIS/Da'esh. I know she was doing it together with other people."*<sup>374</sup>

These "other people" were Moroccan foreign fighters and other online female jihadists who were located in the Maghreb (Mauritania) and South America (Brazil, Mexico). Besides online jihadist recruitment activities and dissemination of violent propaganda, Silvia Celestin was also accused of facilitating the travel of young women to Syria.

### The case of Samira Yerou<sup>375</sup>

Born in Tétouan, Morocco, Samira Yerou (32-years old) migrated to Spain in 2000 where, despite holding a Bachelor's degree, she was working in a factory and as a housekeeper to make ends meet. In 2006, she remarried for a second time to a Moroccan citizen who had migrated to Catalonia, but their precarious economic conditions affected their relationship. According to a court document, she entered into contact with local Salafist-jihadist preachers during a trip to Tétouan, where her radicalisation process was initiated. After returning to Rubí, Barcelona, she was determined to become an online jihadist recruiter and to migrate to Syria. When she was arrested (in the company of her son) in Turkey at the end of 2014, Samira had already recruited several women to the jihadist cause, using social media channels.

The process of Samira's radicalisation took around one year between mobilisation and departure. The short period (as represented in the graphic below) was sufficient to complete her radicalisation.

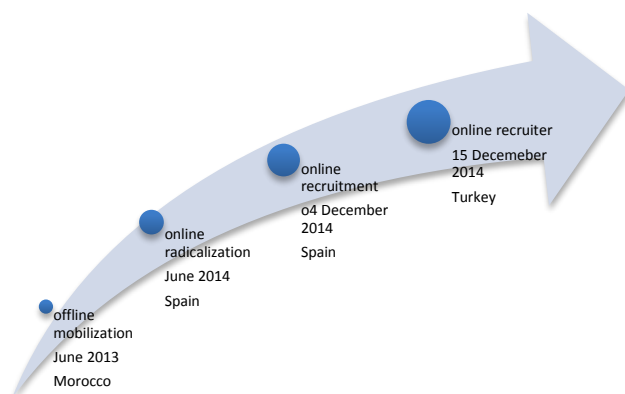
<sup>372</sup> Carvalho, Claudia (2017), *Kids in the green lands of the Khilafat – A Tumblr case study of imagery within the Jihad 3.0 narrative*, Leuven University Press.

<sup>373</sup> Lozano, Andros, (2015), *La celestina gaditana del ISIS*. Available at:

<http://www.elmundo.es/cronica/2015/07/12/55a0d5f4e2704e8f688b456f.html>

<sup>374</sup> Carvalho, Claudia, Saal, Johannes (Forthcoming), *The Hidden Women of the Caliphate – A Glimpse into the Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network on Facebook*.

<sup>375</sup> Carvalho, Claudia (2016), *The importance of Web 2.0 for Jihad 3.0: Female Jihadists coming to grips with religious violence on Facebook*, Online Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet, Vol.11, p.58. Available at: <http://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/index.php/religions/article/view/23627>

**Graph 1: The radicalisation process of Samira Yerou**

It should be noted that Samira was in contact with a high profile Saudi ISIS/Da'esh leader, Omar Seif, a previous member of the Saudi jihadist group, al-Katibah al-Khadra, who had pledged *ba'ya* [allegiance] to al-Baghdadi [the leader of the Islamic State] in 2014. Her proof of commitment to the jihadist cause was achieved when her son, at the time still a toddler, said on the phone to an ISIS/Da'esh member: *"I want to go with the mujahedeen"... "I'm going to cut the throat of a police man."*<sup>376</sup>

As a woman, mother and *muhajirah* [migrant], Samira is important for the analysis of processes of radicalisation because she represents a new gendered perspective of the evolution of women's roles in the jihadist organisation.

**The case of Soukaina Abouddrar<sup>377</sup>**

Soukaina Abouddrar pledged her online *ba'ya* [allegiance] to the Islamic State in 2014 and since then was active online, working to disseminate the jihadist ideology through social media platforms. Soukaina was born in Morocco in 1996 and was raised in Spain. Yet, her online messages were against her host country. She defended the idea of the re-conquest of *al-Andalus* and placing Spain under Islamic governance. In her list of ISIS/Da'esh foreign fighter contacts, the most important was Achraf Jouied, a Moroccan foreign fighter who was responsible for the spreading of the jihadist message in Spain. When Soukaina expressed her wish to migrate, he advised her, according to the police records, to stay in Spain and conduct attacks there. The intention was to promote the growth of single cells, which would be directed to commit terrorist attacks on Spanish soil.

Besides the online propaganda, Soukaina was also indicted for the crimes of online indoctrination and online recruitment of other individuals to the jihadist cause. She is also believed to have had contacts with Samira Yerou.

<sup>376</sup> Judicial, Poder (2015), *Prisión incondicional para la marroquí detenida en el aeropuerto de Barcelona que quería unirse al Estado Islámico*, Poder Judicial España. Available at: <http://www.poderjudicial.es/cgpi/es/Poder-Judicial/Audiencia-Nacional/Noticias-Judiciales/Prision-incondicional-para-la-marroqui-detenida-en-el-aeropuerto-de-Barcelona-que-queria-unirse-al-Estado-Islamico>

<sup>377</sup> Zuloaga, J.M. (2016), *El jefe del Daesh para España, un marroquí que incita a la «recuperación» de Ceuta y Melilla*. Available at: <http://www.larazon.es/internacional/el-jefe-del-daesh-para-espana-un-marroqui-que-incita-a-la-recuperacion-de-ceuta-y-melilla-CO13597423>

### The case of Tomasa Perez<sup>378</sup>

Just after the attacks in Catalonia of August 2017, Muhammed Yassin Ahram Perez, also known as *El Cordobés*, appeared in an Isis/Da'esh video message, entitled “*The conquest of Barcelona*”. He became the first Spanish foreign fighter to speak in the name of the jihadist organisation. He warned of more terrorist assaults to come in the near future and included ideological references to *al-Andalus* in his speech. His example is important for this case study as he was, in the true use of the term, “nursed” into the jihadist ideology by his mother.

His mother, Tomasa Perez, married a Moroccan jihadist and after his arrest moved with their children to Syria in December 2014. A converted Muslim, she gave birth to Muhammed in Córdoba (hence his nom de guerre, *El Cordobés*), followed a strict Islamic orientation and educated her son in the same ideology.

The media attention on Muhammad and his mother Tomasa may reinforce the stereotype of the jihadist mother, of the female educational role and act as a motivational driver for other women.

### 8.3. The role of online radicalisation

The online female jihadist community is bonded by common goals, ideology and by the symbolism given to their *nom de guerre*, “*Umm*” [mother in Arabic] that encompasses the idea of a digital *Umm*.<sup>379</sup> The digital *Umm* represents for these women a community of mothers, or future mothers, brought together online by the violent goal of educating their children to accept the jihadist ideology. Their online kinship is the recognition of themselves as online sisters who share the same violent narrative.<sup>380</sup> The discourse circulating among Spanish female jihadists is based on sacred Islamic texts that are adapted and (mis)interpreted to better suit and justify their extremist views. Through this (mis) construction of a religious discourse, the leading female recruiters form the building blocks of trust, and guarantee their status as a legitimate religious online authority. This high status enables them to conduct a successful jihadist mobilisation.<sup>381</sup>

Research suggests that these women establish online relationships and correspond on social networks and in this way they generate highly valuable social capital. Social capital, through its trust, reciprocity and regard, enhances their online sisterhood and ultimately their commitment to violent extremism and engagement with jihadist networks.<sup>382</sup>

Female jihadists have a crucial recruiting role within the Spanish networks and they achieve it through their bridging, brokerage and bonding functions. They transform online social capital into an effective method of online jihadist recruitment.<sup>383</sup>

### Storylines as radicalisation mechanisms

ISIS/Da'esh recruiters follow a mobilisation protocol and create a storyline that adapts to the individual targeted as a potential candidate. The story is tailored to the potential candidate's

<sup>378</sup> Sau, Jose Antonio (2017), *Tomasa Pérez, Una malagueña en el corazón del Estado Islámico*. Available at: <http://www.laopiniondemalaga.es/malaga/2017/08/25/tomasa-perez-malaguena-corazon-islamico/951844.html>

<sup>379</sup> Carvalho, Claudia (Forthcoming), *i-Imams, studying Female Islamic authority online*.

<sup>380</sup> Carvalho, Claudia (2014), *Okhti Online. Spanish Muslim Women engaging online Jihad? a Facebook case study*. Online Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet, Vol. 6. Available at: <http://heiup.uniheidelberg.de/journals/index.php/religions/article/view/17358>

<sup>381</sup> Carvalho, Claudia (Forthcoming), *-Imams, studying Female Islamic authority online*.

<sup>382</sup> Carvalho, Claudia, Saal, Johannes (Forthcoming), *The Hidden Women of the Caliphate – A Glimpse into the Spanish-Moroccan Jihadist Network on Facebook*.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

own personal circumstances while at the same time directing her to the mainstream jihadist narrative. The jihadist narrative or "single narrative" is a communication system aiming at sharing, disseminating and promoting a coherent line of violent contents.<sup>384</sup> Key stakeholders of the jihadist networks determine the content of the discourse and assure their continuous online circulation. They also ensure that the storylines are compelling, produce emotional bonding and align the audience's behaviour with the desired recruitment goals. Below, there is an analysis and a more detailed explanation of the different main "storyline elements".<sup>385</sup>

The first element is the value attributed to the **online sacred space**:

*"If you cannot start with 'Bismillah' [In the name of God] when opening Facebook, know that this means that you should not be in fb [Facebook], since your intentions are going to be mean and that is what we are going to be judged by our acts and intentions [sic]."*

In this way, it appears that Facebook is curated among jihadist female users as a religiously embedded social media platform. Through frequent self-policing, the women regulate norms of conduct, define good Islamic manners, discuss the rules of engaging online with men, thus linking social media platforms with spiritual purity and correctness. The wish to maintain their Facebook pages as a sacred space is visible in the modesty standards that determine their online visual appearance (e.g. refrain from using personal photos); their online contents (selection of conservative images); and their online conducts (good Islamic manners are reinforced among the women).

A second element is the **digital Umm**, grounded in the explicit gendered categories of childbirth and motherhood as pillars of the female jihadist narrative.

*"How do you define Jihad?"*  
*"Do you know that when a woman gives birth that is Jihad?"*

In this way, it can be concluded that mothers enter online processes of radicalisation because they are persuaded it is their duty to "nurse" their children into the right path to God. Through enhanced visual stimulation (videos, photos, imagery) they feel emotionally and religiously linked to the jihadist stories that have mothers as central players. Furthermore, children provide a "narrative storytelling of victory" cultivated by present generations to ensure the jihadist notion of fight in future generations, as we can see in the case of Tomasa Perez and her son Muhammed.<sup>386</sup>

**Propagation** is a third element defined as an individual obligation of the female jihadists:

*"The work of the women in the field of da'wa [dissemination] is to give strength to the work of our men, and to expand it to areas where the efficiency of women is higher than the efficiency of men."*

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<sup>384</sup> Schmid, Alex P. (2014), *Al-Qaeda's "Single Narrative" and Attempts to Develop CounterNarrative: The State of Knowledge*, ICCT. Available at: <https://www.icct.nl/download/file/Schmid-Al-Qaeda's-Single-Narrative-and-Attempts-to-Develop-Counter-Narratives-January-2014.pdf>

<sup>385</sup> The subsequent quotations are taken from: Carvalho, Claudia (2014), *Okhti Online. Spanish Muslim Women engaging online Jihad? a Facebook case study*. Online Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet, Vol. 6. Available at: <http://heiup.uniheidelberg.de/journals/index.php/religions/article/view/17358>

<sup>386</sup> Berger, J. M. (2015), *ISIS and the state of terror: The genesis, evolution, and impact of the Islamic State*. Brookings Institute. Available at: <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/markaz/posts/2015/03/31-isis-state-of-terror-book-launch-event-summary>



*Jihad al-Da'wa*<sup>387</sup>, or peaceful educational jihad for non-Muslims, is carried out through online jihadist stories as an instrument of mobilisation to their cause. It conceals violent messages under the appearance of authentic Muslim texts and it is a preferred method of online indoctrination. It is sub-divided into the tasks of education, counselling and leadership as seen below.

*"The woman can also use suitable opportunities to educate, guide and invite others (to the faith)."*

In this way, women are encouraged to participate in online media platforms, among other reasons, to learn more about different issues. The starting process of female online radicalisation is often to learn more about Islam and to debate central religious themes as a shared interest. To **acquire religious knowledge** is therefore the fourth element of the Jihadist narrative.

Interconnected with the above elements is **giving advice**.<sup>388</sup> Religious guidance structured as *naṣā'ih* [advice] is a common denominator of the online jihadist message. Its immediate purpose is to help the other believers to find "correct" religious answers and to guide their lives into *jihād fī sabīl-illāh* [jihad in the path of God].

*"Search for knowledge (...), to search for it is jihad al-nafs [soul], to teach it to those who do not know is charity."*

It therefore could be concluded that the short-term purpose is to transmit, share and spread the new teachings to other women, especially to those who are not Muslims. In addition, it would appear that the long-term purpose is to develop bonds of trust between the participants and support for the jihadist narrative.

The social media posts are illustrated with an easily recognisable ISIS/Da'esh black banner, a recurrent image used in the jihadist discourse to reinforce visually the written message. Therefore, **imagery** is the fifth element contributing to the online jihadist storytelling.

*"Facebook is invaded by flags of Palestine and they do not understand that these are political flags. The Muslim flag is ilaha illa Allah!!! [there is no God but God]"*

In this way, it appears that images of bearded men who smile victoriously surrounded by children are another repetitive message spread in the jihadist storylines. The pictures of bearded men are symbolic and contribute to the jihadist mobilisation because Muslims with facial hair are perceived as men who aspire to imitate the Prophet's appearance. The husband of Samira Yerou claims that his wife was also looking for a devoted Muslim husband "with a beard".

<sup>387</sup> Carvalho, Claudia (2014), *Okhti Online. Spanish Muslim Women engaging online Jihad? a Facebook case study*. Online Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet, Vol. 6. Available at: <http://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/index.php/religions/article/view/17358>

<sup>388</sup> Carvalho, Claudia (2016), *The importance of Web 2.0 for Jihad 3.0: Female Jihadists coming to grips with religious violence on Facebook*, Online Heidelberg Journal of Religions on the Internet, Vol.11, p.58. Available at: <http://heiup.uni-heidelberg.de/journals/index.php/religions/article/view/23627>

Finally, an important propaganda message is the high number of pictures featuring children as soldiers – a content filled with emotions, contributing to the utopia of the future jihadist generations, and undoubtedly a part of “*a new dimension of the online jihadist strategy.*”<sup>389</sup>

Through a combination of the above elements, it appears that hierarchies are established among the women. Online female authority is secured by proficiency in two areas of knowledge: classical Arabic language and Islamic studies. Women performing the best at both these subjects are recognised by their peers as online authorities. Their enhanced online status gives them the capacity to build bridges and to recruit.<sup>390</sup>

*“Sister, it has been a while since I mentioned you. Watch this video and tell me about it, insha’Allah.”*

Taking into account these mechanisms of storytelling, radicalisation and mobilisation towards the jihadist cause, and the Catalonia jihadist attacks of August 2017, it is urgent to identify good practice initiatives that have an impact on prevention, intervention and de-radicalisation of violent extremism as presented in the next section.

## 8.4. Good practice initiatives

### National programmes

#### **PEN-LCRV - National Strategic Plan to Fight against Violent Radicalisation (Ministry of the Interior, 2015)**<sup>391</sup>

Considering violent radicalisation as one of the greatest security threats to Spain, the National Strategic Plan to Fight against Violent Radicalisation is a nationwide coordinated plan to detect and neutralise all sources of violent radicalisation. The **Integral Strategy against Terrorism and Radicalisation (Ministry of the Interior, 2015)** is part of the national PEN-LCRV strategy, and also includes an international mandate, as its activities are framed within the European Union programme for the fight against radicalism (2005). **Stop radicalism (Ministry of the Interior, 2015)**<sup>392</sup> is also included in the PEN-LCRV. It brings together twelve ministries in the task of preventing radicalisation. The goal is to empower local community institutions and individuals who have direct contact with local residents.

#### **New Programme for the Prevention of Radicalisation in the Penitentiary System**

Penitentiary systems are also included in the Spanish programme of fighting against radicalism. The programme takes preventive measures and timely actions to detect processes of radicalisation.

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<sup>389</sup> Carvalho, Claudia (Forthcoming), *i-Imams, studying Female Islamic authority online.*

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> <http://www.interior.gob.es/documents/642012/5179146/PLAN+ESTRATÉGICO+NACIONAL.pdf/d250d90e-99b5-4ec9-99a8-8cf896cb8c2f>

<sup>392</sup> <https://stop-radicalismos.ses.mir.es>

## Local Programmes

### Strong Cities Network<sup>393</sup>

Malaga has a local strategic plan to help families dealing with the possible spectrum of radicalisation. As part of the international Strong Cities Network, the city is running a pilot project with a multidisciplinary team focusing on youth. The main areas of intervention are prevention, institutional cooperation, training, promotion of gender equality, facilitation of interreligious contacts and digital media communication. Furthermore, they have an online area of intervention to counter online radicalisation, and in particular online jihadist recruitment aimed at young people. In order to carry this out, they have enrolled young Muslims as online leaders to engage positively and disseminate peaceful messages.

### Islamic Radicalisation Detection Procedures (PRODERAI)<sup>394</sup>

Catalonia has its own local plan of intervention that is organised by the local police, *Mossos d'Esquadra*, and focuses on working with the local school system.

### Preter-IS<sup>395</sup>

The programme is a private initiative of the Camilo José Cela University, in Madrid, aiming to detect patterns of behaviour within different processes of radicalisation. It involves the cities of Madrid, Barcelona and Ceuta and Melilla due to the high incidence of cases of radicalisation in those places.

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<sup>393</sup> <http://strongcitiesnetwork.org>,  
<http://strongcitiesnetwork.org/strong-cities/member-cities/>

<sup>394</sup> <http://educacio.gencat.cat/documents/PC/ProjectesEducatius/PRODERAI-CE.pdf>

<sup>395</sup> <http://www.ucjc.edu/2013/07/campus-de-paz-proyecto-invitado-por-la-ue-y-el-ministerio-de-eslovenia-a-un-foro-internacional-contra-la-violencia/>

## 9. CASE STUDY: THE UNITED KINGDOM

### 9.1. Introduction

Since 2014 when ISIS/Da'esh declared their state, an estimated 850<sup>396</sup> individuals left to join them from the UK with around 17% of them being women.<sup>397</sup> There exists no exact figure of UK females joining ISIS/Da'esh, but the estimate stands at around 145. The women that left were from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, with a disproportionate number of them being white female converts.<sup>398</sup>

There have been a growing number of female arrests in the UK with a spike in numbers from 2014 onwards.<sup>399</sup> There is a correlation with ISIS'/Da'esh's efforts to recruit women during this period. Many were young women or girls under the age of 25 but the majority of people arrested, when including men in the figures, were over the age of 30.<sup>400</sup>

According to the statistics published in September 2017, there were 379 arrests for terrorism-related offences in the year ending June 2017, an increase of 68% compared with the 226 arrests in the previous year. This was the highest number of arrests in a single year since data collection began in 2001. This includes the 12 arrests made in connection with the terrorist attack on Westminster Bridge and Westminster Palace (22 March 2017); the 23 arrests in connection to the terrorist attack in Manchester (22 May 2017); the 21 arrests in connection to the London Bridge attack (3 June 2017); and one arrest in connection to the Finsbury Park Mosque attack (19 June 2017). 91% of arrests were for Islamist related terrorism, 5% were far-right related, and 4% were related to other ideologies.<sup>401</sup>

Within the UK Channel<sup>402</sup> system, there have been referrals of women potentially holding radical Islamist views from all around the UK with higher concentrations in London, Luton, the West Midlands, and Lancashire. There are high concentrations of Muslims living in these areas, which makes them easy recruiting grounds for Islamist groups. However, there have also been referrals from more provincial towns and villages within the UK, proving that recruitment to these groups is not specific to one particular area of the country. The majority of recruitment takes place online so any young female Muslim researching their religion, on Social Media in particular, is at risk of coming into contact with online recruiters.

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<sup>396</sup> BBC News (2017), *Who are Britain's jihadists*, Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-32026985>

<sup>397</sup> International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - ICCT (2016), *The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union - Profiles, Threats & Policies*. Available at: <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report-Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU-1-April-2016-including-AnnexesLinks.pdf>

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> UK Home Office (2016), *National Statistics. Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 and subsequent legislation: Arrests, outcomes, and stop and search, Great Britain, financial year ending 31 March 2016*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-financial-year-ending-march-2016/operation-of-police-powers-under-the-terrorism-act-2000-and-subsequent-legislation-arrests-outcomes-and-stop-and-search-great-britain-financial-y>

<sup>400</sup> HM Government (2015), *Channel Duty Guidance. Protecting vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorism. Statutory guidance for Channel panel members and partners of local panels*, Crown Copyright. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/644558/police-powers-terrorism-jun2017-hosb1417.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/644558/police-powers-terrorism-jun2017-hosb1417.pdf)

<sup>401</sup> UK Home Office (2017), *Operation of police powers under the Terrorism Act 2000 and subsequent legislation: Arrests, outcomes, and stop and search, Great Britain, quarterly update to June 2017*, Statistical Bulletin 14/17, September 2017. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/644558/police-powers-terrorism-jun2017-hosb1417.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/644558/police-powers-terrorism-jun2017-hosb1417.pdf)

<sup>402</sup> A UK Home Office initiative devised to help individuals with radical ideas or vulnerable to them by referring them to professionals who can help them reject extremist views. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/425189/Channel\\_Duty\\_Guidance\\_April\\_2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/425189/Channel_Duty_Guidance_April_2015.pdf)

Referrals of vulnerable/radicalised female Islamists through Channel from 2013–2017 fall into the following specific categories:<sup>403</sup>

- High-achieving university and secondary school students;
- Young girls in care;
- Women with diagnosed mental health issues;
- Converts and newly observant Muslims.

There has been a general decline in referrals from secondary school students after 2016. The likely reason for this is the loss of ISIS/Da'esh territory and the disruption of their online recruitment campaign. There have also been extensive PREVENT<sup>404</sup> workshops in schools as part of a UK statutory requirement for PREVENT training for those employed in frontline public-sector services. These workshops warn students of the dangers of extremism in all forms and seem to have had a positive effect. There are also various programmes which are led by community police, such as “*Our Families Our Futures*”<sup>405</sup>, which seek to bring on board local charities that deal with child safeguarding and address issues such as radicalisation, online safety, sexual exploitation of children, and bullying. There are also voluntary organisations like Inspire. This organisation was set up to specifically address radicalisation amongst Muslim women and to help empower women to fight extremism within their communities.<sup>406</sup> Since ISIS/Da'esh was established, there has been a lot of positive work to create awareness among young people and warn them of the dangers of radicalisation.

However, organisations within the UK who are diametrically opposed to extremists, such as Inspire, are often criticised as unfairly targeting Muslim communities and are helping to create Islamophobia.<sup>407</sup> Organisations such as CAGE<sup>408</sup> go into Muslim communities and criticise PREVENT claiming that the government is spying on them. They have been quite successful at ensuring that these communities do not engage with PREVENT initiatives as they claim they are helping the government with their “war on terrorism” and are targeting innocent Muslims. They argue that the UK Counter-Terrorism (CT) laws unfairly provoke individuals and turn people to extremism. This is what they claimed happened to Muhammed Emwazi “Jihadi John”, the ISIS/Da'esh member from the UK who was depicted in their beheading videos. The Director of CAGE, Asim Qureshi described him as a “beautiful man” who turned to extremism as a result of provocation by UK Counter-Terrorism police.<sup>409</sup> CAGE sets out to help people who have been affected by CT laws by providing free legal advice to individuals and families. Many in Muslim communities have become suspicious and have stopped engaging with counter-radicalisation groups as a result of direct or indirect actions against the PREVENT agenda by organisations like CAGE and other strategies like MEND<sup>410</sup> and HUUGS.<sup>411</sup> This has made it difficult to address the problem of radicalisation within Muslim communities and has proved to be problematic.<sup>412</sup> The support and the help of Muslim

<sup>403</sup> Conclusions of Hadiya Masieh, UK Home Office Intervention Provider.

<sup>404</sup> PREVENT is a UK Home Office initiative to tackle and prevent extremism in all forms. See: HM Government (2011), *Prevent Strategy*, Crown copyright. Available at: [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf)

<sup>405</sup> <http://coventrycityofpeace.uk/our-families-our-future/>

<sup>406</sup> <http://www.wewillinspire.com/inspire-speaks-at-our-families-our-future-conference/>

<sup>407</sup> Inspire Twitter Account: <https://twitter.com/wewillinspire?lang=en>

<sup>408</sup> <https://cage.ngo/>

<sup>409</sup> Channel 4 News (2015), *Jihadi John unmasked: Asim Qureshi on Mohammed Emwazi*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X7Cwl8QIUU>

<sup>410</sup> <https://mend.org.uk/about-mend/mends-achievements/>

<sup>411</sup> <https://www.huugs.org.uk/about-us>

<sup>412</sup> BBC News (2017), *Prevent criticism 'stems from ignorance*, 7 August 2017. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-40845911>

communities are fundamental to tackling extremism because they are specifically targeted by extremist recruiters and not having access to them will make them even more vulnerable.

As time has elapsed, those who are on the Counter-Terrorism radar seem to have become aware of the inside workings of PREVENT. This has led to some "high-risk" individuals agreeing to work with PREVENT and attempt to conceal their views. In an intervention case involving a young female Muslim, the individual decided to act in a way that made her appear to be a low risk case to the authorities. She made statements that disagreed with ISIS/Da'esh, speaking about her contempt for them. She admitted that she was at one point in agreement with them but she had, since then, seen through them. She spoke of them as being part of the "Khawarij"; a term referring to a deviant faction of Muslims who were misled and referred to as the "dogs of hellfire" by the Prophet Muhammad. She was well acquainted with the theological counter narratives and quoted them to the Channel intervention provider (IP) in the hope of convincing them. For a variety of reasons and through experience, the IP was able to see past this attempt and suggested that the woman should remain within the Channel process. The individual was subsequently found to be part of the first all-female terror plot in the UK and charged with conspiracy to murder and the preparation of a terrorist act.<sup>413</sup>

The UK is currently seeing a small number of loyal and committed individuals who still adhere to extremist ISIS/Da'esh views. They are still in contact with ISIS/Da'esh officials, are receiving orders from them, and are forming close networks both online and in the real world. Their conversations have now been taken underground and open discussions are rarely found in social media networks as they were between 2014 and 2016. The new order from ISIS/Da'esh is, *"If you cannot get to the battle field bring the battle field to yourselves."*<sup>414</sup> ISIS/Da'esh is no longer differentiating between men and women like they did in Syria, where women were discouraged from fighting. They are in a desperate situation and are ordering both men and women to become martyrs and to fight in whichever way they can. The strategies employed by ISIS/Da'esh are changing while the rhetoric remains the same. All those who perpetrate the acts of terrorism are convinced that they are on the true path of Islam, they are doing the work of God and rebelling against the "Kuffar" [unbeliever]. They dehumanise the individuals they attack and see in front of them images of severed and decapitated civilian Muslims bodies whom they believe they are avenging. This is the one constant excuse unanimously given by all terrorists to justify their actions. In an intervention meeting with a young girl who was convicted under the Terrorism Act in 2014, she spoke about the Manchester bomber Salman Abedi saying, *"I do not agree with what he did but I heard he did it as a revenge attack for the killing of Muslim children by the British Army."* This somehow made the attack more justifiable in the eyes of this individual. She was unable to condemn Abedi out right and this was something quite worrying. It would be wrong to assume that women are passive when it comes to extremism, they can feel just as aggrieved as men when it comes to foreign policy and are just as capable of committing acts of terrorism.

## 9.2. Profiles of women

As mentioned previously, the UK Channel programme works with women who are vulnerable to radicalisation. These individuals are targeted by extremist recruiters for some of the following reasons:

- They may be showing interest in their faith;

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<sup>413</sup> Account of Hadiya Masieih, UK Home Office Intervention Provider.

<sup>414</sup> Quote from unnamed defector extremist. Hadiya Masieih, UK Home Office Intervention Provider.

- They may be experiencing Islamophobia;
- They may be having an identity crisis;
- They may feeling aggrieved by Western foreign policies.

As stated previously the main categories of the women targeted are:

- High-achieving university and secondary school students;
- Young girls in care;
- Women with diagnosed mental health issues;
- Converts and newly observant Muslims.

These categories are addressed separately below although in practice the methods used by recruiters for each category will overlap significantly.

### **High Achieving University/Secondary school students**

Many young girls who have been referred to Channel have been high achieving students. Young Muslim women who have political awareness from being well-read and in tune with what is happening in the world often begin to feel frustrated. They watch the news and are affected by the images they see. They need answers and ask themselves why they are seeing these injustices. With heightened emotions, they turn to the internet to find out.

These young people care about the world and are eager to make changes to it but have nowhere to turn. They often find that there is very little they can do and not many of their peers will share their sentiments, so they may feel isolated. ISIS/Da'esh recruiters often reach out to them when they detect the grievances they express online. These often very intelligent individuals become intrigued since recruiters are likely to say exactly what they want to hear. They offer them a listening ear and tell them that there is a solution to the distress they are feeling. These girls hear from many other girls who are similar to them and are given reasons for leaving; they are sold a solution in the form of a utopian Islamic State that they believe will take care of those who are suffering, defend against Western powers that bomb Muslim civilians, and provide a pure Islamic lifestyle that cannot be lived in Western nations. Depending on how strongly these young girls feel about the problems in the world they may be inclined to escape, especially if there are other pressures they are experiencing at home. These pressures include work at school or university, bullying, and difficult family relationships.

### **Young girls in government care**

Another trend in Channel referrals is young women who are in social care. Online recruiters specifically target young people who are alone and have no family. The idea of filling a void in the lives of vulnerable people and offering them a substitute family in the form of an ISIS/Da'esh sisterhood proves to be very appealing.

Young people who are in government care may feel resentment and anger at their situation. Many have grievances with the system in which they are being brought up and find it restricting. One individual who was sent into a care home made claims she was abused by staff there but no one believed her. However, her ISIS/Da'esh recruiter stirred anger within this individual to hate the government and put blame on them for the problems they felt personally. This anger would be used and nurtured by ISIS/Da'esh recruiters until the individual felt extreme hatred for the government and this would motivate them to join ISIS/Da'esh and leave the country.

Another Individual who was well known to UK Social Services (because of a problematic relationship with her mother) became quite intrigued by the idea of ISIS/Da'esh when it began to unfold on UK news channels. On two occasions, she attempted to leave and join ISIS/Da'esh, once in 2014 and again in 2016. She was eventually arrested in 2017 for planning a terrorist act in the UK.<sup>415</sup>

From first-hand reports, individuals in care spoke about the ISIS/Da'esh brothers and sisters as being their family. Once recruiters gain their trust and seem like credible voices, these vulnerable individuals are often easy to manipulate. ISIS/Da'esh recruiters understand the weaknesses of their subjects and manage to say the right things to them. They sell them the dream and a way to escape. One individual described it like the feeling of seeing a picture postcard or an exotic travel brochure and how it makes you want to visit a place. They feel they have nothing in the place where they are and online conversations will include picture messaging that will depict an almost idyllic life for them. They are told that they will be provided with a house, money, and food. They will even be able to marry and have their own family. Recruiters then send pictures to prove what they are saying is true. Examples of these pictures have been of exotic takeaway food, shopping malls, marriages taking place, beautiful homes, hospitals and thousands of other propaganda images. They are told to be suspicious of all Western media and to make them their point of reference as they are at the source and can give first-hand information which they say is unbiased.

### **Women with diagnosed mental health issues**

This is an obvious vulnerability and an area that ISIS/Da'esh recruiters and other extremists will inevitably exploit. Depending on the severity of the individual's mental health problems ISIS/Da'esh recruiters will tailor their approach. For example, those who may suffer from depression will be given uplifting messages using religion. Recruiters try their utmost to almost counsel those who are finding life difficult and again offer them alternatives in ISIS/Da'esh territories selling them the idea that they will be happy there, they will be free from sadness, and their lives will be better under ISIS/Da'esh.<sup>416</sup> Again, pictures will be used to try and endorse their messages and back their claims.

With those who may have more severe mental health issues, possibly learning difficulties, or extreme mood disturbances, the scope for manipulation is vast. It has been known for recruiters to befriend those with learning difficulties and turn them into loyal followers that will listen to their orders. Those who may be easily aggravated will be cajoled into committing violent acts more easily and this applies to both men and women.

### **Converts and Newly Observant Muslims**

Converts to Islam are at a higher risk of falling into the hands of extremists as they have no prior knowledge of religious teachings and will be affected by their new-found passion. There have been a significant number of cases that have involved converts as they are fervent and ready to prove their devotion. They are enthusiastic and ready to make big sacrifices. They also want to prove themselves and be accepted into a community that can be suspicious of Westerners.

From first-hand experience of speaking to many converts who were contacted by ISIS/Da'esh, many of them followed a similar path. They would research the faith online as often they were not confident enough to enter their local Mosques alone and felt it was more convenient to learn from their devices. They fulfilled the need to meet other Muslims by

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<sup>415</sup> Account of Hadiya Masieih, UK Home Office Intervention Provider.

<sup>416</sup> Account of Hadiya Masieih, UK Home Office Intervention Provider.



reaching-out to people on social media, mainly using Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Converts, especially between the ages of 18 and 25 were exactly the type of people ISIS/Da'esh recruiters would prey on. They were looking for knowledge, they wanted to be part of their new faith and join other Muslims and they had no prior existing religious influence; in a sense, they were a clean slate and would be easier to influence. There have been a number of prominent female ISIS/Da'esh members in the UK in this category, including Samantha Lewthwaite,<sup>417</sup> wife of Jermaine Lindsay the 7/7 bomber and Sally Jones<sup>418</sup> the prominent ISIS/Da'esh recruiter. These two were known as the “White Widows”. Others include Jamila Henry, Kerry Thomason, and Lorna Moore.<sup>419</sup>

Many converts who become involved with ISIS/Da'esh end up speaking with recruiters on line and are also sold a life of excitement and honour. Many seemed to have lived very mundane and normal lives. For example, one convert said that she was bored of her life working in a supermarket, where she woke up at 5 am to work in the bakery. She longed for excitement and the idea of escaping to Syria where she would have status and security was an extremely appealing idea.<sup>420</sup> There is most definitely an active attempt by ISIS/Da'esh recruiters to find converts who are unhappy and bored with their lives and offer them the “true way” to practice their faith. After coming into contact with ISIS/Da'esh, many converts no longer feel the need to further study their new-found faith because ISIS/Da'esh fulfil this duty for them. They trust the sources and evidences provided by ISIS/Da'esh and have no ability to counter arguments as they had no other knowledge. Extremist groups always argue that all other sources of knowledge are untrustworthy, misguided, and government sponsored. This is believed by all their followers and they rarely question it. The Muslim convert is highly desirable to Islamist extremist groups, not only do they prove to be loyal and committed followers but the very idea of them often baffles Western societies as they are usually white and indigenous. A common phrase taken out of context from the Quran, and a main aim of terrorist groups like ISIS/Da'esh, is to “*strike fear into the hearts of the enemy.*” Having white convert recruits from their own countries most definitely fulfils this aim.

### 9.3. The role of online radicalisation

For many years, blogs and online edicts have been the means of communicating en-masse to express ideology, and detailed extremist theological beliefs. These were used by al-Qaeda clerics such as al-Maqdisi to explain dogma, theological tenets, the legitimacy of governments, and interpretations of Islamic religious jurisprudence on major questions of politics. These methods were not very effective in terms of mass recruitment for the movement but were effective in defining the neo-orthodoxy of Jihadist ideology.

Many chat forums arose in the early period of online communication. Forums for both English and Arabic speakers existed; some openly accessible while others were closed behind password protection. Others had levels of security somewhere between these two extremes by allowing for individuals to join them, gain a level of trust, and then move on to more heavily protected parts of the forum. There were several key subject-areas of debate and discussion on the forums. These included: the jihadist doctrines on the usage and legitimacy of violence and other tactics; the criteria for judging movements established on Islamist ideology; discourse on political movements and activities; and the Salafi/Wahabi approach

<sup>417</sup> Williams, Zoe (2014), *The radicalisation of Samantha Lewthwaite, the Aylesbury schoolgirl who became 'the white widow*, The Guardian. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jun/27/what-radicalised-samantha-lewthwaite-77-london-bombings>

<sup>418</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sally\\_Jones](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sally_Jones)

<sup>419</sup> BBC News (2017), *Who are Britain's jihadists*, Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-32026985>

<sup>420</sup> Account of Hadiya Masieh, UK Home Office Intervention Provider.

to Islamic jurisprudence and scripture. That these areas became a subject of discussion was because of the wider debates that were taking place, specifically with the “sahwa” [awakening] in Saudi Arabia. Combined with the rise of the internet the new paradigm of Jihadist ideology started to be developed from this very specific discourse led by the likes of Muhammad Suroor, Safar al-Hawali and Salman al-Awdah.<sup>421</sup> Moreover, various political factors informed the debates, including the first Gulf War and the continuing presence of what was perceived as a colonising military presence in the holy land. While these were effective in framing discourse and creating online communities in both English and Arabic language, they were more like echo chambers; reinforcing those already converted while gathering the attention of a few seekers from the real world.

The absence of major charismatic and impactful English language preachers to capture popular imagination changed with the arrival of new charismatic figures such as Omar Bakri Mohammad. Although he achieved widespread notoriety he wasn't truly successful in making inroads with younger audiences in the UK. His presence and that of his followers, particularly within universities, was arguably influential in creating a *trend* for debating religious and political issues among young people, but nevertheless he was more often perceived in comical terms, satirically labelled as the “Tottenham Ayatollah” in a channel 4 documentary.

Latterly, Anwar Awlaki became the dominant force in expounding Jihadist ideology in the English speaking online environment; an estimated 25% of known English-speaking Jihadists can be linked to Awlaki's online propaganda.<sup>422</sup> He used YouTube as a delivery mechanism for popular speeches addressing people in a charismatic, culturally resonant, and politically relevant way. He addressed issues of social-identity as well as discussing fundamentalist religion in a unique non-sectarian manner (he never presented himself as a Salafi). He also maintained gradual exposure of his more extreme ideological positions. Those who were familiar with the details would have spotted his views and his implicit endorsement of Jihad, suicide bombings, and rejection of democratic participation. This obviously meant that he took a more extreme position than the likes of the mainstream Salafists or the Islamist movements which generally eschewed political violence for political engagement. Within the space of a few years, from the early 2000's the online Islamist presence had changed from being a self-engaging community, to a proselytizing and influential faction of internet warriors with a charismatic leadership figure.

This then evolved into a young generation of culturally savvy, educated and professionally competent, recruiters using different tools and techniques. They transformed online journals into op-magazines, using modern media and high value production of videos and powerful messaging. Messaging which engaged with the identity issues facing a western audience who were already asking existential identity questions, while feeling and perceiving a rise in hostility to Islam and Muslims across Europe. Islamist ideologues addressing the “real issues” went mainstream and there was little room for traditional religious authorities. The result was a veritable regiment of European recruits to ISIS/Da'esh when finally a “successful” Islamist State came into existence. It was billed as a place where you can live with your identity manifest in political circles, stand up to the West, and against the corrupt tyrannies supported by Western powers. This was the true manifestation of the “ideology of Islam” successfully marketed through modern means and social networks.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Maher, Shiraz (2016), *Salafi Jihadism – The History of an Idea*, C Hurst & Co Publishers Ltd.

<sup>422</sup> Stuart, Hannah (2017), *Islamist Terrorism – Analysis of Offences and Attacks*, The Henry Jackson Society. Available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/2017/03/05/islamist-terrorism-analysis-of-offences-and-attacks-in-the-uk-1998-2015/>

<sup>423</sup> Personal communication by Hadiya Masieh with Rashad Ali, ISD Fellow.

An employee of Moonshot CVE who analyses ISIS/Da'esh propaganda and the impact of women on ISIS/Da'esh recruitment has observed an interesting trend, stating that the propaganda directed towards women was distinctly different to that aimed at men, being very stylised, romantic, and generally depicting ISIS/Da'esh as a place of adventure, not too far from a fairy tale. However, there was also more violent imagery of women posing with guns, actively enforcing punishment on other women who were breaking the rules of Shariah. From some of the reports of the Al Khansa Brigade, the all-female religious enforcement unit of ISIS/Da'esh, women regularly issued violent punishments to other women; often in quite gruesome ways. With the fall of ISIS/Da'esh, the war has certainly become even more cyber focused with the creation of Al Khansa Kateeb (battalion). This is an all-female wing of the United Cyber Caliphate (UCC). They have boasted on their encrypted Telegram channel to have hacked over 100 twitter accounts and use violent threatening language against anyone who comes to challenge them. What has been observed by Anita Nayyar<sup>424</sup>, a UK Home Office Intervention Provider, is that many women interested in the dark web are becoming curious about IS/Da'esh encrypted content. It is as though they are seeing it like a game. They want to complete the challenge of locating IS/Da'esh material and feel a sense of great achievement when they finally do so. The idea of the dark web is just as intriguing to many women, one website quoted by a client was called "bestgore.com" this website depicted gruesome images of violence and featured some IS/Da'esh beheadings. The female client began to interact with online recruiters via this site. She had formed an obsession with watching extreme violence and spent much of her time doing this. One theory put forward was that recruiters are purposely putting out challenges and those who manage to locate them are deemed worthy of being let into the group.

For both men and women, Twitter initially was the most popular means of engagement, initial recruitment, and propaganda. Other means were used including Skype, to engage directly with individuals, but the most impactful means were YouTube and Twitter. There was also some usage of Facebook forums and accounts especially in the Arabic language where they proliferated with much less awareness on the part of Facebook. These were however, eventually either shut down, removed or made untenable, they migrated onto platforms such as Telegram, Sure Spot, KiK and other encrypted message platform where they could operate securely, and up until the middle of 2017 were given double encrypted protection from the forum without any action taken to minimize their usage at all.

Women are also often used to promote IS/Da'esh propaganda on line through poetry. Ahlam al Nasr is a famous poetess who IS/Da'esh has used to articulate their struggle and romanticise their jihad. Poetry is their alternative to Western pop music, which they deem to be haram [forbidden]. Her poetry is used in both encrypted messaging and publicly on Social Media platforms as a means of emotional provocation to win support from those who may already be inclined to IS/Da'esh' ideas.<sup>425</sup>

IS/Da'esh has changed tactics and is openly asking women to partake in Jihad. A document released by IS/Da'esh calls on women to fight Jihad and not just online Jihad.<sup>426</sup> They were once adamant that a woman's place was not on the battlefield however it seems that their desperate circumstances have prompted them to reconsider, now saying that it is necessary and an obligation.

<sup>424</sup> Personal communication by Hadiya Masieh with Anita Nayyar, UK Home Office Intervention Provider.

<sup>425</sup> Creswell, Robyn and Haykel, Bernard (2015), *Battle Lines. Want to understand the jihadis? Read their poetry*, The New Yorker, June 8 & 15, 2015 Issue, Available at:

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/06/08/battle-lines-jihad-creswell-and-haykel>

<sup>426</sup> <https://twitter.com/ShirazMaher/status/916229959013855232>

## 9.4. Good practice initiatives

Good practice initiatives in preventing radicalisation in the UK have come in the form of supporting voluntary organisations who work at grassroots level with people who are the most vulnerable in society, for example initiatives like **Inspire**,<sup>427</sup> **WARN** (Women Against Radicalisation Network),<sup>428</sup> and the **Henna Foundation**.<sup>429</sup> There are numerous such organisations that exist around the UK and many were established decades ago addressing problematic cultural issues that particularly affected women in Asian communities, like forced marriages, honour killings, and domestic violence. In 2008 the Labour Government brought together women leaders of such groups under the **National Muslim Women's Advisory Group (NMWAG)**. They sought the advice of these women as they knew their communities well and had credibility within them. The Labour Government at the time sponsored three main initiatives that addressed theological issues and women, one that empowered women in the form of promoting role models, and lastly one that increased civil participation.<sup>430</sup> In general the work was received well by women in their communities but the most powerful by product of this initiative was bringing together strong, active, and credible Muslim women who were able to share best practices and support one another in their work. Even after the NMWAG was disbanded in 2011 by the coalition government many remain in contact today and they continue to work and support one another as they face similar challenges in their work. Women who head these groups are criticised as they speak openly about difficult issues within their communities. Their actions have been construed as encouraging Islamophobia and have caused some factions within their communities to become quite defensive. Inspire and WARN both were created specifically to address the problem of radicalisation and Islamist extremism. Perhaps because of this they are more heavily criticised than some of the other older Muslim women's organisations. However this does not deter the founders as they are highly motivated to rid their community of extremism and hate. Inspire organised a "Road Show" where they toured the UK with their message against extremism and spoke about actions women could take against radicalisation and on advice on how they could protect their children. They held workshops and talks creating awareness. They raised the difficult subjects that were generally not spoken about within many Muslim communities and really aimed to put these women into the picture, making sure they were equipped to defend themselves and their children against extremist recruiters. WARN also do similar work in the form of workshops stating on their website, "Our workshop teaches mothers to know what's what and how to spot the signs of radicalisation. It walks them through the simple steps they need to make sure their children stay safe online"<sup>431</sup>. These organisations are doing great work within their communities and there is a great possibility that the decrease in numbers of young women wanting to join ISIS/Da'esh can be attributed to some of their work within schools and communities.

A fundamental part of good practice is to be transparent and for all those working with individuals and communities to gain the trust of those who may be susceptible to radical views. This also includes all Government institutions, such as the Police, Education, Healthcare and Social Care. The multi-agency approach has worked exceptionally well in the UK and has successfully addressed the needs of hundreds of individuals who have been at risk of radicalisation or who have actually held radical views. This is largely to do with the afore mentioned PREVENT strategy and the **UK Channel initiatives**. The key to the success of Channel is information sharing and for all parties to be on the same page when addressing

<sup>427</sup> <https://wewillinspire.com/>

<sup>428</sup> <http://warn.org.uk/>

<sup>429</sup> <http://www.hennafoundation.org/>

<sup>430</sup> Rashid, Naaz (2014), *Initiatives to empower Muslim women as part of the UK's 'war on terror'*, Public Spirit. Available at: <http://www.publicspirit.org.uk/initiatives-to-empower-muslim-women-as-part-of-the-uks-war-on-terror-2/>

<sup>431</sup> See: <http://warn.org.uk/blog/safe-online/stay-safe-online/>

each individual case. The cases that come through Channel need to be understood by all parties involved so that the best possible actions can be taken for each person. If information is not relayed effectively there is a greater chance for people to slip through the net, or escalate issues which could lead to problems. On the other hand, although multi agency approaches with regular face to face meetings are essential when dealing with cases, what has also tended to occur is a type of “professional help overload.” This is where the individual is in connection with an excessive number of agencies and professionals. In one case, an individual had around 10 people they needed to keep regular meetings with and it became quite suffocating for them. They began to resent the amount of time taken up by the meetings and did not find any of them useful to her. What was decided at the Channel Panel,<sup>432</sup> in this case, was to cut back some of the services the individual felt they did not need and to keep the ones she engaged with the best.

Training all frontline Government workers so that they understand the complexities of the issues surrounding radicalisation and can address any problems that may occur, is an essential best practice. In the UK, **WRAP** (Workshops to Raise Awareness of PREVENT) training<sup>433</sup> is offered to all those working in front line services so that they have adequate knowledge of extremism and radicalisation. However, although WRAP training gives a good introduction, it is important for training to be ongoing and background reading needs to be kept up by individuals who work in the area. Best practice would include a means of support for individuals dealing with cases, especially those who feel unsure of how to deal with a radicalised person. There should be a helpline for professionals of some sort and an accessible and easy to understand handbook for frontline workers so they are helped to make the right decisions.

Dealing directly with an individual’s radical views is something that needs to be dealt with in a sensitive manner, in the UK this is the role of the **UK Channel Intervention Provider** (IP). An IP saying the wrong thing or acting in a way that can aggravate the individual can be catastrophic. Professional IPs who have the responsibility of talking to radicalised individuals are all well trained and have in-depth understanding of radical views. They need to have the ability to counter arguments and be familiar with extremist rhetoric, in order to be most effective. Each individual referred onto Channel will have a particular drive and this will need to be addressed in a non-combative way. Anita Nayyar is an IP who uses her Psychology background to employ Freud’s “Free Association” technique where she will allow her clients to speak freely and openly on subjects using prompts to encourage speech.<sup>434</sup> This allows the individual to feel comfortable and say what is on their minds leaving the IP with a clear understanding of their needs and to then specifically address them. She gave the example where one client spoke about the fact they had a very limited network of friends. The IP then arranged for them to meet people in her local area with whom she could meet on a regular basis. Offering the correct support for individuals will give the individual a sense of genuinely being helped this will then increase the chance of them remaining on the programme and engaging for as long as the IP deems fit. A large function of the IP is not only to engage in counter narratives with an individual but to support and mentor them. Often IPs are referred to as mentors and this may be a more apt definition for IPs depending on the case in hand. Under some circumstances where the individual is not radicalised but is categorised only as vulnerable to radicalisation, the IP must get to know their client and provide them with solutions to specific problems they may be having. For example, it is not

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<sup>432</sup> The regular Channel meetings with all professionals involved in an individual case. At the meetings all professionals discuss and decide on the best ways forward for the individual on channel.

<sup>433</sup> UK Home Office (2016), *Guidance. Prevent Duty: catalogue of training courses*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-catalogue-of-training-courses>

<sup>434</sup> Personal communication by Hadiya Masieh with Anita Nayyar, UK Home Office Intervention Provider.

uncommon for IPs to help their clients filling out CVs to find a new jobs or filling out forms for college to embark on a course. To ensure an individual feels hopeful and supported is a major part of an IPs job description as this helps to eradicate susceptibility to radicalisation.

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This paper was commissioned by the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs on request of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. The paper focuses on Islamist radicalisation and violent extremism in the EU and has two aims: 1) to explore and assess the question of women's radicalisation and their involvement in violent extremism in the EU as well as to look into the mechanisms in place to prevent women and girls from radicalisation and propose further actions; and 2) to identify the potential of women in preventing radicalisation, in particular by looking into women's current role in counter-radicalisation strategies and to explore potential gendered approaches and best practices to counter-radicalisation.

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