

WOMEN'S ROLE  
AND THEIR POSITION  
IN THE INSTITUTIONS  
ON LOCAL AND  
NATIONAL LEVEL WITH  
REGARDS TO PREVENTING  
AND COUNTERING  
VIOLENT  
EXTREMISM

ASSOCIATION OF CITIZENS “NEXUS - CIVIL CONCEPT“  
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WOMEN’S ROLE AND THEIR POSITION IN THE INSTITUTIONS  
ON LOCAL AND NATIONAL LEVEL WITH REGARDS TO  
PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

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# FOREWORD

This research study has been conducted by two women - from project idea to project implementation. In this regard, the authors made an attempt to eliminate any form of bias or prejudice at different stages of the research:

- ▶ Special attention was paid to inviting the same number of male and female respondents to take part in this research, as well as to the number of men and women as representatives of the same/similar institution;
- ▶ The questionnaires and structured questions were designed in such a way as to obtain more statistical data and less subjective insights;
- ▶ In the process of data collection and presentation of the attitudes and the analysis, in terms of perception, some of the statements made by the respondents were retained in their original form, as quotes, placed inside quotation marks, in order to avoid prejudice;
- ▶ In the process of analysis, all the main recommendations were noted and deduced from the summary discussions;
- ▶ Passive voice has been used in writing the document.

Therefore, we consider that the research is impartial and fit for purpose.

To conduct the research and sort out the impressions, while at the same time remain impartial and fair-minded, in times when the country is in a state of emergency, when there is an economic crisis, an increased number of disinformation, a state of pandemic and an increased number of femicides, while the institutions are reorganising themselves and shifting towards remote/on-line work - it wasn't an easy task at all.

We have encountered numerous obstacles, such as:

- ▶ Failure to get a response to the calls and invitations made to various stakeholders;
- ▶ Lack of willingness among some especially relevant actors and individuals - female representatives at high managerial positions - to give their input and support;
- ▶ Extension of the deadlines for collecting data and conducting the interviews due to the Covid-19 situation and the imposed curfew;
- ▶ Requests for additional explanations concerning the objectives of the research, especially by representatives of the institutions;
- ▶ Requests by some institutions to ensure strict anonymity, etc.

Nevertheless, we have the research study in front of us and it is a real honour and pleasure to thank all those whose contribution made this possible.

We extend our big gratitude to all the experts involved, to representatives of the institutions and municipalities, and representatives of the civil society, the academia and the media, who took their time to provide input and support in the implementation of this research.

*From the authors*

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# GLOSSARY

# GLOSSARY

The analysis and research use terms and concepts for which there is still no generally accepted, single, uniform definition in the world. It poses limitations and causes problems when analysing and interpreting the situations, policies and strategies established on national and local level. Moreover, these concepts must be aligned with the concepts of the international institutions whose documents set the obligations and recommendations for member states. On the other hand, the scientific and academic community, in making its contribution to defining and interpreting the terminology, sublimates these concepts and quite frequently examines them through two approaches: a narrower and a wider understanding of the terms. Due to such complex aspects in understanding the terms, this analysis will make use of the following terms with their corresponding meanings and definitions:

## Extremism

Extremism denotes an exaggeration, obstinacy and a kind of a radical denial of the prevailing social norms, behaviour rules, views, etc., in the state by individuals or groups.

### Left-wing terrorism

or far-left terrorism (sometimes called Marxist-Leninist terrorism or revolutionary/left-wing terrorism) is terrorism aimed at overthrowing the capitalist systems and replacing them with Marxist-Leninist or socialist societies.

### Right-wing terrorism

or far-right terrorism is terrorism motivated by various right-wing and far-right ideologies, such as: neo-Nazism, neo-fascism, eco-fascism, white nationalism, white separatism, ethno-nationalism, religious nationalism and anti-government patriot/sovereign citizen beliefs and occasionally with anti-abortion and tax resistance beliefs.

### Religious extremism

is a long-running phenomenon which manifests itself in various forms. It is a concept considered as a high sense of ideological identification expressed through certain activities that exhibit deep loyalty to the belief system. It involves practices that characterise and define rituals and customs of many religious groups. Some of the characteristic features of religious extremism include seclusion, evangelisation to non-members, maliciousness of members and non-members, criminalisation and elimination of recalcitrant<sup>1</sup> persons or those considered to be enemies or “pagans”.

## Violence

Violence - an action and/or behaviour by use of force or threat to use force on somebody against their will and against their rights.

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<sup>1</sup> Persons having the characteristic of being able to remain unchanged and who have an obstinately uncooperative attitude towards authority or discipline.

# GLOSSARY

## **Violent extremism**

Violent extremism - beliefs, understandings and actions of ideologically motivated violence by use of violent methods, instruments and tactics by extremists in pursuit of radical ideological, nationalist, religious or political views.

## **Radicalisation that leads to violent extremism**

Radicalisation that leads to violent extremism - a process whereby an individual or a group contemplates the use of violence as a legitimate and desired course of action in order to achieve a significant change in society.

## **Terrorism**

Terrorism - planned, organised and intended illegal use of force by means of weapons (firearms, cold weapon, biological weapon, chemical weapon, radiological weapon, nuclear weapon, etc.) or by coercion or intimidation under the threat of use of force aimed at different targets, as an instrument for achieving extremist goals.

## **Prevention**

Prevention - set of measures, activities, approaches, policies and strategies for decreasing, reducing, preventing, combating and eliminating a certain phenomenon.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The research study gives a clear picture of the role of women in the country and their position in the institutions on national and local level with regards to preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation. At the same time, it provides an insight into the perception of various actors, experts in different areas, organisations and institutions, on the role of women.

This research study was conducted in the period of May-June 2020 and it covered a total of 31 respondents through interviews and questionnaires. Out of the total number of respondents, 18 were female and 15 were male. Concerning the gathering of data through questionnaires - the institutions and municipalities responded strictly in writing, whereas some of the experts agreed to a phone interview through a call recording application. Out of the total number of interviewed experts, 53% were women and 47% were men. Concerning the method of data collection, a recorded phone interview was agreed to by 60% women and 40% men. From the responses submitted by the municipalities - as many as 67% were prepared by women, whereas 37% by men. Only 2 of the 6 (interviewed) municipalities are run by women.

The National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism has 22 members, out of which only 9 are women, or just 41%, and none of them holds a managerial or coordinating position. Neither there is a woman at the position of a deputy coordinator. The external members of this body are also women - 3 of them; however, it does not change the fact that the internal positions, as well as those appointed by the managers of the institutions do not even reach 50% of the total number, and neither there is a woman at a managerial position within the body.

**According to the findings of the experts**, we can single out several key points:

- ▶ Women can have a particularly significant role in preventing extreme views, attitudes and understandings among people, and especially **among young people**, taking into account their role in society. As wives and mothers in the family, they can provide emotional and psychological support to all family members, show empathy, and motivate the others in creating positive attitudes and views towards life. The promotion of gender equality can directly contribute towards prevention of violent extremism.
- ▶ The **economic empowerment of women** can reduce tensions in the family and in the community, thus increasing the resilience to violent extremism.
- ▶ **Regarding the role of women in the processes of rehabilitation, re-socialisation and reintegration of foreign fighters in society**, and in view of the status and position of women in family and society, they [women] would have a significant role and yield further better results in the processes and activities of work with returning foreign fighters. The input that women can give within these processes depends on their status in the society, i.e. whether they have the role of a sister, wife, mother, close relative, friend, psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, prison worker, NGO activist, volunteer, etc.
- ▶ However, above all, **women must have access to information and education**. The level/degree and aspect of their inclusion also depends on their role in these processes. It is a fact that we haven't built concrete mechanisms to tackle that phenomenon. These people are left to their own devices. Nevertheless, the role of the psychologists, psychiatrists and sociologists in the

centres that would be established for this purpose, would be of great significance.

- ▶ Almost all experts regretted to conclude that **state institutions pay very little attention to initiatives, activities and campaigns** that would raise the awareness for the involvement of women in security and prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation. The involvement of women in the central and local institutions is addressed more in terms of equal opportunities in education, healthcare, culture, business, as well as the so called “positive discrimination” in political life.

## From the municipal administration we got the following insight:

- ▶ They recognise the need for changes and involvement of women at higher level in the decision-making processes. Even the recommendations that they give have a positive connotation, with them being confident that: **“this change** will ensure that the change agents in the municipality are members of that particular community and the **change that is being encouraged** is relevant to the local needs and narratives of the people in that community. Such policy will make the local institutional actors, such as education workers, non-governmental organisations, social workers, religious leaders, together with state representatives, such as the municipal officers, to be engaged in implementing preventive, long-term responses to extremism. It is extremely important to introduce gender mainstreaming in the design of programmes for prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation.”<sup>2</sup> Although such statements and narratives by the municipal administration are quiet positive, bearing in mind that they perceive this as a “change”, at the same time it serves as an indicator of the level of the situation in practice.
- ▶ **Municipalities are far from implementing any activities contributing to the strategic documents for fight against terrorism and radicalisation.**
- ▶ The existing programmes are being supplemented, as they say, “according to the needs”, as well as the work of the Local Prevention Councils, which are formally and legally established, but very poorly functional. They meet very rarely; therefore, we cannot know how they establish “the needs”. **There is no continuity in the dynamics of the meetings held by the Local Prevention Councils, nor is there a possibility for getting access to the reports from their working meetings in a visible and transparent manner.** Therefore, it raises a dilemma concerning their effectiveness and capacity for early detection and urgent reaction to such situations.
- ▶ The local NGOs - non-governmental organisations led by women and other organisations are not much recognised within the local community, unless being part of certain campaigns and activities that are being implemented/or that have been implemented together with the municipality.

From the responses provided by the respondents from the **competent institutions**, although not easily available, we can single out several findings:

- ▶ The institutions were very **rigid in terms of informing about the practical implementation of the strategic documents on gender equality** and involvement of women in different activities, initiatives and campaigns for preventing and countering violence, conflicts, etc.
- ▶ It was possible to talk only about campaigns and activities that have already been finished, but it was not possible to present a certain programme or working plan in this segment.
- ▶ The institutional statements of this type sounded like a **cliché that has no practical application**,

2 Quoted statement of a respondent from the municipal administration

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

with no institutional examples as a fact, just the well learned phrase: “Gender perspective is necessary in the measures for countering terrorism in order to ensure observance of all human rights based on equality between women and men, and without discrimination.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> UN General Assembly (2009) “A gender perspective in countering terrorism”, report of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism, 3 August, UN Doc. A/64/211, section III.

# INTRODUCTION

The radicalisation and violent extremism that lead to terrorism, seen as global social phenomena, pose a grave threat to society, and the process of radicalisation in different social environments is a reality that will continue to be a risk factor for new terrorist attacks. Therefore, the states are focused on accelerated development for the purpose of creating efficient strategies for reducing the number of new recruits and the ideas of violent extremism and terrorism in general.

The project “Program for Building Community Resilience against Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Leads to Terrorism (VERLT) at the Nexus of Security and Development in the Republic of North Macedonia” implemented by the Association of Citizens “NEXUS - Civil Concept”, is aimed at recognising, preventing and countering violent extremism that can lead to terrorism in society with special emphasis on the engagement and the role of young women in this problem area, both on national and local level.

The research conducted within the framework of this project is aimed at providing a clear picture of the role of women in the country and their position in the institutions on national and local level with regards to preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation.

The research study gives clear recommendations for amending and/or supplementing the concrete policies, and at the same time, it is a basis for further project activities and cooperation with the institutions on local and national level concerning the problem areas of representation of women in the activities for violent extremism prevention.

## Scope of the research

### Location

The research study refers to examining the role and influence of women in the implementation of various methods, concepts and strategies for tackling violent extremism in the Republic of North Macedonia. Apart from the national level, the research shall also look into the situation on local level in the City of Skopje and in the municipalities of: Kumanovo, Tetovo, Veles, Kichevo, Gostivar, Kavadarci, Kriva Palanka, Karposh and Bitola, concerning the issue of interest.

Based on some research studies and analysis, the cities of Skopje (the settlements Chair, Serava and Gazi Baba within the City of Skopje), Tetovo, Gostivar and Kumanovo, are pointed out as key locations for the presence of radicalisation that leads to violent extremism in the Republic of North Macedonia. It doesn't mean that potential risks are absent elsewhere, it's just that we don't have data since they haven't been subject to a comprehensive analysis. Therefore, we slightly extended the framework and invited other municipalities, in addition to the above-mentioned, to take part in the interview.

# INTRODUCTION

## Timeframe and limitations

The research refers to examining the engagement, role and influence of women in countering violent extremism and the activities implemented on local and national level in the period *following 2018* when the National Strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia for Countering Violent Extremism has been adopted as a fundamental strategic document in this area, *up to June 2020*.

It must be underlined that the period of conducting the research was particularly difficult for data collection due to the declared state of emergency and the COVID-19 pandemic, which disabled us from organising the focus groups. The activity was conducted in the form of an interview, but due to the situation, everything was cancelled and the interviewees responded in a period when there was a rise in the number of fake news, disinformation, messages with ethno-nationalism and an increased number of femicides.

## Objectives and Target group

The research involves analysis of the policies for the purpose of ensuring better understanding of the situation in the Republic of North Macedonia concerning violent extremism in view of gender representation on local and national level through the institutions.

Further on, the practical objectives of the research work are aimed at establishing patterns and concepts of the position of women in the process of opposing violent extremism, much more through the methods of “soft power”, i.e. “soft tools”, for countering this phenomenon. The research makes an attempt to provide an answer/recommendation on the way in which women can help in countering extremism through education, religion, civil society organisations, local self-government units, sports, family and other forms of social actions.

On national level, it is related to whether they are involved in the national bodies that work on these issues, on which position, how much time they spend on those tasks, whereas on local level, it covers the involvement of women in the local prevention councils by conducting research in the targeted municipalities. Apart from the institutional level, the research also determines the level of involvement of women, who as part of the civic activism/NGO sector, work on these issues, as well as their level within the decision-making process.

The specific tasks of this research include:

- ▶ Research on the involvement of women at national and local level in preventing violent extremism;
- ▶ Research on the positions held by women on institutional level (national and local) who work on the issues of preventing violent extremism;
- ▶ Research on gender representation and involvement of women in the local prevention councils in selected municipalities;
- ▶ Research on the number of women in the NGO sector who work on these issues;
- ▶ Detecting the challenges faced by women who work on preventing violent extremism;
- ▶ Analysing the best practices from other countries concerning gender mainstreaming in the prevention of violent extremism (comparative analysis approach);
- ▶ Recommendations on how to improve the gender representation of women on more important positions that deal with prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation.

In this regard, the research is aimed exclusively at targeting the institutions involved, which are already part of the Local Prevention Councils. Therefore, we covered the following institutions:

- ▶ Ministry of Interior;
- ▶ Ministry of Justice;
- ▶ Ministry of Local Self-Government;
- ▶ Ministry of Labour and Social Policy;
- ▶ Ministry of Education and Science;
- ▶ Ministry of Health.

Concerning the target group on local level, it covers representatives of the Local Prevention Councils and the Commission for Inter-Community Relations within the municipality, the Community Action Teams for improving the cooperation between state and local authorities (if established), associations of citizens, non-governmental organisations, think-tank organisations, religious groups, representatives of educational institutions, academic institutions, sports clubs, analysts, etc.

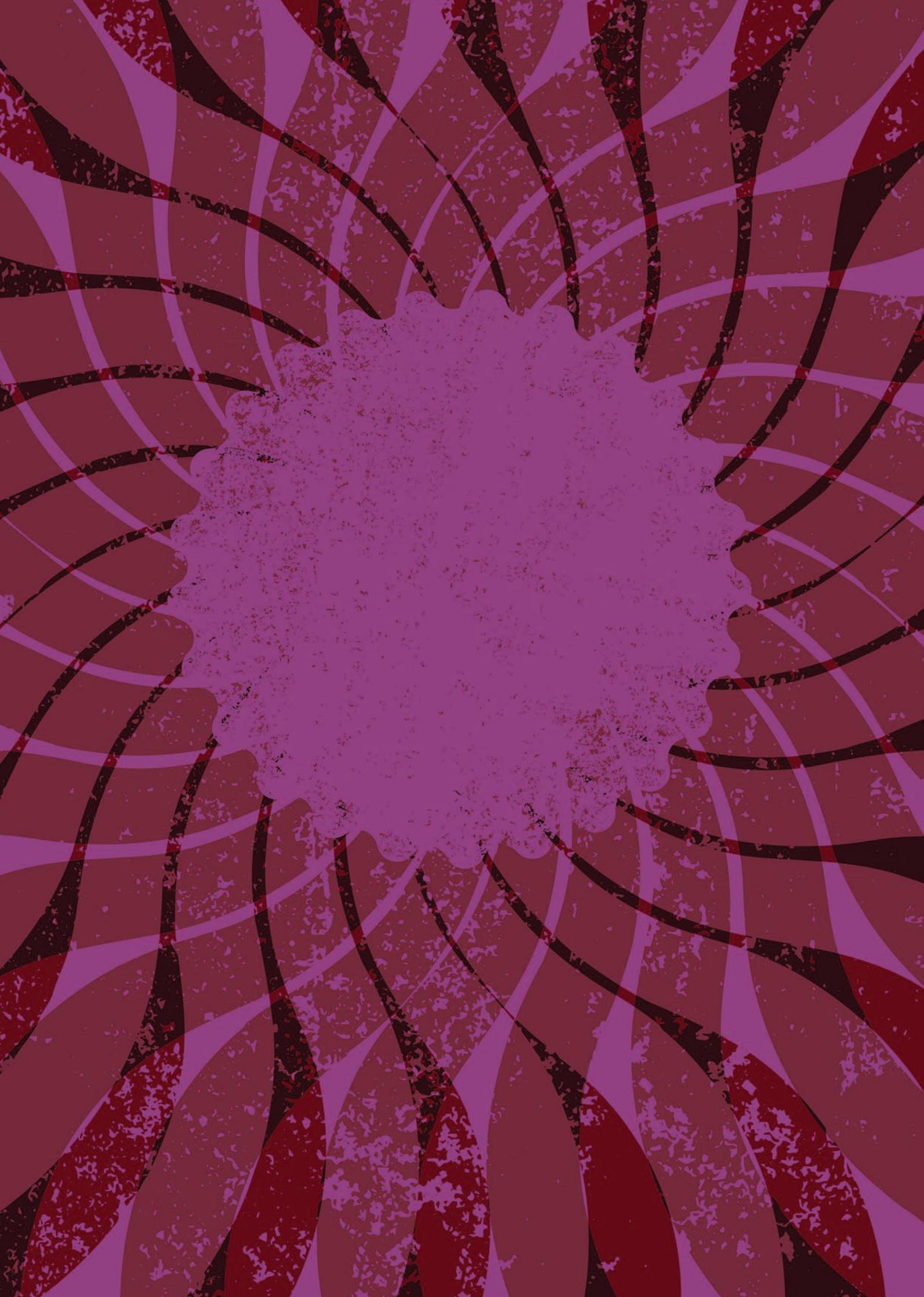
## Ethical standards in data collection

When attending the interview, the experts were given a separate document with information about the project and the research, as well as a special consent form for participation in this activity, whereby they were required to sign and return the form to be kept in the archive of the project. The interviewees were not named without their consent and they remain anonymous. They were neither required to disclose information that could reveal their identity. After asking each question, the respondents were allowed to express themselves freely, without any further pressure to talk on topics they don't feel comfortable about. The interviews were comprised of open-ended questions that were general and objective, without leading the respondents in a specific direction, in order to get their individual opinions and views.

The planned interviewing of experts involved a total of 19 interviewees: 6 university professors, 3 representatives of state institutions, 4 independent researchers/analysts, 3 NGO representatives, 1 media expert and 2 psychologists/pedagogues, having knowledge in the field of security and counter-terrorism. A total of 30 experts were invited, but only 19 agreed to attend the interview, whereby efforts were made to ensure gender equality in this target group.

*Table 1: Conducted interviews with experts*

| Experts                 | MEN      | WOMEN     | TOTAL     |
|-------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Academia                | 4        | 2         | 6         |
| State institutions      | 1        | 2         | 3         |
| Independent researcher  | 2        | 2         | 4         |
| NGO                     | 2        | 1         | 3         |
| Media expert            |          | 1         | 1         |
| Psychologist/pedagogues |          | 2         | 2         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>            | <b>9</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>19</b> |



## DESK RESEARCH ANALYSIS

From the relevant literature and competent institutions/working bodies (publications, analyses, research studies, strategic documents and legally binding acts, etc.) for the representation of women in the area of preventing and countering radicalisation that leads to violent extremism and terrorism, we single out the following:

### National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism

On 25 of July 2017, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted a decision<sup>4</sup> on establishing the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism (NCCVECT) as a national coordinating body for monitoring and analysing the situation concerning the prevention of violent extremism and fight against terrorism and coordinating the activities of the competent institutions in the country that work of resolving the issues in this area. This Committee is governed and represented by the National Coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism. The National Coordinator is supported and assisted in his work by the Deputy National Coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism and the Deputy National Coordinator for Countering Terrorism, whereby the latter is no longer performing this duty as of January 2020, which means that the Committee now functions without a Deputy Coordinator for Countering Terrorism.

### Strategic Documents

On 10 of April 2018<sup>5</sup>, the National Coordinator presented the strategic documents: The National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (2018-2022) and the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2018-2022) along with the action plans. The division into two separate strategic documents arises from the essential difference between violent extremism and terrorism, as well as the forms of reaction/prevention with the purpose of combating them. The need for developing new national strategic documents seeks to transfer the activities in countering violent extremism and radicalisation in the field of prevention and applying a comprehensive social and institutional approach in addressing these security phenomena.

### Legally Binding Instruments

In the Republic of North Macedonia the principle of equal opportunities and gender equality is protected primarily with the Constitution from 1991; however, at the same time, it is protected in two complementary manners: by integrating the principle of equal opportunities in certain laws, as well as by adopting a separate law, i.e. the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men adopted in 2012 and its amendments from 2014 and 2015<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Decision on Establishing the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism, Government of the Republic of Macedonia, 25.07.2017, Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia no. 98/2017

<sup>5</sup> Session of the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism, 10.04.2018, available at <http://vlada.mk/node/14421>

<sup>6</sup> Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" no. 6/2012, 30/2013, 166/2014 and 150/2015)

# DESK RESEARCH ANALYSIS

The National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2007-2012) is the first document that specifically integrated the gender perspective in the areas of peace and security and that defined specific actions in ten areas, including increased participation of women in the peace processes.

The deviation and restriction of fundamental rights in the context of violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism<sup>7</sup> may also infringe the international human rights obligations for promoting gender equality, as well as the obligations for promotion, participation and authorisation of women according to the UN Resolution on Women, Peace and Security. Key document for gender mainstreaming and achieving gender equality in the areas of peace and security is the UN Security Council Resolution 1325<sup>8</sup>. In addition, the Security Council Resolution 2242 (adopted in October 2015) recognises the need for engaging women in the prevention of violent extremism.

In April 2019, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy published its report on the achievements and challenges in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995). The report provides a comprehensive picture of the steps undertaken by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and underlines that the current Government Programme (2017-2020) obliges the Government to fight against gender-based discrimination and violence and to encourage and empower women. Further on, the report includes a series of recent developing legal frameworks: the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men was adopted in 2006 and amended in 2012; the Law on Prevention, Combating and Protection against Domestic Violence entered into force in 2015; and the new Law on Prevention of and Protection against Discrimination was adopted in 2019. In addition, in order to promote women's participation in politics, the Electoral Code was amended in 2015 by introducing a quota of 40% for the less represented gender on the lists of the parties for the parliamentary and municipal elections.<sup>9</sup>

The Strategy for Gender Equality 2013-2020 is another key document regulating the equal opportunities and gender equality by underlining nine thematic priorities where the 7th priority refers to women, peace and security. This priority has been incorporated in the Strategy, and correspondingly in the institutions which are most relevant to this sector priority - the Ministry of Defence and the Army.

Currently, there are national strategies and action plans in place which are related to the application of the international standards and domestic laws, such as: the National Strategy on Gender-Responsive Budgeting (2012-2017) and the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2013-2020, as well as the National Action Plan for Implementation of the Istanbul Convention (2018-2023). The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is responsible and competent for the budgeting and implementation of the related activities.

7 OHCHR, "Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism", 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/issues/terrorism/pages/srterrorismindex.aspx>

8 The Resolution 1325 was adopted in 2000 by the UN Security Council following the wars in the '90 which took place in the Balkans, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as on the African continent, where women and children were most exposed to the brutality of war and conflict.

9 Regional review and response to the questionnaire on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the results of the 23<sup>rd</sup> session of the General Assembly (2000) for preparing a regional review and appraisal in the context of 20 years anniversary since the adoption of the Beijing Platform and Declaration for Action in 2015, April 2019

10 Strategy for Gender Equality (2013-2020), Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Skopje, 2013

## Findings

- ▶ Currently, both the National Coordinator and the two Deputy National Coordinators are men. The National Committee<sup>11</sup> is comprised of 22 members, 9 of whom are women, or **just 41%**, and 22 deputy members who have a permanent employment in 21 ministries and state institutions, 10 of whom are women, i.e. 45%, who are appointed by the Government for a period of 4 years with a possibility for reappointment.
- ▶ According to some of the respondents, the composition has been significantly changed on the last meeting in 2019 without changing the decision for their appointment.
- ▶ **There is no woman on the position of a deputy coordinator.** The appointed Deputy Coordinator for Countering Terrorism no longer performs this duty.
- ▶ The external members of this body are also women - 3 of them; however, it does not change the fact that the internal positions, as well as those appointed by the managers of the institutions, **do not reach even 50% of the total number**, and neither there is a woman at a managerial position within the body.
- ▶ The National Committee, in line with its obligation, should submit a report on its work to the Government at least once a year. However, such **reports have not been published on the web-site of the Government so far**<sup>12</sup>.
- ▶ Having regard to the role, significance and positioning of this body as a single national body for implementing activities in line with the strategic documents for countering violent extremism and terrorism, **it begs the question of the functionality and efficiency, i.e. effectiveness**, in a situation of having no activities, having poor coordination, too many institutions involved and a total absence of mechanisms for motivating the competent institutions and organisations that work on these issues.
- ▶ The role of the ministries and institutions involved in the work of the National Committee in carrying out activities and measures translated into Action Plans is underlined. These strategies also have financial implications arising from the activities and the need of every institution to allocate funds for implementing measures. In this context, there are priorities that need to be set in terms of implementation within an appropriate period. The priorities cannot be followed up since there are no indicators to monitor the processes.
- ▶ In respect of the progress in the implementation of the measures envisaged in the Action Plans, we are unable to get any information since neither work progress reports are being published, nor performance indicators of the strategic documents per institution.
- ▶ The Republic of North Macedonia **is yet to approve a National Action Plan** for women, peace and security - NAP 1325, although it exists as an obligation for being a NATO member state. Bearing in mind that the Balkan countries in the region have already prepared it (BiH is preparing its third plan, Serbia and Albania have two, Montenegro and Kosovo), it raises the question of whether the institutions are inert in this regard or have no capacity.
- ▶ The strategic documents envisage the following: “For successful fulfilment of the obligations in future, it is envisaged for a state working groups to be established that will work on individual issues, as well as integrated task forces to be established on state and local level that will deal with different aspects in the fight against terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism.” It remains unclear **why spending resources and time in establishing new working groups with**

11 Official Gazette number 106/17

12 Accessed on 15.05.2020

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**new names and forms, but without essential responsibilities and tasks?** Why the existing mechanisms and established working bodies are not used which may/should assume the role of organisers and coordinators of all the aspects in countering terrorism and preventing violent extremism?

- ▶ Although the municipalities responded to us that “on local level, they also plan to establish groups in local communities that will act on preventing violent extremism and that will be comprised of different social actors”, we were unable to identify whether they refer to activating the already existing capacities or establishing new ones. If they refer to the Local Prevention Councils, they are not active anyway, neither do they organise initiatives and campaigns on their own initiative. In very few cases we were able to establish through the web-sites of several municipalities that some of the representatives of the institutions (MoI), as members of the Local Prevention Council, indeed organised some lectures on addressing conflicts and peer violence. For the rest of the members and representatives of institutions in the Local Prevention Councils, we were unable to find any data or information regarding their contribution. Most of the initiatives come from local non-government organisations. Nevertheless, the budgets of the municipalities allocate very little to support the local NGO sector to work on preventing and countering violent extremism.
- ▶ It is more than obvious that the large number of actors involved only **renders the process more difficult when it comes to organisation and coordination, and it is really rare to find such capacities anywhere**. Therefore, we would agree with the conclusion of one study<sup>13</sup> that the approach of “securitisation” that was implemented in North Macedonia so far is insufficient. **These efforts are reactive, not proactive**, thus having very little impact on extremism as a phenomenon, and it is, above all, on violent manifestations only. Nevertheless, the most important thing is that such a change in the political approach would show an important acknowledgement that the violent extremism and radicalisation within the Macedonian context are a social issue, as well as a security issue, and an action that reflects that the change in mentality should be accepted.
- ▶ Welcoming is the fact that in September 2014 the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia adopted the **amendments to the Criminal Code**, thus, introducing as a criminal offence the participation, recruitment, training, agitation, logistics and financing of Macedonian citizens in military conflicts outside of the country and in foreign paramilitary and terrorist organisations.
- ▶ As a result of the challenges, namely the **low awareness of the importance of gender equality**, these action plans and strategies obviously have not been a priority during the **budgeting** process and it was not possible to implement the envisaged activities.

## INTERVIEWS WITH EXPERTS

For the purpose of research, semi-structured interviews were conducted with relevant actors from the expert community – ranging from at least two to a maximum of five representatives on local level/municipality, including representatives of the local government, civil society activists, teachers/university professors, psychologists, sociologists, social workers, sports workers, religious figures, journalists, analysts, etc.

13 Stojkovski, F., Kalajdzioski, N., Community Perspectives on the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Macedonia, Berghof Foundation and Democracy Lab, 2018, available at [https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other\\_Resources/WB\\_PVE/CTR\\_CaseStudy1\\_Macedonia\\_mk.pdf](https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other_Resources/WB_PVE/CTR_CaseStudy1_Macedonia_mk.pdf), p. 31-32

In this manner, the research got insights from various perspectives. At the same time, the objective was to detect the challenges faced by women on local level in countering violent extremism and radicalisation. This should help in establishing the capacities and assumptions about the efficiency and quality in undertaking future activities for strengthening the role of women and their resilience in the fight against extremism.

The data gathering in the interviews was carried out directly, over the phone, and/or by e-mail, depending on the preference of the interviewee, as well as the possibility for data collection in view of the situation and conditions present in the country.

## Families are key for early detection and prevention

The majority of experts from different background indicated the family as a key factor, while all of them agreed that: “Within the families very little is talked about inclusiveness, and more is talked about our culture/religion being the best, our ethnic values and flags being the best, whereas the others are perceived somewhat as enemies.”

According to all respondents, the early detection and prevention of violent extremism is very important, especially for our country, “since there are different centres [of power] that want to divide people, particularly based on ethnic and religious grounds, to draw frames or lines of who belongs there and who doesn’t, and all of this can cause a problem in society. By promoting such division, it becomes part of the political discourse, and we had a case a few years ago where many young people from different cities became ISIS members. It is more of a problem of the entire social system and education, but also of the family, i.e. family upbringing is one of the factors where extremism is promoted to be part of our everyday life. The first information and exposure of every child to faith, ideology, ethics and values begins at the earliest age, at first through direct involvement in family rituals and customs (which may, but does not have to have religious connotation), and later also through teachings that will influence on future attitudes. The family as the fundamental cell of society must be functional, healthy and sustainable, in order to have a healthy and functional society.”

## The role of women in the family

Concerning the role of women in the family, all experts agree that: “Women can more easily and quickly recognise the changes in behaviour, lifestyle, activities, social life, and influence from other persons on members of the family; therefore, they are in a position to issue an early warning of such occurrences, to put themselves out to help them through conversation and support, thus influencing on preventing the radicalisation of their family members.”

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We would like to single out the opinion of one expert from the academia: “In the role of wives and mothers in the family, they can provide emotional and psychological support to all family members, show empathy, as well as motivate the others in creating positive attitudes and views towards life. Since the early ages, through proper guidance and teaching, every mother is directly responsible for his/her formation and proper psychological, moral and spiritual development.”

It is an interesting fact that all experts agree on the importance and double role of women in the family, although they recognise them more in the role of mothers “in raising and educating the children and being able to create future generations that will not be guided towards extremism”, however, there is not sufficient awareness of the responsibility, efforts and work that are expected of women and the burden on them to provide “emotional support to all family members and take responsibility for the education”, but it is rather taken for granted “as something that should be like that”.

The representatives of the non-governmental sector on the other hand were more focused on the extremist concepts that young people face when exposed to external factors through the new technologies and media, and they perceive women as being in the role of protectors from external influences. The model of a woman-mother in the family, according to their concept, should be technologically savvy, “especially in terms of the modern technology and communication media through which these phenomena can be significantly prevented by women.”

More indicative are certain statements made by a media expert that suggest “a central role of women in the household, i.e. in the family and community in general” considering and generalising that women are well familiarised with the situation in the entire community and in a good position “to recognise the unusual behaviour patterns and activities, such as mobilisation of weapons and weapon storage.”

## The role of women

### in the community

Concerning the other social roles played by women, such as employees in state institutions, at managerial positions, leadership positions, as state officials, sports workers, culture workers, etc., the academia provides two opinions:

As per the first opinion, women generally “give motivation and encouragement to other members of society by their actions in various social activities, and they always have a greater chance of reaching out to the mind-set of the people and promoting positive values,” while others believe that “the chances to contribute to the prevention of this phenomenon in our country depend on other factors as well, such as the level of education, literacy, the position of women in the family, the ability to think critically, the cultural differences, religion, initiativeness - the willingness of women to point out to the occurrence of such phenomena in the family or in society, etc.” The indication of several factors tells us that a general (positive) image of women in society is being built and nurtured, but there are few who do not generalise and point out directly to the conditionality of women’s position in society.

The majority of NGO experts agree on the second opinion and emphasise the need of education in order for women to be able to play the social role as a positive example. Apart from education as one of the main challenges, they also pointed out to the access to education and information and the access to relevant

information and cooperation with state institutions, having regard to the specificity and sensibility of the issue, as a main element in the decision-making process. The awareness about the importance of these two elements was indeed raised by the NGO sector, whereas the municipalities, including those run by women, were completely unaware that the access to information, if being a woman, plays a certain role.

## The role of women

familiar with

ideological matrices

The NGO sector also recognises the importance of the experience gained by women who have previously been involved (have taken part, have been recruited, have assisted, etc.) in extremist and radical processes and activities. In that case, they indicated that such experience could be used to highlight the key points, perceptions and narratives "that could help in building strategies on local level for countering occurrences of extremism among the other members of the community. Such experiences should not be neglected at all, and it should be worked with these women as they can significantly contribute towards prevention of extremism." - underline the representatives of the non-governmental sector.

There are two categories of women who can significantly contribute to such tendencies:

- ▶ The first category is comprised of women who understand the respective ideology that inherently has a discriminatory treatment towards women. In this regard, women can have an impact through a comparison of warning that would refer to the position of their own family members (women, mothers and sisters). Consequently, they can give their own affirmative discourse *vis-à-vis* the distorted views of a certain teaching that essentially has a humane and philanthropic essence.
- ▶ The second category of women comprises those who have personally experienced violent extremism and radicalisation that has led to terrorism. Their experience with a real life situation, regardless of their initial convictions or forced participation, could make young people in their family and surrounding develop a feeling of empathy. Their experience, as well as understanding of such ideology, could help in bringing to life the respective issues in their surroundings, at their work place, etc.

## Empathy among women

Key in the process of identifying the occurrence of abnormal patterns of behaviour in conflict situations is the feeling of empathy among women. This opinion is shared by the majority of respondents, especially researchers and experts, who believe that "the empathy is necessary not only for the purpose of emotional literacy on a personal level, but also for the purpose of understanding, feeling, engaging and acting in a situation of conflict with the others. They react more calmly, not so impulsively, so most of the time their role is to balance the relations, especially child-father relations. This helps them in applying peaceful solutions when resolving some undesired situations, verbal conflicts, quarrels, etc. In a nutshell, the soft

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approach applied by women in resolving an issue (challenge, conflict, etc.) can lead to finding a concrete solution much easily”, according to a university professor.

On the other hand, the representatives of the institutions are more focused on the competences that each employee has in the hierarchy and do not perceive this as an added value, but as a job duty, if included, so they say “those are preferences of opinion that do not depend on the gender, but on the individual him/herself.”

## The role of women in rehabilitation, re-socialisation and reintegration processes

It is a general conclusion that women would have a significant role and far better results. However, the input and explanations mostly came from the NGO sector which has an extensive experience with migrants, refugees, discrimination - “Of course, the input that women can give within these processes also depends on the status they have in the family and in society, i.e. whether they are in the role of a sister, wife, mother, close relative, friend, psychologist, psychiatrist, social worker, prison worker, NGO activist, volunteer, etc. The level/degree and aspect of their engagement also depends on their role in these processes. On the other hand, the women who themselves have resided in conflict zones (to a smaller extent in the role of fighters and to a larger extent in the role of companions of their husbands) are quiet often more flexible in handling the processes of rehabilitation, re-socialisation and reintegration of foreign fighters in society. Being victims to acts of violence or direct witnesses of the violence and trauma of the military actions or terrorist activities, or even as widows of such fighters, they can develop strong awareness and a motive to articulate and prevent such phenomena”.

The research experts cannot recognise any existing institutional mechanisms, and as a solution suggest the engagement of psychology professionals: “It is a fact that we haven’t built concrete mechanisms to tackle that phenomenon. These people are left to their own devices. Nevertheless, the role of the psychologists, psychiatrists and sociologists in the centres that would be established for this purpose, would be of great significance. The issues are very sensitive and to some extent a sex-/gender-based distinction can be made that women may have a certain sense for dealing with people who are depressed and traumatised after a conflict.”

## Participation of women in various initiatives

Almost all experts regretted to conclude that state institutions pay very little attention to initiatives, activities and campaigns that would raise the awareness for the involvement of women in security and prevention of radicalisation that leads towards violent extremism. The involvement of women in the central and local institutions is addressed more in terms of equal opportunities in education, healthcare, culture, business, as well as the so called “positive discrimination” in political life. Within the security sector, the issue is addressed more from the perspective of women as victims of domestic violence and extreme ideologies, which from a specific female discourse could encourage radicalisation in adolescent girls.

Experts in the field of security pointed out that the representation of women in institutions and stakeholders as an issue has not been addressed at all, but it is one of the crucial issues in the implementation of the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy. They recommend the following: “Therefore, the state institutions, together with the civil society organisations, should make greater efforts and establish partnerships to raise awareness of the need for women’s engagement in security and of the role that they can play and the contribution that they can make in countering and preventing violent extremism and radicalisation. In particular, such initiatives, activities and campaigns should focus on the local level, i.e. at the level of the local community, because there they can make the greatest impact, both in gathering information on the issue, early warning, warning, as well as in creating proposals and solutions for preventing such phenomena.”

However, there are also a few experts who disagree that special initiatives, activities or campaigns of state institutions and civil society are needed to raise the awareness of women’s engagement in security and prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation. This is for the simple reason that in any society, it is sufficient to provide fair and equal access for both genders, i.e. equal opportunities. Any pushing for an equal outcome, whether it is with measures of positive discrimination, or with additional initiatives in this regard, could only lead to a gap that does not reflect the reality.

Experts do not trust public institutions to engage women in building community resilience against extremism and radicalisation. According to them, first of all, public institutions should work more and they should strive to increase and strengthen gender equality, thus giving confidence to women and engaging them in building partnerships with local communities in order to build resilience against radicalisation that leads to violent extremism. They should additionally reinforce their capacities for involvement and engagement of women in building community resilience against this phenomenon.

The experts were not aware of any examples, nor were any good practices of women’s participation in institutions in dealing with this issue presented in the media. What seems to be particularly prevalent in the existing institutional practices and security bodies for preventing extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism is that primarily the role of women is limited and targeted only at dealing with issues that affect their gender. Our institutions still have a big task to learn and implement the experiences of the European countries, which in this regard prove to be very efficient, said the security experts.

The community in a broader sense, or some state institutions, remain silent in the sense that they do not want to face the problem publicly, nor give publicity to the problem, which indeed exists in our society,

and on the other hand, in some part, there are no efficient mechanisms to find concrete solutions to combat the radicalisation that leads to violent extremism.

Experts believe that the representation of women who work through the NGO sector on countering violent extremism and radicalisation in the country (based on knowledge of their previous and current projects and research conducted on the topic) is insufficient. The number of women in the NGO sector who work on these issues is insufficient. They assume that this is not due to the insufficient number of female professionals in the NGO sector who could carry out activities in these areas, but due to other factors, such as: insufficient number of calls for grants for project proposals in this area to which they can apply, access to funds (difficulties in finding funds to finance their project proposals), extensive documentation in the application process, which makes them insufficiently attractive to potential applicants, etc.

Consequently, the civil society sector, like the public institutions, underperforms on this issue in comparison to the neighbourhood, the region or the European countries. Nevertheless, some of them underlined that the civil society sector has a more dynamic and stronger exposure to these issues.

One of the experts from the NGO sector pointed out that violent extremism and radicalisation emerged as current topics for the NGO sector relatively recently and quickly became recognised as current topics for receiving donor support, even from organisations that had nothing in common with the topic, which is related to NGO sustainability issues. The same practices have been observed concerning other topics. For such a specific topic, there is a risk of projects that may do more harm than good in solving the problem, for which donors are also responsible. At the same time, it can affect the lack of trust in the NGO sector by the decision-makers. This assessment applies equally to men and women, but in terms of trust in the NGO sector, men who do not have relevant experience have it much easier than women in a similar situation. Therefore, there is the impression that women who work in this area invest much more in personal development and learning, and have a more thorough approach in the implementation of projects which in the long run significantly contributes to building the capacity of the NGO sector to deal with these issues.

Many of the experts did not have information on the representation of women in the working bodies for prevention of violent extremism and fight against terrorism at national and local level. Some believe that the reason for this could be pinned down to the assumption that these working bodies do not show much activity in this area in public. Nevertheless, gender representation and equality in the participation of women in such bodies certainly must be observed.

Some of the experts from different target groups assume that since we are a society that gives preference to men – a male society, the percentage of women involved in these processes and areas is small and the state should make an effort to increase that number through concrete solutions. We have seen that young and older people are involved in activities that were extremist activities and they were not only men, but also women, and in that sense, the number of women should be increased.

Some of the experts directly pointed out that such representation is not at a satisfactory level. Primarily at national level, if we look at the gender structure of the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism (CVE/CT), i.e. the central and pivotal members, such as the National Coordinator for CVE/CT, and the Deputy National Coordinators for CVE and CT, we can see that they are all men.

According to experts, women's participation in these bodies at national and local level would be positive for sure and would contribute to their functioning and efficiency. Increased involvement of women in those institutions would unequivocally enhance the visibility of such strategies and action plans for implementation.

**The interest among international organisations to support women who work on preventing violent extremism** (based on knowledge of their past and current projects on the topic that are being implemented) depends on the priorities they have set in relation to certain countries. In our case, international organisations and foundations show interest in working and providing support to local social actors on the topic of prevention of violent extremism. Hence, when providing and awarding grants to state or civil society organisations, they pay particular attention to the gender aspect and encourage more women to apply and carry out activities related to this issue.

## SURVEYING THE INSTITUTIONS ON NATIONAL LEVEL

The survey was conducted by using a specially designed survey questionnaire for representatives of the targeted municipalities and institutions, where data and information were recorded concerning issues related to the participation, role and position of women in the institutions at local level in the preventing violent extremism and radicalisation. During the survey, the respondents were given a separate document with information about the project and the research, as well as a special consent form for participation in this activity, whereby they were required to sign and return the form to be kept in the archive of the project. Participation in the survey is anonymous, and the name and surname of the respondents is not disclosed without their written consent.

At the same time, each institution was required to define several recommendations that they would give to policy makers and implementers.

As part of the research, several interviews were conducted with representatives of some of the institutions/ministries responsible for conducting activities to counter and prevent violent extremism and radicalisation. Presented below is the state of play identified in them in relation to this area, deduced from the answers provided by the interviewees.

*Table 2: Conducted interviews with representatives from the institutions*

| Institution                          | MEN      | WOMEN    | TOTAL    |
|--------------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| Ministry of Interior                 |          | 1        |          |
| Ministry of Local Self-Government    |          | 1        |          |
| Ministry of Labour and Social Policy | 1        |          |          |
| Ministry of Defence                  |          | 1        |          |
| Ministry of Justice                  |          | 1        |          |
| Ministry of Health                   |          | 1        |          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                         | <b>1</b> | <b>5</b> | <b>6</b> |

### Ministry of Interior

There are several units in the Ministry of Interior that work in the field of countering violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism. Within the Public Security Bureau (PSB) - Department for Combating Organised and Serious Crime, there is a newly established Sector for Terrorism, Violent Extremism and Radicalisation, as well as a Sector for Criminal Investigations, which has a unit for serious crime and terrorism in charge of criminal and operative investigation of preparatory activities for committing terrorist acts, as well as detection and clarification of extremist and radical behaviours. In each police station there is a Section for Prevention which is in charge of activities within this problem area, as well as cooperation with municipalities, NGOs and international organisations working on this topic. Also,

# SURVEYING THE INSTITUTIONS ON NATIONAL LEVEL

when international cooperation and exchange of information with relevant international partners is required, the Sector for International Police Cooperation gets involved through the units for cooperation with Interpol and Europol. On the other hand, there is the unit for international cooperation and joint operations within the Sector for Border Operations at the Department for Border Affairs and Migration. The percentage of women working in these bodies is higher in those in charge of international cooperation than in those involved in criminal investigations.

The Ministry of Interior is actively conducting activities to contribute to the implementation of the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (2018-2022). Thus, together with the OSCE Mission to Skopje, the “Tiger” Special Task Force organised two international scientific and professional conferences on management and negotiation in crisis situations caused by violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism, as well as on profiling and identifying returning foreign fighters. Also, representatives of the Ministry actively participate in working groups related to the creation and development of strategies and action plans in this area, as well as in the work of the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism. In fact, the general secretary of this coordinating body (besides the member and deputy member), by decision of the Government, is a representative of the Ministry of Interior.

In all activities carried out by the Ministry, in the internal trainings that are conducted, as well as in the appointment of head persons, care is taken to include women with the purpose of ensuring gender representation.

Also, within the implementation of the operational and tactical measures and activities, as well as the implementation of investigative actions, women are included if deemed necessary, especially when it comes to resolving issues in the field of preventing violence, building coexistence, multiculturalism, handling conflicts, etc. In this way, contribution is made to the implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality, and the work of the Ministry of Interior in meeting the objectives set therein has intensified in all areas - from the process of recruiting new staff to the appointment of women to leadership positions in various sectors, departments and units. Although it is not enough, nevertheless it is a fact that work is being done. At the same time, special care is taken to involve women in the activities implemented in the field of prevention of various phenomena at national level through the unit for prevention, but also at local level, through the police stations and members of the Local Prevention Councils, in cases where they exist.

## Ministry of Local

## Self-Government

According to the competencies, the Ministry of Local Self-Government does not have organisational units working on countering violent extremism, radicalisation, terrorism, preventing violence, assisting and educating victims/re-socialisation. There is a nominated member and deputy member (men) from the Ministry in the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism. Both are junior associates, but they come from the sector responsible for local development and decentralisation. The member has a degree in security and from that aspect he is competent in the subject area.

No activities are known of that the Ministry implements as a contribution to the implementation of the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (2018-2022).

Regarding the gender policy of the Ministry, women are indiscriminately involved depending on the job position and the problem area they work in, when it is necessary to address issues in the field of violence prevention, coexistence, multiculturalism, conflict management, etc.

Due to the scope of work, the Ministry finances projects that are implemented by the municipalities and the planning regions. They are not natural persons, so with regards to this, the aspects of gender equality should be taken into account through special criteria. However, when evaluating projects submitted by municipalities and planning regions, the project evaluation commission takes into account whether the project is gender sensitive. The municipalities and the planning regions, which have organised a large number of trainings, are extremely aware of this aspect.

Within the Ministry, women are involved in all activities that correspond to their professional engagement and qualifications, so no special care is taken of the engagement of women in activities implemented in prevention of various phenomena.

The interviewed employees of the Ministry believe that women's participation would increase the visibility and efficiency of the bodies that work in the area of preventing violent extremism, because it will break the stereotypes that it is a male area of work. According to them, women, in principle, are ambitious, they want to prove that they can do it and that they know how to do it, and they want to show it, because in this way they fight for greater gender equality and greater democratisation of society. They have an understanding of the need for transparent way of working.

The main messages they send to policy implementers regarding gender representation in countering and preventing violent extremism and radicalisation are:

- ▶ The competencies and capacity of the people involved in policy implementation should always be taken into account;
- ▶ Adequate gender representation of the representatives involved should always be taken into account;
- ▶ Adequate gender representation, through the involvement of women in this area, will bring better quality to the planning of measures and their implementation. Gender sensitivity is an indicator of the level of democratisation and humanisation of society.

## Ministry of Labour

## and Social Policy

In the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, among others, the Sector for Equal Opportunities and the Sector for Social Protection work in the area of countering violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism, prevention of violence, assistance and education of victims/re-socialisation. The two sectors and three units are headed by women. In the Sector for Equal Opportunities, 90% of the employees are women, and in the Sector for Social Protection over 75% are women.

The respondent was not aware of any activities conducted by the Ministry as an input in the implementation of the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (2018-2022).

Regarding the gender policy of the Ministry, the respondents believe that specifically this institution has a leading role in creating policies for countering this social threat. The indicated sectors adopt programmes, offer counter and prevention measures, as well as act upon procedures initiated before the competent Social Work Centres, which in the Law on Family are titled as Bodies for Guardianship, but it is also done through the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men.

According to the approach of the Ministry regarding the implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality, a decisive and primary responsible action needs to be undertaken through the indicated sector for equal opportunities in order to take care of the implementation of this Strategy and the fulfilment of its goals. The Ministry also pays special attention to the involvement of women in the activities it implements in preventing various phenomena, as according to the strategic plan, it is one of its primary objectives and tasks.

The interviewees agree that women's participation would increase the visibility and efficiency of the bodies working on this issue, as the best way to tackle these phenomena is to include women.

The message that the respondents from the institutions would like to send to policy implementers regarding the gender representation in countering and preventing violent extremism and radicalisation is:

- ▶ Involvement of all relevant government institutions in parallel with renowned and recognised NGOs.

## Ministry of Defence

There are no separate units or sectors in the Ministry of Defence that are fully dedicated to countering violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism, prevention of violence, assistance and education of victims/re-socialisation, but there is a Working Group for Implementation of Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming in the Ministry of Defence and in the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia, which includes male and female representatives from almost all sectors in the Ministry, as well as from the Army units. In the Army of the Republic of North Macedonia, according to its formation, there are units that are specially trained for countering extremism, radicalisation and terrorism, but it is more from a military perspective.

In the past period, the Ministry of Defence has worked intensively on gender equality and gender mainstreaming in the defence sector, especially in terms of preventing workplace harassment, preventing violence and creating mechanisms to help the victims.

Coordinator of the Working Group for Implementation of Gender Equality and Gender Mainstreaming in the Defence is a woman at a high position in the Ministry of Defence (Chief of Cabinet of the MoD). The Working Group has more women than men, but also among the gender mediators, gender trainers and advisers, the majority are women.

The Ministry of Defence organises an annual multi-day regional forum as a scientific and professional contribution to the implementation of the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (2018-

2022). The conclusions of the forum are submitted to the Government and implemented in the strategies of the individual ministries/in the security sector.

The Ministry of Defence, especially in recent period, is committed to intensified implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality, i.e. as many women as possible to be engaged in resolving issues in the area of preventing violence, building coexistence, multiculturalism, and handling conflict. The Ministry pays special attention to the involvement of women in the activities it implements in preventing various phenomena, since its policy is to achieve gender balance and for women to have equal opportunities with men in terms of the profession.

The interviewees from the Ministry believe that women's participation would increase the visibility and efficiency of the bodies working on this issue, as the presence of women in these bodies would give a special dimension and bring quality to the strategy itself and the mechanisms for preventing and countering these phenomena.

They assess as excellent the representation of women working through the NGO sector on countering violent extremism and radicalisation in the country, since the NGOs and the women who work within the organisations are quite visible, active and efficient in the pursuit of their goals, they are quite skilful in the use of media space and have good cooperation with international organisations.

According to them, there is interest among international organisations for supporting women who work on preventing violent extremism, and in cooperation with the institutions, they seek gender representation in the implementation of activities in the field of prevention of violent extremism.

The messages to policy implementers regarding gender representation in countering and preventing violent extremism and radicalisation are:

- ▶ To pay attention to the principles of gender representation and to have enough women who will contribute in a specific way in this field;
- ▶ To provide greater media visibility and promotion of the activities related to the prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation, especially the gender dimension;
- ▶ When involving female experts in the fight against violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism, it is necessary to include female experts, members of different ethnic communities, which will certainly contribute to proper recognition and more efficient handling of these negative phenomena in our society.

## Ministry of Justice

In the Ministry of Justice, among others, the Sector for International Cooperation, which participates in the work of the Council of Europe Committee on Counter-Terrorism, is the organisational body that works in the area of countering radicalisation, violent extremism, and terrorism. Within this sector, there are also units, which are headed by women.

The respondent is unaware of any activities carried out by the Ministry as a contribution to the implementation of the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (2018-2022), although the Directorate for Sanctions participated only partially in some meetings of the National Committee.

The approach of the Ministry regarding the implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality implies participation in the activities in line with the competence. Women are involved in the drafting of laws by the Ministry of Justice, in accordance with the Ministry's policy on gender equality and inclusion.

According to the interviewees, women's participation would increase the visibility and efficiency of the bodies working on the issue of preventing violent extremism, and then women would transfer their experiences and knowledge to other stakeholders. They also believe that the support and interest of international organisations to support women who work on preventing violent extremism is insufficient.

The messages to policy implementers regarding gender representation in countering and preventing violent extremism and radicalisation are:

- ▶ Gender equality in the design and implementation of all the measures for preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation;
- ▶ Analysing the gender impact of the measures for preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation;
- ▶ Greater opportunities and finances for women's organisations.

## Ministry of Health

So far, there have been no special projects on preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation in the Ministry of Health. However, the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism has a member and a deputy member from this ministry as well.

Special care is taken regarding gender representation and equality in the bodies and institutions within the ministry. According to the interviewed representatives, the recommendation regarding this topic is that health professionals should have training on how to recognise these phenomena, as health institutions have a higher turnover of patients who require access, detection and treatment. There is a need of psychologists who could help patients in such situations.

As a positive example, they indicated the Department of Immunisation, where the employees have ongoing contact with mothers who come to vaccinate their children. If the employees of this department are trained and familiarised with such phenomena, they can have indirect influence on the mothers and the parenting, giving advice on certain conflict situations. Furthermore, to educate the mothers on the possible occurrence of radicalisation and how to reverse the process, experiences from other mothers, connecting and sharing, giving them access to knowledge, methods and guidelines, as well as recommendations on how to act. According to them, mothers need to be encouraged and trained since they have the closest contact with children and have the greatest educational influence on children in the family and society. Nevertheless, first of all, there must be trained staff in the healthcare sector that will be able to provide such professional support to mothers, and patients in general, as well as education and assistance.

## SURVEYING THE INSTITUTIONS ON LOCAL LEVEL

Invitation to take part in this research was submitted to several municipalities, but responses were received by the following: Karposh, Veles, Kriva Palanka, Kavadarci, Bitola, Tetovo, Kichevo and Gostivar. The municipalities of Ohrid and Struga still haven't established Local Prevention Councils from a formal and legal point of view.

### Municipality of Karposh

The Local Prevention Council has been established in March - April 2018 and has 16 members, 5 of whom are women.



*Figure 1: Women in relation to men's membership in the LPC of Municipality of Karposh*

The female members of the Local Prevention Council are representatives of: the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Municipality of Karposh, the Ministry of Health, the Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Religious Groups and the printed media. All 16 members are permanent members, "and where necessary, different profiles from different institutions can take part, depending on the issue which is being addressed.

The municipality has implemented some 15 campaigns for prevention of violence, for increasing public safety in all urban and local communities, as well as for traffic safety and prevention of bullying, joint patrols of services and citizens to prevent vandalism, etc.

# SURVEYING THE INSTITUTIONS ON LOCAL LEVEL

Representatives of the municipality have met with representatives of the religious communities, the Islamic Religious Community and the Macedonian Orthodox Church, with the aim of preventing religious radicalisation.

In 2019, Community Action Teams were formed in the municipality to improve the cooperation between state and local authorities in accordance with the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (2018-2022), together with the Karposh Police Station. These activities include women from the local self-government, such as: **the Gender Equality Coordinator, councillors, and school principals.**

The local self-government also implements activities to contribute to the implementation of the **National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism** (2018-2022), in the form of lectures, trainings and joint patrols in the urban and local communities where there are security threats (from traffic or vandalism on street furniture). **The members of the Municipal Council, the municipal administration, and experts in the field of pedagogy and psychology are mandatorily involved.** The education sector undertakes activities, such as: joint classes, trainings, meetings and joint workshops.

The approach of the local self-government regarding the implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality is **open, affirmative and to a large extent stimulating.** The municipality takes special care of the engagement of women in the activities it implements in the field of prevention of various phenomena. Extremism and radicalisation are perceived as predominantly “male” issues in politics related to militant behaviour. No international organisation has yet expressed interest or suggested a project for cooperation in this regard.

*Table 3: The key messages from the Municipality of Karposh*

|  |
|--|
| Radicalisation and violent extremism know no boundaries, no gender or sex  |
| Only by raising public awareness and vigilance can the emergence of radicalisation be prevented  |
| Cooperation between institutions at local level, central level and the NGO sector is a necessary prerequisite for successfully countering this undesired phenomenon.   |
| Some burning issues, such as the radicalisation that leads to violent extremism, transcend the established stereotypes about where this behaviour comes from and who practices it. It is shown by empiricism, by global experiences, but also by all scientific findings. Hence only the sensitisation of the entire public, without restrictions on gender and age, can contribute towards successfully addressing these phenomena and preventing them. |

## Municipality of Veles

The Local Prevention Council in the Municipality of Veles was established on 16 September 2019 and is comprised of 15 members. Chairperson is the Mayor of the Municipality. Only 4 of the members of the Local Prevention Council are women.



*Figure 2: Women in relation to men's membership in the LPC of Municipality of Veles*

The female members of the Local Prevention Council are representatives of: the Regional Crisis Management Centre in Veles, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office and the municipal administration. The female members of the Local Prevention Council are actively involved in campaigns against domestic violence, in various lectures, presentations and forums on peer violence. Representatives of the administration take part in the meetings with representatives of the religious communities.

The cooperation with women activists takes place in the form of meetings and communication with the Municipal Organisation of Women - Veles, the National Network to End Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, and other women's associations.

The municipality has not yet established Community Action Teams for cooperation between the state and local authorities. However, they emphasise the need for early intervention and elimination of radical ideas by using so-called soft measures for prevention. In accordance with national and local strategic documents, it implements activities of preventive nature which are an integral part of the annual programmes for the Municipal Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency, the Council for Public Health, the Local Commission for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Illegal Migration in the Municipality of Veles, the Local Commission for Protection of Children's Rights, etc. All these activities and initiatives involve women from the local self-government and the non-governmental sector. In the 2020 activities programme of the municipality of Veles in the field of education, budget funds are allocated for conducting activities for educating young people on topics related to building coexistence, multiculturalism (inter-ethnic integration in education). At the same time, in the field of social care, the activities programme of the municipality provides for budget funds for the Annual Programme of the Municipal Council for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (part of the activities are related to prevention of peer violence).

# SURVEYING THE INSTITUTIONS ON LOCAL LEVEL

The respondent from the municipality says that “women would better deal with a problem in the field of prevention of violence and violent extremism, since they make better and wiser decisions, and the participation of women in the municipality of Veles in these activities is solid.”

The 2020 Social Care Programme envisages funds for activities under the operational plan for gender equality and thus the local self-government contributes to the implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality. At the same time, when nominating members to various working bodies and commissions, care is taken to have a sufficient number of women included in them. Respondents believe that “women’s participation in them would increase the visibility and efficiency as women have multiple roles in society and in life in general.”

There are no initiatives by the NGO sector for implementation of activities related to prevention of violent extremism.

## Municipality of Kriva Palanka

The Local Prevention Council is composed of 12 members, 4 of whom are women. The female members of the Local Prevention Council are representatives of the education sector and the municipal council. So far, the female members have not been involved in activities and campaigns against violence and terrorism and for building coexistence, since “there has been no need for it so far.”



*Figure 3: Women in relation to men's membership in the LPC of Municipality of Kriva Palanka*

No Community Action Teams have been established in the municipality, which is an obligation under the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism, nor are activities currently being implemented to contribute to the implementation of the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism.

The municipality believes that the approach to the implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality is proactive by engaging women in the activities it undertakes. However, they are unsure whether women

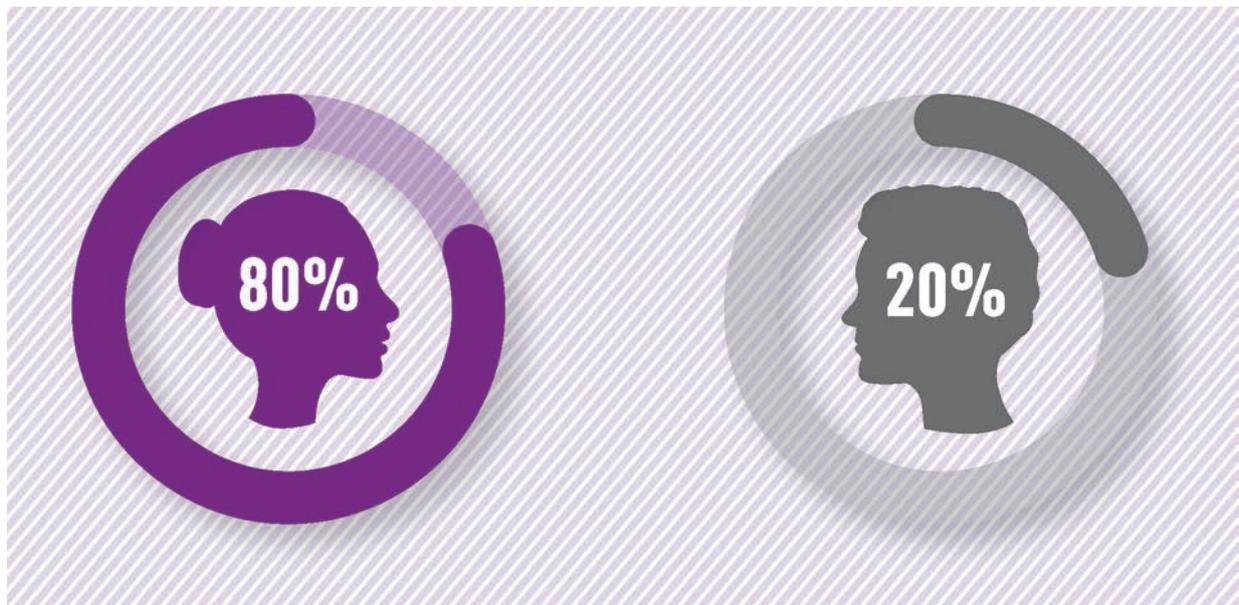
# SURVEYING THE INSTITUTIONS ON LOCAL LEVEL

would be better in dealing with such a problem and whether women's participation would increase the visibility and efficiency of the bodies responsible for preventing and countering violence and conflict.

The representation of women through the NGO sector, as well as the cooperation with international organisations on this issue, is insufficient.

## Municipality of Kavadarci

The Local Prevention Council in the Municipality of Kavadarci is composed of 25 members, 20 of whom are women and 5 are men. The female members of the Local Prevention Council are representatives of the education sector, the MoI, the social work institutions and the municipal administration. The female members have been involved in activities and campaigns against violence, but have not met with religious communities **“since there has been no problem with extremism so far”**.



*Figure 4: Women in relation to men's membership in the LPC of Municipality of Kavadarci*

Regarding the implementation of activities in accordance with the strategic documents, the municipality follows the guidelines of the government and works especially in the education sector by involving women from the local self-government, as well as cooperating with teachers and psychologists.

## Municipality of Bitola

The Local Prevention Council is run by the Mayor and it is comprised of 19 members (2019), 8 of whom are women at the moment.



*Figure 5: Women in relation to men's membership in the LPC of Municipality of Bitola*

The Strategy for Gender Equality is one of the top priorities of the Municipality of Bitola, which through the Commission on Equal Opportunities established in 2002, has adopted and implements an Action Plan on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, and also adopts and monitors a strategy for gender equality. The Commission is comprised of 7 councillors. Although there is no document that provides a concise description of the tasks of the Commission on Equal Opportunities, apart from the statute of the municipality which gives a brief description of the Commission, it is still active. It meets 4 times a year and adopts an Action Plan on Equal Opportunities, for the implementation of which the Municipal Council allocates a budget each year.

The local self-government takes special care of the involvement of women in the activities it implements in the area of prevention of various phenomena, which is evident from the fact that the councils for social care and prevention of juvenile delinquency are presided by women, the Commission on Equal Opportunities, where out of a total number of seven members, five are women, and the commission for local economic development and the commission for children's rights, which are also chaired by women.

The municipality considers that: "Women are those who by nature are destined to respond to the challenges in a calm and rational manner, despite the more vivid expression of emotions, still women are the ones who always try to apply a solution to any situation that would not involve violence. Women are the ones who prefer, more than men, to establish a constructive dialogue on any issue and to resolve any conflict in a peaceful manner through discussion, compromise and mutual respect. Women's participation would increase visibility by the mere fact that perhaps women would pay attention and increase the visibility of these bodies among the population, whereas men simply want to have the work done, not paying attention to sharing information about their work in public, while in terms of efficiency, these bodies depend entirely on the efficiency of the members of that body, i.e. on their personal characteristics and their diligence, regardless of gender."

# SURVEYING THE INSTITUTIONS ON LOCAL LEVEL

*Table 4: Main recommendations from the Municipality of Bitola*

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|--|
| Active engagement of women in working bodies, groups and commissions that work on this issue   |
| Improving the perceptions of the population about the place of women in countering and preventing violent extremism and radicalisation |
| Increasing the number of women who would like to be part of these issues   |

The Municipality of Bitola undertakes no activities on countering and preventing radicalisation that leads to violent extremism, so many of the questions could not be answered, but they expressed complete readiness to implement activities in this area.

## Municipality of Tetovo

The Local Prevention Council is composed of a total of 13 members, almost half of whom are women and have been formally and legally part of the Council since its establishment.



*Figure 6: Women in relation to men's membership in the LPC of Municipality of Tetovo*

The female members are representatives of the ombudsman, an NGO, a social work centre and the mayor's office, and all of them are actively involved in several campaigns.

According to the annual programmes, joint activities are planned for educational workshops, exhibition in schools, for a gallery of arts and for a humanitarian organisation that provides assistance to the most vulnerable families from the Roma settlement.

The Mayor regularly meets with representatives of religious communities, and women from the municipal administration, i.e. from the Council and the Mayor's Office, also take part. "We have regular coordinating meetings with the bishop and the mufti, monthly and periodic ones, where we discuss many topics, and the close meetings lead to absence of such phenomena of larger magnitude. The mayor

# SURVEYING THE INSTITUTIONS ON LOCAL LEVEL

has authority and her role is very important. These meetings are more frequently attended by men as representatives of the Mayor's office.”

**Community Action Teams** have been established for which the formal and legal procedure is under way; however, they have on-going communication with the National Committee on Countering Terrorism.

There is a larger number of NGOs in the municipality run by women. The municipality constantly implements various activities: forums, meetings and projects with all relevant stakeholders and institutions are constantly organised at municipal level. “Cooperation between men and women is inevitable, but I think that women are also good managers in every job. The fact that the municipality is run by a woman and that there is low percentage of extreme nationalism or radicalisation at municipal level is sufficient proof that women know how to deal with this issue successfully.”

Regarding the municipal policy on gender equality: training of the managerial staff was conducted together with the NGOs and their experts, so that gender equality should be part of all the acts adopted by the municipality, including the budget. From the start of all projects so far, attention has been paid to the equal involvement of women. **We believe that the number of women is sufficient, and in percentages they are equally represented in the work of NGOs.**

We singled out one interesting view from the interview itself: “The teaching staff is predominantly female. Both the pedagogical and psychological staff and half of the principals are women. Education becomes a female profession, all are women. There is no male kindergarten teacher or educator. Imagine being a male kindergarten teacher in Macedonia. Furthermore, 90% of the teachers in grades 1-5 are female, whereas over 60% of the teachers in grades above 5 are female, and education is becoming a female profession. Here the child enters the education process and sees no male. There used to be only male students at the Faculty of Mechanical Engineering in the past. Things are slowly changing, but in primary education it still lingers as a problem.”

Within the municipality, they always observe the gender balance, as they stated, **but the narrative was aimed at pointing out that those who plan and coordinate all the activities are women, whereas the decision-making positions are held by men.**

Recently, the interest of foreign donors to support projects in this area has become visible.

*Table 5: The key messages from Municipality of Tetovo*

Preventing violent extremism and radicalisation undoubtedly requires a multidisciplinary and well-integrated approach, based on on-going community consultation.

Violent extremism and radicalisation as a problem issue should not be treated as an individual phenomenon, but as a phenomenon that is directly or indirectly caused by many factors.

Consequently, the Local Prevention Council should also equally address those factors.

There should be gender equality in the national coordinating body (meaning the Committee for Countering Violent Extremism), since from the contacts we have, all of them are men. Maybe they [women] should be more represented, and maybe they will have more suggestions.

The perception would be from a different perspective, as currently they look at things from a male point of view, thus it will be more efficient if a female point of view is introduced.

## Municipality of Kichevo

The Municipality of Kichevo failed to respond to the questionnaires submitted, but according to the information obtained from the web-site<sup>14</sup>, female representation in terms of membership in various commissions within the municipality does not exceed 20%, i.e. only 1 in 5 members in any commission is a woman, except for the Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men where a level of representation of 50% and above has been observed. In some of the commissions, there is no female participation at all. The members of the Local Prevention Council have not met at all for more than three years.

## Municipality of Gostivar

The Municipality of Gostivar, according to the information from the web-site,<sup>15</sup> has adopted a decision to establish a Local Prevention Council in 2018, but we have not found any recent and updated records on the implementation of any activities by the Local Prevention Council. It has 19 members, of which 18 are permanent members. Only three (3) of them are women.

In general, the composition of the commissions<sup>16</sup> is no different from the Municipality of Kichevo, i.e. the percentage of female members does not exceed 20% of the total number of members in a commission, or only 1 in 5 members is a woman. Only in the Commission on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the participation of women exceeds 50%, which indicates that the very name of the commission only ensures the participation of women in the processes of work, coordination and decision-making.

## Commissions for

## Inter-Community Relations

Article 55 of the Law on Local Self-Government (Official Gazette no. 5/2002) provides for the establishment of a Commission for Inter-Community Relations. Within the bodies of the municipalities in the country, where the composition of the population is such that more than 20% are members of a certain ethnic community, a Commission for Inter-Community Relations will be established. The Commission is established in order to efficiently resolve issues, problems and needs that affect members of a particular ethnic community, as well as to improve the relations between the different communities living in the country.

The Commission for Inter-Community Relations is comprised of:

- ▶ A president; and
- ▶ Members of each ethnic community represented in the municipality.

14 See: <https://kicevo.gov.mk/mk/council-committees/> - accessed on 15/06/2020

15 See: <http://gostivari.gov.mk/mk/се-формира-локален-совет-за-превенциј/>

16 [Municipality of Gostivar – commission membership](#) – accessed on 15/06/2020

The work of the Commission for Inter-Community Relations is regulated by the Statute of the municipality. The Commission discusses issues that affect the relations between the different ethnic communities living on the territory of the respective municipality, makes its opinion or decision, which is submitted to the Municipal Council. The Commission reviews the proposals of the Mayor, the members of the Council, as well as the initiatives by the citizens. The Council is obliged to review the opinions and solutions offered by the Commission and to make a decision upon them.

From the interviews and from the respondents, we obtained the following information:

In the Municipality of Butel - the Commission has 4 representatives, and 50% of them are women, whereas in the Municipality of Chair there is only 1 woman who “recently got removed from the role of a Chairwoman and was replaced by a man, so even the female member who was quite active, in some way became demotivated to work actively”.

In the Municipality of Kumanovo, the Commission<sup>17</sup> is comprised of 10 members, 1 of whom is a woman, and also the Chairperson of the Commission is a woman, which means that there is only 18% women’s participation.

The Council of the City of Skopje, at the session held on 27 November 2019, made a decision<sup>18</sup> on establishing a Commission for Inter-Community Relations, which consists of one representative of each of the communities represented in the City of Skopje, with a four year term of office. The Commission in the City of Skopje has 7 members, of whom only 1 is a woman, whereas in Gostivar, out of a total of 8 members, 4 are women.

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17 Municipality of Kumanovo – Commission for Inter-Community Relations – accessed on 15/06/2020 <http://kumanovo.gov.mk/комисии-на-совет-на-општина-куманово/>

18 [Decision of the City of Skopje](#)



**EXTREME**



**EMISSM**

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GOOD PRACTICES IN THE REGION

The comparative analysis of good practices from other countries in the region is done in order to have a clear overview of the strategic goals of the fight against radicalisation and violent extremism and the gender mainstreaming in preventing and countering violent extremism. This refers to identifying national strategies and action plans, national bodies and institutions, scope of competencies and the manner of their functioning. Thereby, the best solutions are detected and suggestions are made for possible ways of applying them in the existing context in the Republic of North Macedonia.

### Albania

No significant changes can be observed in Albania in terms of women's education, addressing prejudice and gender-based violence, women's financial inclusion, parliamentary representation, legal protection and community safety. The position of women, their protection, security and well-being are still at a low level.

In September 2018, the Albanian government adopted the Action Plan for the Implementation of Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace and Security", which is being implemented in the period 2018-2020<sup>19</sup>. Although Albania is not a post-conflict country, it is sensitive to gender issues and needs to work hard to achieve the desired dimensions in terms of participation, protection, prevention of violence and work on recovery processes.

The project "Resolution 1325, Women's Rights from Concept to Albanian Reality"<sup>20</sup> was the first committed initiative by the country's civil society to move forward with the agenda for women's participation in the development of peace and security at national level.

The adoption of a NAP plan is indicative of this approach and includes the Republic of Albania on the map of countries that have a dedicated plan for gender mainstreaming and gender equality, as well as a plan for Women, Peace and Security. During this process, it was concluded that the Albanian Government continued to place the empowerment of women and girls at the centre of its policies, considering their involvement in political and public life as a contribution to the country's sustainable development.

However, in Albania there is still little participation and little attention is paid to the role of women in countering radicalisation and violent extremism. Due to lack of data and information on women's involvement, these efforts are implemented based on general statements only, remaining mainly focused on awareness raising campaigns. The basis of the Albanian strategic framework for prevention concerning

19 Nr. 524, Datë 11.9.2018 Për Miratimin e Planit të Veprimit për Zbatimin e Rezolutës 1325 të Këshillit të Sigurimit të Kombeve të Bashkuara, "mbi Gruan, Paqen dhe Sigurinë", 2018–2020, [www.siguria-paqja.al](http://www.siguria-paqja.al) Retrieved from: <http://www.siguria-paqja.al/sites/default/files/NAP%20Shqip.pdf>

20 Association of Women, Peace and Security. "Resolution 1325, Women's rights from Concept to Albanian Reality". Retrieved from: <http://www.rezoluta1325.al/?q=en/content/project-resolution1325-womens-rights-concept-albanian-reality>

the process of radicalisation and violent extremist phenomena is the National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism adopted in 2015,<sup>21</sup> which calls for the development of a multi-sector approach between various institutions outside the security sector. The national coordinator of this body is a man.

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>22</sup> has a unique and complex political, social and religious context that reflects the effects and interaction between different forms of extremism and radicalisation. As a society that is just a generation away from the violent war and displacement, there are many manifestations of extremism present in Bosnia and Herzegovina: right-wing nationalism, separatism, anti-LGBTI, and extremism subject to foreign Salafi ideology.

The National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Terrorism was adopted in 2015, and it refers to the period 2015-2020. The strategy got improved in comparison to previous security and terrorism strategies by recognising the issue of radicalisation that leads to violent extremism, but lacks clear and concrete prevention and protection mechanisms, as the resulting action plans have not been implemented despite the fact that the implementation was due to begin in 2016. While the Ministry of Security claimed to have consulted civil society and independent experts on the strategy, many experts and analysts noted that the consultation was not widespread enough and that more consultation would be needed to ensure efficient implementation and community support, including recognition of the role of women in these processes.

So far, several efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism and radicalisation have been undertaken by non-governmental and external actors. Nevertheless, the existing initiatives, such as these, are largely external.

What is noticeable in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the lack of real local programming to tackle violent extremism and radicalisation, or project plans in this area, and especially the engagement of women, which are specific to the local communities affected by these phenomena. All programming is currently initiated and targeted at state or entity level, making it more difficult to implement at local level, as well as to implement projects, measures and activities where women will have a central role and contribution. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the national coordinator for CVE and CT is also a man.

## Kosovo

In 2015, the prevention and countering of violent extremism and radicalisation began to attract more attention. In September 2015, the government approved the National Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism. The Strategy runs until 2020, along with a five-year plan. The action plan is envisaged as a flexible document, appropriate to the current implementation

<sup>21</sup> The Coordination Centre for Countering Violent Extremism, [www.cve.gov.al](http://www.cve.gov.al) Council of Ministers, National Strategy to Counter Violent Extremism and the Action Plan. Decision No. 930. Tirana: Albanian Official Gazette, 18.11.2015

<sup>22</sup> According to feminists, the role of women in preventing violent extremism is largely important in traditional societies, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina and other Western Balkan countries, but women are neither recognised, nor systematically supported as an important factor in the prevention, especially in recognition of them identifying the early factors of radicalisation.

experiences. The national coordinator for CVE/CT has changed several times so far, and this position has always been held by a man. The Kosovo Security Council is a body responsible for monitoring the implementation of the strategy, with a five-member working group and a larger government working group involved in the implementation. The larger working group includes representatives of the ministries (on labour, foreign affairs, education, and security), non-governmental organisations, religious communities and others who run the activities outlined in the Action Plan. The larger group should meet twice a year.

A recognised weakness in the development of the strategy for countering violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism is that it does not involve the local government. As part of the implementation, the government instructed the municipalities to improve the communication between the central and local government. This was the first time the government had instructed the municipalities to talk to the communities in this way. Another weakness that has been observed is the lack of broader citizen consultation in the drafting phases. This is attributed to the weak civil society, but also the different definitions and concepts of consultation.

The referral mechanism model is a key part of the work with the communities that advance. This mechanism is comprised of representatives of the education sector, social care unit, teachers, parents, psychologists, representatives of the Islamic community, etc., in order to ensure early detection of young people (boys and girls) at risk of radicalisation that leads to violent extremism and terrorism. As soon as the teacher, parent, or youth leader suspect that the individual needs support, the referral mechanism will be put into action with the purpose of determining the best support options available in order to get to the individual in a constructive manner. The challenge would be to provide sufficient staff and psychological and social resources for these people at risk.

## Serbia

Relatively few people fall into the category of violent extremists in Serbia. However, it is worrying that there is a significant number of non-violent extremists, as well as a trend of spreading extremist beliefs among Serbian citizens, especially young people (boys and girls) and the Roma population. This trend can best be explained through ideas of relative deprivation and culturalisation of politics.

Although there are differing opinions on the extent of the potential for ISIL/Daesh-inspired violent extremism, there is general consensus that there are communities at risk. Also, it should not be underestimated that a large number of Serbian citizens took part in foreign armies in the conflict in Ukraine, fighting on the Russian side. In this country, there are increasing cases of far-right, nationalist-inspired extremism expressed in the form of hooliganism and serious incidents of street violence, as well as all movements that threaten the territorial integrity of the country. Any links between groups that support extremist views or involvement in violent extremism and political parties are a serious concern.

The Working Group on Countering Terrorism began developing a Strategy and an Action Plan in mid-2015, and the coordinator of this group is also a man. Previously, Serbia did not have a defined document of a strategy for countering terrorism, although there was a previous attempt by the Ministry of Justice. The attempt in 2015 was led by the Ministry of Interior. TAIEX supported the effort with the Slovenian experts, while other relevant documents from Montenegro, the USA, the United Kingdom, Russia and other locations were reviewed during the drafting. Together with advice from the EU and the OSCE, the

government decided to combine the fight against terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism in a single document, so the strategy includes both repressive and preventive measures. Competent ministries and other government bodies involved in this strategy have committed themselves to developing an internal plan and a time frame for its implementation.

The Belgrade Centre for Security Policy provided written comments during the drafting process. The OSCE is also assisting the Government in identifying stakeholders from civil society organisations for further consultation as such relations are not yet firmly established.

The Strategy refers to the period 2016-2021. Following the adoption, a working group was established, as well as a mechanism for monitoring the implementation and regular monitoring and reporting. It is characteristic that this Strategy fails to mention directly measures and activities involving women and girls, so the role of women in countering and preventing violent extremism and radicalism is not directly recognised.

## Bulgaria

In Bulgaria, radicalisation and violent extremism, as potential threats to society, have recently been raised in the political debates and have entered the political agenda, mainly in light of the global and EU responses to the so-called domestic Islamist radicalisation, the activities of terrorist organisations, such as Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda, and the issue of foreign fighters for whom Bulgaria has become a transit zone, as well as from the conflict zones of the Middle East. Other forms of violent radicalisation, although existing for a long time (such as right-wing extremism and football hooliganism), have received significantly less attention.

The National Counter-Terrorism Plan (2008) is among the first strategic documents dealing with the trends of radicalisation. Most of the measures included in the plan were aimed at protection against terrorism, as well as on how to respond to potential terrorist attacks, subsequent crisis management, operational control, deterrence, better intelligence gathering, information exchange and preparedness. In other words, the focus was put on the so-called hard measures.

At the end of 2015, the new government strategy and action plan to counter radicalisation and terrorism were approved by the Government. At the end of 2017, the Bulgarian government implemented an update of this strategy with a greater emphasis on providing prevention tools and resources to frontline practitioners, such as teachers and police officers (men and women). The strategy envisages mechanisms for improved cooperation with civil society, business organisations, local communities and religious leaders. It aims to strengthen the existing efforts of the government for countering terrorism by including all possible services and optimising the inter-institutional coordination. The people in charge of these services are also mostly men.

Understanding the role of women in the processes of radicalisation is crucial. Therefore, the European Commission supported the development of specific initiatives and frameworks engaging women and promoting their participation in the fight against extremism and aggressive radicalisation, such as, through projects within STRIVE and WomEX, which were also available to Bulgaria. In addition, the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) provides a platform for those working in this area (including those working particularly on gender-related aspects of radicalisation) that enables on-going exchange

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of best practices. The Radicalisation Awareness Network also publishes a “Collection of Approaches and Practices” (2019), which identifies the most promising practices and approaches in involving and empowering women in the field of prevention, which also lists projects in which Bulgaria participated as well.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Women and community leaders are key actors in civil society when undertaking efforts to prevent violent extremism, and this is due to their influence and ability to promote social change.

Women can prevent the emergence of extreme views, attitudes and perceptions in people, especially in young people, through the family where the role and position of women is of primary importance.

Women can also have influence through the educational process, through the non-governmental sector and through associations of citizens (sports clubs, cultural and artistic societies, etc.) where they would be in a position to detect extreme views and perceptions and react appropriately to them, and where it is especially important to maintain an on-going dialogue between all members of religious, ethnic and cultural groups.

Women can more easily create a network of individuals who are resistant to radicalisation that can lead to violent extremism and terrorism (especially given that the professions related to social affairs, education, health care, etc. are mostly performed by women (so-called female professions). The possibility for establishing associations that will develop strategies for preventing extremism is primarily seen in the activity of the women's associations composed of professionals in the respective fields.

Women have a great role in preventing radicalisation that leads to violent extremism, because in the family they are in a position to detect the initial stages of this phenomenon, but also to have a psychological influence on preventing them. The protective influence of women in the family as mothers and spouses should be taken into account. The patience, perseverance, communication skills, as well as their closeness to all members of the family are an advantage that would allow for preventing the occurrence of radicalisation that leads to violent extremism.

If we take into account that 95% of the employees in preschool institutions are women, their significant influence in the prevention of these phenomena is evident; primarily their influence on the children, but also their influence on the families of the children.

The family link is a priority in this paradigm. Women are the new “pillars” of the family. The established moral and ethical norms have a great impact on defining the influence of women in the family in preventing the occurrence of radicalisation and violent extremism. It would be perceived differently by a family woman who is on a different educational level and in different field. If the perception of radicalisation and violent extremism could be exposed in all of its forms of occurrence, then the terminology would become closer to young people as something real and existing and as something that they would seek to “avoid”. Otherwise, the female parent will walk along with her child and will be discovering the path of real “danger” and new challenges.

Basically, women with their empathy could deal better with conflict situations, since they have wider horizons. But also the character traits, social skills and ability for quick adjustment to any situation and perception of differences (cultural, ethnic, or religious) they have are aimed at efficiently dealing with conflict situations. The level of empathy is different and individual to each person. Empathy creates positive conditions for compassion for the environment, in a way that will contribute to understanding the real “weight” that some individual faces compared to others. Empathy is a powerful “weapon” for

# CONCLUDING REMARKS

exposing the other side, regardless whether it has a positive or negative attitude towards us. The conflict itself and by definition responds to empathy in the surrounding, so people with a high level of empathy would greatly contribute to resolving or minimising the harmful consequences of conflict situations.

Women have a primary role in the processes of rehabilitation, re-socialisation and reintegration of foreign fighters in society, especially when they are in the role of partners (spouses), but also as psychologists, social workers, friends or colleagues at work, they can have a positive impact and enhance the process of rehabilitation, re-socialisation and reintegration of foreign fighters in society. The environment should accept them and provide them with adequate opportunities and conditions for re-socialisation and reintegration in society.

There is a need of more active involvement of the media in this domain, with a clear, precise framework of supporting women's engagement in the community, in view of the extremism and radicalism. Only in that way can we ensure measurability that would be the basis for a new, future strategic action in this domain.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The main recommendations of the experts to policy implementers regarding gender representation in countering and preventing violent extremism and radicalisation are summarised as follows:

- ▶ To ensure gender equality in the bodies dealing with these issues at national and local level;
- ▶ To encourage and stimulate women to get involved in the implementation of activities for countering and preventing violent extremism and radicalisation;
- ▶ To seek and collect information from women at local level about the possible existence of certain forms of extremism;
- ▶ To train women in recognising such phenomena and the possible forms for their contribution in preventing them;
- ▶ To set up a pool of female experts in countering and preventing violent extremism and radicalisation, protection of women's rights, equality and non-discrimination and active discussion on efforts to avoid stereotypes;
- ▶ To cover the component of monitoring and evaluation of the policies for inclusion of women in the fight against radical and violent extremism, for the purpose of improving them, performing comparative analysis, building expertise in this field;
- ▶ To identify and effectively address the causes that have led to the involvement of women in violent extremism, etc.;
- ▶ When implementing such projects, women should get involved as participants in larger numbers, in rural areas, all typical environments that exist in the country and the region regardless of their social structure, education, etc., because in this way we will all contribute to reducing the level of extremism that exists in our society;
- ▶ The importance of educating women and youth on security issues, as well as on the threats and dangers arising from various factors: ethnic conflicts, civil wars, scenes of all kinds of extremism and radicalisation, cyber threats, requires greater investment in human resources in this field in order to increase the stability and economy of the country and the region;
- ▶ More initiatives, activities and campaigns of state institutions and civil society are needed to raise awareness of women's involvement in security and prevention of radicalisation that leads to violent extremism, as women's involvement in these processes is at a considerable level;
- ▶ Women are not sufficiently engaged in building community resilience to radicalisation that leads to violent extremism. The influence of women is necessary to achieve positive results in preventing and countering violent extremism.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Argumentation for drafting and/or amending policies

- ▶ The focus must be on strengthening gender equality.
- ▶ **Educating women** on these topics will contribute to the recognition, early warning, appropriate response and reporting of events related to violent extremism and radicalism.
- ▶ **Peace education** is an instrument for which there should be curricula developed for the educational institutions, but not only should it include training and information gathering to increase the relevant expertise in the region, it should also single out and highlight experiences through local contexts.
- ▶ **Institutionalisation of women** - It is necessary to find ways to identify and assign various positions in institutions and society to women who will deal with conflicts, work against violent extremism and radicalisation, and support multiculturalism and non-violent conflict resolution.
- ▶ It is necessary to **actively engage female advisory groups of citizens** with the presence of women from the sectors of social work, education, medical personnel and police. Having conversations on the topic in all settings (rural and urban) will contribute to understanding of this problem by members of the community. So, it is necessary to initiate and hold open debates with people from the community as part of informal meetings where the local problems, the antisocial behaviours detected and other socially negative phenomena will be discussed.
- ▶ The **involvement of female parliamentarians** is another factor in supporting women who work in the areas of peace and security, and their voice helps in facilitating the implementation of strategies and action plans, especially those in the field of preventing violent extremism, which in particular should intensify with activities that will involve women from all walks of life.
- ▶ The **economically strengthened position of women** will mean greater level of cohesion within families.

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*"Preventing and countering radicalisation that leads to violent extremism requires a multidisciplinary and well-integrated approach, based on ongoing community consultations and the active involvement of women in the working bodies on this issues."*



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