

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SECURITY AND COUNTERTERRORISM



A project funded by the European Union
Global Threats Programme

CONTEXT

Terrorism remains one of the key threats to the security of the European Union (EU) and its citizens, at home or abroad. Terrorism is a transnational threat, requiring a collective response and cross-border cooperation. Engagement with third countries is key, as is cooperation with international organisations. Combatting terrorism requires a whole-of-government, whole-of-society, long-term and sustainable approach.

Counter terrorism policies and measures to prevent violent extremism have tended to ignore the gender perspective or reduce it to general assumptions about the role of women in society. On the one hand, terrorist groups are assumed to be made up only of men. On the other, those fighting terrorism, be it in security forces or in judicial institutions, are still primarily men. The role of women in counterterrorism (CT) is still largely limited to perceived stereotypical roles (e.g., mother figures) in preventing radicalisation, as sources of intelligence among families and communities on the ground and participation in de-radicalisation and reintegration programmes.

Yet, as in all policy areas, the gender dimension must be taken into consideration to generate more inclusive, and thus more effective, initiatives and reshape the narrative on CT. It is time to move away from the assumption that women are only victims of terrorism and violent extremism rather than actors involved in combatting terrorism.

The benefits of and challenges to including more women in the judicial and security response to CT are under-researched and suffer from an incomplete knowledge basis. The identification of societal and practical barriers to increasing women's participation in this domain must be examined to derive solutions and raise the awareness of the added value of women actively combatting CT.

AMOUNT

€ 390,000

IMPLEMENTING PARTNER

Women in International Security
(WIIS) Brussels

DURATION

Eighteen months. From January 2022 until June 2023.

COUNTRIES COVERED

Global scope

CONTACT

European Commission Service
for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI)
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OBJECTIVE, EXPECTED RESULTS AND ACTIVITIES

The specific objective of this project is to produce guidance to promote a strategic approach and understanding of the role of women in security and counterterrorism.

The main expected result is the production of operational guidance for partner countries on how to promote the participation of women in the field of security and counterterrorism.

The guidance will serve to consolidate gender-related policy and translate it into operational support for EU programmes addressing security and counterterrorism. It will support the design and implementation of programmes which promote and/or facilitate meaningful engagement of women in the criminal justice response to counterterrorism, by drawing from globally sourced best practices and lessons learned from CT programmes and initiatives in national governments or international institutions.

To produce this guidance, the project will identify key challenges to women's participation in the criminal justice response to terrorism, be it culture (e.g. that of law enforcement institutions or the judiciary), training and education, or perceived operational barriers (e.g.: biases surrounding women's roles and competencies). Case-studies will be put forward to derive possible solutions to these challenges.

Project activities will include an in-depth literature review, mapping of key concepts, documents, organisations and initiatives on women's role in CT and a broad consultation with key stakeholders to develop and validate the guidance. A strategic steering committee made up of very high-level as well as working level experts will guide the project and ensure that its conclusions and recommendations are valid, reflect reality and are tailored to their intended audience.