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WOMEN'S ALLIANCE FOR SECURITY LEADERSHIP
Preventing Extremism by Promoting Rights, Peace & Pluralism

National Action Plans on Preventing Violent Extremism

A Gendered Content Analysis

A Brief on Policy and Practice to Inform National Strategies for Preventing Violent Extremism and Promoting Sustainable Peace

ICAN International Civil Society Action Network

For women's rights, peace and security

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Introduction

In 2015, the UN Secretary General released a Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (PVE) in response to the fourth review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (A/RES/68/276) and Security Council resolution 2178 (2014).[1] The plan, recommends that: "each Member State should consider developing a national plan of action *(emphasis added)* to prevent violent extremism which sets national priorities for addressing the local drivers of violent extremism and complements national counter-terrorism strategies where they already exist."[2]

The UN further recommends that National Action Plans be firmly grounded in human rights, developed in a multi-disciplinary manner, promote respect for the principle of equality before the law, address the issue of foreign terrorist fighters, and are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 2030 agenda.[3]

> *"Women's empowerment is a critical force for sustainable peace. While women do sometimes play an active role in violent extremist organizations, it is also no coincidence that societies for which gender equality indicators are higher are less vulnerable to violent extremism"*
>
> — UNSG's Plan of Action

Under Goal 5, the Plan of Action recommends that countries mainstream gender perspectives in PVE work, include women in national law enforcement and security agencies, and build the capacity of women and civil society groups to engage in prevention and response efforts.

Due to the importance of National Action Plans as policy instruments in the prevention of and protection against violent extremism, and the ongoing work in this realm by national governments and civil society organizations, the

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[1] UN General Assembly, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism: Report of the Secretary-General* (A/70/674), available at: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674.
[2] Ibid
[3] United Nations, *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism,* Agenda for Action, available at: https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism.ctitf/files/plan_action.pdf.

International Civil Society Network (ICAN) sought to gain a better understanding of the content of the plans that have been published thus far in 2017, and to highlight good practices and gaps particularly in relation to the inclusion of civil society and gender perspectives and priorities. To this end, ICAN conducted a content analysis of nine NAPs, analyzing whether and how specific themes and target groups were discussed, including education, media, civil society, gender/women, and human rights.

The review has also informed ICAN's consultative work on these issues, particularly with regard to the three thematic meetings we convened under the auspices of the Global Solutions Exchange (GSX) in 2017. In line with the GSX principles, the meetings each addressed PVE issues with the participation of grassroots women and youth organizations focusing on security interventions, community policing, economic policies and education programming, each with attention to the gendered dimensions of the topics at hand. The findings from those meetings are available in separate publications that accompany this brief.[4]

They offer practical recommendations to be applied and implemented in the process of NAP planning and implementation by countries and organizations active in PVE issues.

Methodology

ICAN analyzed the nine National Action Plans that governments have produced as of July 2017. Since there is no central database for NAPs, it is possible that there are other NAPs in circulation. However, ICAN was not able to locate them at this time. In the content analysis, ICAN focuses on 10 themes. These were decided in consultation with ICAN partners, which include women's organizations and activists working on issues of security and extremism. The themes that were selected based on their particular relevance to the work, of local, civil society and grassroots organizations in the field.

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[4] Sanam Naraghi-Anderlini et al, *Education, Identity and Rising Extremism: From Preventing Violent Extremism to Promoting Peace, Resilience, Equal Rights and Pluralism (PREP)*; Melinda Holmes et al, *Preventing Violent Extremism, Protecting Rights and Community Policing: Why Civil Society and Security Sector Partnerships Matter*; and Sanam Naraghi-Anderlini et al, *From the Ground Up: A Preliminary Dialogue on the Nexus of Economic Policy, Gender and Violent Extremism:* ICAN: Washington D.C., Fall 2017, available at: www.icanpeacework.org.

In conducting the content analysis, ICAN answered the following research questions:

How often is a specific theme referenced in the NAP?

This question was answered by conducting a simple word search, and tallying the total number of references. While it leaves out the context of the reference, it does provide us with insight into which themes NAPs chose to prioritize. The number of references for each NAP/theme was recorded in a spreadsheet.

To what extent is the theme discussed in the NAP?

The analysis distinguishes between a theme being mentioned in passing, discussed comprehensively, or treated as its own section or action point. For instance, where one NAP contains a single reference to the "importance of education in PVE work", another NAP may devote an entire section to PVE through education, including specific measures and action steps. Where one NAP might mention women and civil society only as target groups or beneficiaries, another discusses the need for their engagement as equal partners throughout all stages of PVE work.

What are the elements of each theme included in the NAP?

The analysis looks at how NAPs interpret each theme. Media, for instance, might be discussed in various ways: NAPs can talk about the need to change curricula, stress the need to embed early warning systems in educational institutions, emphasize vocational training, and so forth. In Section 3 of this document, the analysis outlines how each theme is discussed and any sub-themes that emerge.

Analysis

Themes by number of references in National Action Plans

Country	Gender	Women	Youth & Adolescents	Civil Society	Media
Finland	0	0	24	0	10
Burkina Faso	0	5	15	28	20
France	0	3	25	4	14
Denmark	0	2	60	13	24
Norway	0	0	25	11	6
Kenya	2	0	11	14	15
Switzerland	9	24	20	14	9
Somalia	1	13	14	18	4
Morocco	0	3	24	2	1

1. Gender

Gender and gender equality concepts are sparsely mentioned in the current set of NAPs. Of the nine analyzed, only three reference gender and of those only one—Switzerland's—recommends specific actions to encourage gender mainstreaming in PVE strategies and action plans, incorporate gender concepts in education and training, and analyze the gendered causes of violent extremism.

The Kenya and Somalia NAPs broadly call for the importance of furthering gender equality and identify gender as a dimension of violent extremism, but do not issue targeted recommendations to integrate a cross-cutting gender lens.

2. Women

The word "women" appears in only five of the nine analyzed NAPs, most prominently when describing groups vulnerable to become targets or perpetrators of violent extremism. The existing work of women-led organizations

Economics	Education	SGBV	Community Policing	Human Rights
0	25	0	0	7
40	32	0	0	9
10	25	0	0	0
0	50	0	0	3
0	10	1	0	1
18	13	0	0	0
7	23	3	0	25
3	7	0	1	11
10	21	0	0	24

and women leaders in preventing and countering violent extremism is sparsely mentioned, despite the UN Action Plan's explicit reference to this matter.

The Somalia, Switzerland and Burkina Faso NAPs set out a course of action to build the capacity of women as leaders of their community, development actors, and/or mentors and parent coaches of youth.

The Switzerland NAP is the only one to explicitly reference UNSCR 1325 and the country's related Women, Peace and Security NAP, stating, "Switzerland advocates the participation of women in decision-making processes concerning policy-making and will thus meet its obligations under the current National Action Plan on the UN Security Council's resolution 1325" (p. 21). Notably, it is also the only NAP to highlight the need for women's participation in policy and decision-making processes related to PVE.

3. Youth and Adolescents

Youth and adolescents are broadly referenced in all NAPs as groups vulnerable to violent extremism concepts and biases, key target groups of PVE policy and programming, and potential actors for implementing such policy and programming. A general consensus across NAPs is that more research is required to analyze the drivers behind the radicalization of youth.

PVE actions targeting youth are primarily focused in the spheres of education and employment. Education initiatives seek to promote media literacy, critical thinking and opportunities to interact with different religions and cultures.

Youth unemployment is frequently highlighted as a key issue—the Burkina Faso NAP, for instance, describes it as a "social and political ticking bomb" (p. 20). However, NAPs do not propose a comprehensive approach to address the lack of employment opportunities for youth beyond vocational skills training and increasing the range of civil service activities.

Examples of good practice include the Denmark, Finland and Norway NAPs that call for engaging youth as actors in their own education by calling for the establishment of a national dialogue corps and organizing dialogue conferences and debates.

The Switzerland NAP also expands its scope beyond education and employment and calls for encouraging the voter participation of youth and for revising the treatment of youth as perpetrators, victims and witnesses in the justice system. France's NAP also calls for justice sector reform to better accommodate adolescents and youth.

None of the NAPs address the gendered dimensions of "youth and adolescence" even though the experiences of young men and women are quite different vis-à-vis exposure and recruitment into extremist movements, and their involvement in PVE and initiative that foster positive alternatives.

4. Civil Society

The majority of NAPs acknowledge the essential role played by civil society in PVE strategy and work, analyze the current state of civil society in their country, and outline steps to engage civil society actors further. They propose partnering with civil society in research, dissemination of counter-narratives, and policy-making processes. Several NAPs highlight the need to strengthen civil society

itself, by creating CSO networks and establishing platforms to connect civil society, citizens and the media.

Select NAPs envision civil society leadership in PVE strategy, involving civil society as implementers and managers as opposed to solely as partners or constituencies. Burkina Faso is the only country to indicate civil society took part in writing its NAP, while Norway's NAP calls for civil society to be part of a permanent reference group to improve national PVE coordination.

5. Media

NAPs frequently mention the use of media by extremist groups as a recruiting and radicalization tool. They also propose education initiatives for youth around media literacy and responsible internet use as potential solutions. The Switzerland and Somalia NAPs also call for "strategic communications" to spread messages that run counter to those of extremist actors and groups.

Across NAPs, media actors—including social and online media—are identified as key "voices of moderation" in PVE work to disseminate counter-narratives. The Burkina Faso NAP also stresses the important role of media organizations in accountability and early warning: enhancing civil society oversight of governmental action and monitoring the national security organization.

Beyond "counter-messaging" none of the NAPs address the need to provide positive alternatives to youth or men and women who may be lured into extremism based on their aspirations or sense of exclusion. For example, for many young men, extremist movements offer the promise of fulfilling masculine ideals of heroism or contributing to a cause. Media programming could be developed to celebrate existing example of local "heroism" or engage youth in community initiatives.

Similarly, there is potential for amplifying the voices and perspectives of community or international figures who can be "points of light" to inspire young women and men, not just to be reacting against extremists' tactics. There is also a need for NAPs to highlight and encourage support for existing innovative practices using media such as community radio to reach the marginalized populations and offer them positive alternative interpretations of religious texts as in Nigeria. These forms of traditional media are critical too, as extremist movements have used them to target those communities for radicalization.

6. Economics

Economics and economic concepts are referenced in six of the nine NAPs analyzed, mostly in the context of a discussion on drivers of extremism. The Burkina Faso NAP, for instance, includes a section on socioeconomic drivers that identifies "unmet economic needs" and "deprivation of socioeconomic needs" as key factors driving recruitment and radicalization of youth (p. 8).

Across NAPs, potential solutions to economic issues center around increasing the breadth of economic incentives and livelihoods available to youth and emphasize economic development to create opportunities.

Macroeconomic policy is not mentioned as a factor in any of the NAPs. However, there is a sense that greater research is required to connect the dots: the Kenya NAP, for instance, calls for a participatory research agenda on the "nexus between radicalization and personal, economic and existential crises" (p. 36). These issues and related recommendations are also discussed in greater detail in ICAN's 2017 brief, *From the Ground Up: A Preliminary Dialogue on the Nexus of Economic Policy, Gender and Violent Extremism.*

7. Education

NAPs call attention to both the positive role education and educational institutions can play in promoting critical thinking and acceptance of diversity and acting as an early warning system, as well as the potential of education—for instance traditional religious education—to propagate biases and fundamentalism.

Proposed PVE actions related to education focus largely on the distribution of materials for teachers and students, scaling up vocational and skills training in academic institutions to improve job prospects, and embed prevention and early warning systems in education strategies. Several NAPs aim to create safe fora for students to express grievances and establish pupil and student welfare services in addition to case management structures.

Some of the more innovative developments in PVE through education are evident in the Kenya, Finland and Somalia NAPs as they propose changes to education curricula to integrate conflict resolution skills, teach critical thinking and promote pluralism and diversity. The Kenya NAP further proposes changes in educational

institutions that promote "cooperation, free thought and positive acceptance of ethnic, racial, and religious diversity" (p. 28). In Finland, the government has integrated an increasing emphasis on human rights and adjustment to the democratic society in its core education curricula, and proposes intensifying cultural and global education, for instance by providing opportunities for young people to visit different religious communities (churches, mosques, synagogues, etc.). Finally, the Somali NAP aims to highlight the peaceful message of Islam in education curricula, and use education as a platform to foster relationships between teachers, families, other students, and local community leaders

However, the majority of NAPs focus on educational institutions as a platform for skills training, media literacy, or preventing and identifying signs of radicalization, and do not propose curriculum changes related to the promotion of positive values relating to diversity and human rights. None of the NAPs so far reference the need for teaching history that is reflective of injustices. Nor do any of the NAPs acknowledge the need for teacher training to address inherent biases or improve their skills in addressing the needs of marginalized students.

None of the NAPs discuss teacher salaries or quality standards for instructors, or the reduction in education spending and infrastructure that has given rise to a proliferation of private educational institutions particularly religious entities that often foster exclusion and separation not social cohesion. These issues and related recommendations are also discussed in greater detail in the ICAN's 2017 brief, *Education, Identity and Rising Extremism: From Preventing Violent Extremism to Promoting Peace, Resilience, Equal Rights and Pluralism (PREP).*

8. Sexual and Gender Based Violence

Mentions of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) and its connection to extremism are absent in the vast majority of the NAPs. Only the Switzerland NAP discusses it at length, dedicating a section to "gender-specific violence" that details how Switzerland has increased its efforts to prevent SGBV in fragile contexts by involving young and adult men (p. 16).

Notably, none of the NAPs discuss SGBV as it occurs in their own national context.

9. Community Policing

Only one NAP, that of Somalia, specifically mentioned community policing as a key responsibility of the Ministries of Justice and Internal Security. The majority of NAPs discuss policing as it pertains to security practices such as surveillance, investigation and law enforcement. However, several NAPs discuss the role of the police in PVE outside of these practices.

The Norway, Denmark and Switzerland NAPs do call for improved trust between police and communities and the establishment of cooperation mechanisms between municipalities and the police.

Given the importance of policing to effective PVE, and the documented experiences of police abuse as a contributor to radicalization, there is urgent need and significant potential for developing the community policing elements of PVE NAPs. Recommendation for practical measures are detailed in 2017 brief, *Preventing Violent Extremism, Protecting Rights and Community Policing: Why Civil Society and Security Sector Partnerships Matter.*

10. Human Rights

Most NAPs, with the exception of Kenya and France, make a reference to human rights. However, aside from Switzerland and Morocco's NAPs, none integrate a strong, cross-cutting human rights approach to PVE throughout the document or detail how proposed actions will contribute to human rights. The Denmark and Finland NAPs, for instance, only mention human rights in relation to education: indicating the importance of incorporating human rights in school curricula and youth debates.

The Switzerland NAP contains a focus on human rights throughout its strategy, in addition to a section on "promoting human rights, international humanitarian law and the rule of law" (p. 13). The NAP also stresses accountability for states to meet their human rights obligations when preventing violent extremism. Morocco's NAP frames its discussion of violent extremism entirely in the context of human rights, referencing the 2011 revisions to its constitution and assigning many of the PVE responsibilities to its National Human Rights Council (p. 9-10).

"I am convinced that the creation of open, equitable, inclusive and pluralist societies, based on the full respect of human rights and with economic opportunities for all, represents the most tangible and meaningful alternative to violent extremism and the most promising strategy for rendering it unattractive."

— UNSG's Plan of Action

Conclusion

While NAPs are not intended to be the gold standard on PVE policy, they are an important starting point and baseline for:

- Providing a clear conceptual and analytical framing of the issues including the drivers and mitigating factors related to, violent extremism;

- Establishing guiding principles and policy priorities and fostering transparent and accountable institutions;

- Identifying programmatic and actionable PVE and related peacebuilding initiatives and necessary related technical capacities that are needed to implement programs; and,

- Allocating funding and resources to enable implementation and coordination.

In additional the NAP development process is a critical opportunity for ensuring the inclusion of women, youth and other community based civil society actors, who can both provide valuable input into the plans based on their own innovative practices and experience, and foster greater communication and trust between states and their citizens that in turn can strengthen the horizontal and vertical ties necessary for social cohesion across diverse societal sectors and communities.

Their insight and contributions are relevant on multiple levels:

- Conceptually they can ensure that NAPs are being developed not simply to prevent or counter the negative force of extremism, but that they are plans designed to foster peace, resilience, equal rights and pluralism (PREP) that are critical to enabling a healthy cohesive society resilient and able to reject the ideology of violence and extremism in its mainstream;

- They can offer a real-time feedback loop regarding the efficacy or state interventions for example the quality and impact of security sector actors, local police and others in fueling or mitigating radicalization;

- They are able to provide gendered analysis and insight into youth trends and practices based on the access and trust they have in their communities;

- They can provide expertise and insight regarding innovative practices in the realm of education, media, economic initiatives that are PVE-specific and PVE relevant initiatives;

- Given their experiences, many can demonstrate how to implement holistic programs that tackle the psycho-social, religious, cultural and economic simultaneously given that both prevention and deradicalization efforts require attention to all these spheres;

- They can also provide examples of effective cooperation between CSOs, communities and the police. Such small scale initiatives can inform NAP design, while the NAP itself can lead to scaling up (or across) the positive experiences and approaches;

- By virtue of being involved in the process, they can demonstrate the value added of cross-sectoral cooperation and the complementarity that each sector brings;

- Robust monitoring and oversight by civil society will also counter the politicizing of NAPs by actors looking to capture the PVE agenda to further their own interests and obtain funding for political goals;

- CSOs will also ensure that NAP development does not become an end in itself and that the plans do turn into actions; and

- If local actors feel ownership in the NAP process and priorities that are developed, they will generate community support and feel responsible for their implementation as well. This is transformative as it engages and enables communities to limit and contain the signs and spread of extremism from within or without.

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