



**GALMUN 2025**  
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*RETORIKA FOR MULTICULTURALISM*



**UNWOMEN**  
**Research Report**

## GALILEE MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

*United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Research Report*

*The Online Recruitment of Women and Girls into Terror Organizations.*

### **DEFINITIONS:**

**Terrorism:** The unlawful use of violence to intimidate a population, especially citizens, based on a political viewpoint.

**Counterterrorism:** A group of military or political forces established with the objective of preventing and eliminating terrorism, such as the ICCT (International Centre for Counter Terrorism), UNOCT (United Nations of Counter Terrorism), etc.

**Terror Organizations:** An organization or group of people engaged in the act of terrorism.

**Online Recruitment:** The process of selecting individuals to be part of an organization or unit via the Internet.

**Propaganda:** The act of spreading false and biased information in order to promote a particular political ideology or perspective.

**Extremist:** Someone who holds extreme political or religious views (usually unacceptable to most people) and supports extreme actions.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Oxford English Dictionary, [www.oed.com/?tl=true](http://www.oed.com/?tl=true).

## **BACKGROUND:**

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global lockdown and the shift to digital spaces, there has been an increase in the amount of time individuals spend on social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok. These platforms own sophisticated algorithmic systems designed to display content based on users' interests. Unfortunately, these algorithms exposed many users to terrorism, which gave terror organizations the opportunity to identify and engage vulnerable individuals for recruitment.

The recruitment of women and girls into terror organizations has been a global issue for years, with the rise of technological advancement, terror organizations are utilizing these developments to gain more power by spreading propaganda, hosting attacks through digital offensive systems, and expanding and strengthening their networks.

One method terrorist organizations use to reinforce themselves is online recruitment. Today, in our modern and digital landscape, extremist groups are taking advantage of the accessibility and reach of social media to share their propaganda, leveraging algorithms to deliver messages to potential recruits, especially women and young people. With a click of a button, they can reach thousands of internet users, influence the minds of desired individuals, and persuade them with a promising future in exchange for joining their cause. Women and girls have been a common target for those organizations, specifically women who feel marginalized, neglected, or unheard. These terror organizations exploit such vulnerabilities to appeal to women, offering them agency, belonging, and most importantly, power. The rise of online misogyny and anti-feminist communities has supported extremists with their approach to women who feel marginalized or discriminated against, drawing them into their circles. In addition, many young women face limited freedoms in their real lives due to cultural norms and family pressures, restricting their access to education, employment, and social interactions. These limitations often lead them to seek social connections online, where extremist groups end up emphasizing on promising empowerment to those girls.

Online extremists appear to have a deep understanding of the challenges faced by marginalized women, and with careful analysis and strategic messaging, they manipulate these vulnerabilities. Through their content, extremists build narratives that resonate with women's experiences, their content usually includes: presenting their ideology as a source of empowerment and purpose, content shaped by stereotypes that promote strict gender roles and target specific audiences, for example, studies analyzing extremist websites in Indonesia reveal recurring patterns

## GALILEE MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

*United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Research Report*

where women are typically portrayed in traditional roles such as “mother” or “housewife”, while men are depicted as “leaders” or “protectors” yet, to attract young women, they promise active or even combat roles, offering a sense of agency within their cause.

There are a number of notable examples of the use of online recruitment for terror purposes. British-born Sally Jones, a U.N.-designated recruiter and propagandist for ISIS, used social media, particularly Twitter, to issue threats and recruit women for terrorist activities. After converting to Islam in 2013, reportedly influenced by the Iraq War, Jones traveled to Syria with her young son to join ISIS. She led the “Anwar al-Awlaki” female battalion, training European female recruits for suicide missions in the West. In 2015, Jones became the first British citizen added to the U.N.’s most wanted list for ISIS affiliation. Her case highlights the role of online platforms in facilitating the recruitment of women into terrorist organizations.<sup>2</sup>

Another case is Hoda Muthana, once an online American agitator for ISIS, used social media to spread violence and the killing of Americans before leaving the U.S. in 2014 at the age of 20. After secretly planning her departure, she traveled to Syria, where she married an Australian jihadist, the first of her three husbands. Now in the al-Hawl refugee camp in Syria with her young son, Muthana claims she was brainwashed online and misunderstood her faith, believing she was following Islamic teachings. Reflecting on her actions, she described her past as driven by ignorance and regrets joining ISIS, a decision that underscores the devastating impact of online radicalization.<sup>3</sup>

Shamima Begum, a British-born woman, left London in 2015 at the age of 15 to join ISIS in Syria along with two school friends. After taking part in being an ISIS member for almost 5 years, Begum became a controversial figure after expressing a desire to return to the UK. The British government revoked her citizenship in 2020, citing national security concerns; Begum has since claimed she was brainwashed and regrets her actions. She currently resides in a Syrian refugee camp amidst ongoing legal and political disputes.<sup>4</sup>

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2 “Sally Jones: Who was the ‘White Widow’? What we know about the Isis member reportedly killed in a US drone strike”, *The Independent*, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/white-widow-sally-jones-killed-isis-uk-jihadi-us-drone-strike-syria-who-was-she-explainer-a7996521.html>.

3 “Hoda Muthana ‘deeply Regrets’ Joining ISIS and Wants to Return Home.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 17 Feb. 2019, [www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/17/us-woman-hoda-muthana-deeply-regrets-joining-isis-and-wants-return-home](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/17/us-woman-hoda-muthana-deeply-regrets-joining-isis-and-wants-return-home).

4 “Who Is Shamima Begum and How Can You Lose Your Citizenship?” *BBC News*, BBC, 25 Mar. 2024, [www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53428191](http://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53428191).

## **TREATIES AND ORGANIZATIONS:**

### **UNOCT:**

The UNOCT (United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism) was established by the UN General Assembly in 2017, the General assembly created an office dedicated for counter terrorism in order to strengthen the UN's counter-terrorism efforts, in Addition, to focus on coordinating the UN's global response to terrorism under the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

The UNOCT is taking measures to tackle terrorism in various methods. Its main approach is leadership and coordination, providing leadership to all UN bodies and coordination to the GCTCC entities (global counter-terrorism coordination compact). Moreover, the UNOCT focuses on capacity-building, resource mobilization, partnership and priority; all of these functions end up in harmony, ensuring a robust system ready to eliminate global terrorism.<sup>5</sup>

### **ICCT (International Centre for Counter-Terrorism)**

The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) is a think-and-do tank based in the Netherlands, founded in 2010. It provides research, policy advice, training, and practical solutions to enhance global counter-terrorism policies and practices. As an independent foundation, ICCT works with governments, international organizations, and agencies worldwide, focusing on Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

One of the ICCT's programs "Current and Emerging Threats" specifically tackles online recruitment for terror organizations. This program aims to provide a deep understanding of terrorist and extremist threats by analyzing the ideologies and worldviews that drive individuals toward violent extremism. By conducting this program, policymakers and practitioners are able to develop informed, evidence-based counterterrorism solutions and strategies.

"We are not only interested in the 'why', but also in the 'what' and the 'how'. Our research is therefore also focused on how terrorists and extremists run their day-to-day operations, including those that take place in online environments. We examine, to give just a few examples, how they recruit new members, how they spread their ideas and how they plan and commit their attacks."<sup>6</sup>

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5 "Office of Counter-Terrorism" *United Nations*, United Nations, [www.un.org/counterterrorism/](http://www.un.org/counterterrorism/).

6 Short Read by Gina Vale, et al. "Divide and Conquer: The Strategy and Enduring Legacy of Islamic State's Governance of Civilian Women." *ICCT*, [www.icct.nl/](http://www.icct.nl/).

## **CURRENT SITUATION:**

International governments are recognizing the importance of inclusive approaches to countering terrorism and recruitment of extremists, with several initiatives highlighting gender-sensitive approaches. Each country has found a suitable approach depending on its understanding of the issue. For instance, some countries have attempted to counter this by dealing with the problem at its core, by the integration of marginalized women into society, thus making them less of a susceptible target to online recruitment. For example, Australia's National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security integrates a gendered perspective into peace-building and security efforts, ensuring women's participation in decision-making processes and the protection of their human rights. In addition, Indonesia engages women as mediators, using education, religious discourse, and initiatives to counter extremist ideologies. Initiatives similar to these emphasize women's role in addressing radicalization.

Other countries have implemented rehabilitation programs, both inside and outside prison, as part of their efforts to counter violent extremism and support individuals in disengaging from extremist ideologies. These measures, which include criminal investigations and risk assessments, aim to provide returnees with the opportunity to rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society. Though, on the other hand and as mentioned in the Shamima Begum case above, some countries have adopted policies to strip women of their citizenship after they join terrorist groups. This is a measure that is often justified as a security precaution but widely criticized for its lack of rehabilitative focus. This approach denies individuals the chance to access support and resources for reintegration, leaving them stateless.<sup>7</sup>

While progress is being made, there is a need for more robust and collaborative governmental initiatives to fully leverage the role of women in countering violent extremism.<sup>8</sup> With the world stage currently facing many destabilizing events that lead to rise of extremism from many cultures and ideological positions, it is vitally important for the international community to protect vulnerable women from exploitation by malicious elements. It is only by understanding the underlying conditions and of the technical technological advancements allowing online recruitment terror groups to exist that suitable solutions can be formulated.

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<sup>7</sup> Check, Reality. "How Do Countries Deal with People Returning from IS?" *BBC News*, BBC, 15 Feb. 2019, [www.bbc.com/news/world-47252164](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-47252164).

<sup>8</sup> "The Role of Women in Terrorism." *SecurityWomen*, [www.securitywomen.org/post/the-role-of-women-in-terrorism](http://www.securitywomen.org/post/the-role-of-women-in-terrorism).

## CRITICAL EVENTS AND TIMELINE:

In 2014, Daesh (ISIS) launched a global online recruitment campaign which mainly occurred on Twitter, this launch targeted not only potential male foreign fighters, but also specifically aimed to recruit women and teenagers. Through this campaign, Daesh rapidly established a substantial social media presence, gathering tens of thousands of supportive accounts. While the recruitment of women into terrorist networks was uncommon at that time, the rush of female recruits joining Daesh far exceeded compared to other groups in the past.<sup>9</sup>

In 2019, extremist groups used TikTok to spread propaganda, with videos promoting ISIS content, including armed militants, corpses, and women declaring their loyalty to jihad. Despite TikTok removing nearly two dozen accounts responsible for this content, the videos still had significant impact. Although the videos were viewed by only a small number of people, they highlighted the challenge of monitoring extremist content on popular platforms, especially among vulnerable groups like young girls. TikTok, which has become highly popular with teens, acknowledged the difficulty of preventing such content, with extremist actors actively trying to bypass protective measures. While TikTok acted quickly to ban the accounts, some had already gained more than 1,000 followers, already having influenced individuals with extremism, even in cases where quick action was taken. This issue has added growing concerns about TikTok's content moderation practices.<sup>10</sup>

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9 European Commission, *Extremists' Targeting of Young Women on Social Media and Lessons for P/CVE*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022. [home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-03/ad\\_hoc\\_young\\_women\\_social\\_media\\_Lessons-p-cve\\_022022\\_en.pdf?ref=hir.harvard.edu](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-03/ad_hoc_young_women_social_media_Lessons-p-cve_022022_en.pdf?ref=hir.harvard.edu).

10 Feuer, Will. "TikTok Removes Two Dozen Accounts Used for Isis Propaganda." *CNBC*, CNBC, 21 Oct. 2019, [www.cnbc.com/2019/10/21/tiktok-removes-two-dozen-accounts-used-for-isis-propaganda.html](https://www.cnbc.com/2019/10/21/tiktok-removes-two-dozen-accounts-used-for-isis-propaganda.html).

## GALILEE MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

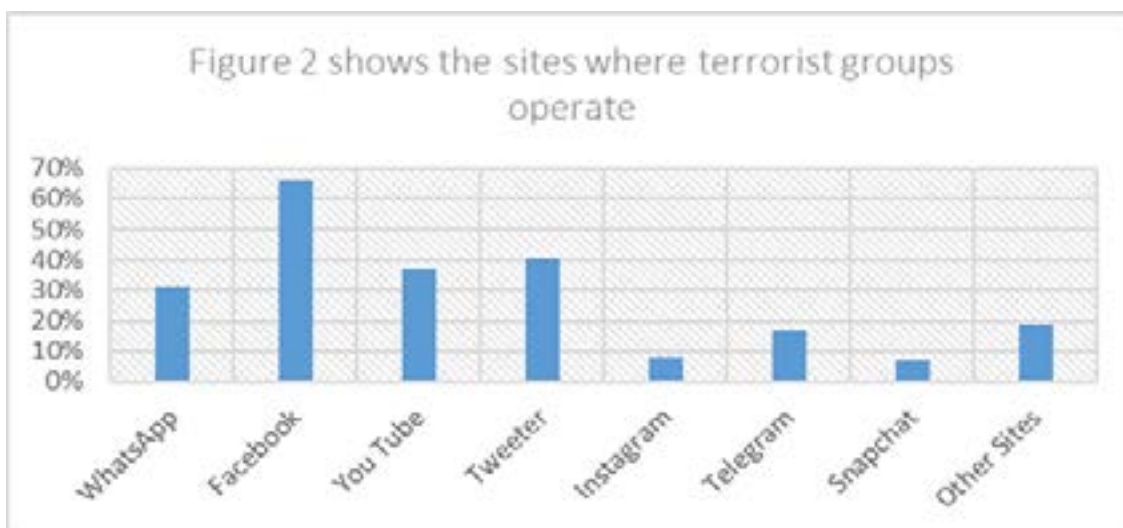
*United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Research Report*

### **QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:**

- What are the root causes that make women vulnerable to this type of recruitment?
- Does your country engage in international frameworks in order to prevent women from getting into similar situations?
- What are the socio-economic factors that make women more vulnerable to online recruitment by terror groups?
- What are your country's counterterrorism strategies regarding this specific issue of online recruitment of women by terror groups?
- What specific actions is your country taking to prevent women from joining terror groups?
- How is your country ensuring that women who have left terror groups receive proper aid (mental/ physical, in case of abuse/ etc)?
- How is your country utilizing advancements in technology, such as AI or machine learning, to detect and combat recruitment attempts?
- How has social media been used to glamorize the recruitment of women by terror groups?
- How do factors such as ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation influence vulnerability to online recruitment in your country?
- How much funding is allocated by your country specifically to combat the recruitment of women and girls by terror groups?
- Is there a possible method for preventing individuals from being exposed to terrorism without harming their freedom of access as users on the internet?
- What is your country's position on rehabilitation and punishment?



## RELEVANT MEDIA AND HELPFUL RESOURCES:



Displayed above is a chart showing common platforms that terrorist groups use for operations, sharing propaganda, recruitment etc..<sup>11</sup>



Proportion of women survivors who reported having been exposed to online violence in the past year, per country.<sup>12</sup>

11 “Using Social Media Websites to Promote Terrorism Issues- A Study of Site Users’ Sample.” *Granthaalayah Publications – A Knowledge Repository*, [www.granthaalayahpublication.org/journals-html-galley/07\\_IJRG20\\_B05\\_3328.html](http://www.granthaalayahpublication.org/journals-html-galley/07_IJRG20_B05_3328.html).

12 “Online Violence against Women: Insights from a Multi-Country Study in Arab States.” *RIWI*, 14 Oct. 2022, [riwi.com/research/online-violence-against-women-insights-from-a-multi-country-study-in-arab-states/](http://riwi.com/research/online-violence-against-women-insights-from-a-multi-country-study-in-arab-states/).

## GALILEE MODEL UNITED NATIONS 2025

*United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women Research Report*

More knowledge about the topic of the committee: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-03/ad\\_hoc\\_young\\_women\\_social\\_media\\_Lessons-p-cve\\_022022\\_en.pdf?ref=hir.harvard.edu](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-03/ad_hoc_young_women_social_media_Lessons-p-cve_022022_en.pdf?ref=hir.harvard.edu)

Here is located everything about the UNOCT, including partnerships funding and initiatives: <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/>

Check out any resolutions/committees your country has attended/discussed: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/?ln=en>

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