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**THE WOMEX GOOD PRACTICE APPROACH WITHIN RAN:
WOMEX – GENDER METHODS IN PREVENTION AND
DERADICALISATION**

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WomEx is a research and intervention approach that employs – and further studies and develops – gender methods in extremism prevention and deradicalisation. WomEx is delivered by “Cultures Interactive” (CI; see Collection xx), a Berlin based NGO targeting right-wing extremist milieus in rural, mostly East-German areas as well as ethno-nationalist and religiously extremist milieus in inner-city districts. Within its methodological setup – combining youth-cultural workshops, civic education/ anti-bias training, and psychologically based self-awareness group work – CI employs both gender specific interventions (in settings with young women) and gender focused methods (across all settings and target groups).

CI’s WomEx approach is based on the assumptions (i) that there is hardly any violent extremist, terrorist, or hate crime offender that does not also hold sexist and homophobic attitudes, i.e. manifests highly conflictive gender issues (especially within the two major threats of violent extremism, rightwing extremism and religious fundamentalism, both Moslem and Christian), (ii) and that these conflictive gender issues do not only coincide with but are a key psychological driving force behind violent extremism and hate crime.

For example, practitioners have recurrently found that violently extremist young men compensate insecurities in their sense of male identity and manliness by acting-out in hateful ways against women, homosexuals, and generally all persons that by appearance or behaviour confuse their restrictive gender role order. Moreover, women that are active in extremism overwhelmingly tend to and actively reconfirm this restrictive gender role order. They thus share and defend the sexist and homophobic attitudes and draw motivation from them for their activities (like providing ideological support und internal social cohesion, helping to prepare attacks, also committing fierce physical hate crimes and terrorist attacks themselves etc.)

On a different level, extremist movements take advantage of the socially given gender roles strategically in that they position their female followers in places of society that

allow them to propagate extremism and at the same time make it look more normal and mainstream. For instance, in Germany rightwing extremist women enter child day care, parents' organizations, schools, family welfare and professional social work in order to infiltrate and to support the current mainstreaming of rightwing extremist attitudes into middle classes.

Hence, both gender specific interventions with girls/ women and gender focused methods across all settings of deradicalisation and prevention work are needed.

WomEx originally came out of CI's 'Girl Power' workshops. Since then CI has developed various methods in which young vulnerable people work on building consciousness about gender roles and their consequences in key situations of conflict, hatred and escalation. In particular, the interventions aim at making the participants more aware of the intrinsic connection between violent extremism and rigid/restrictive gender roles, reflect upon their personal stance and experience with this topic. To some extent the participants also learn about how certain biographical and milieu specific conditions (violent/ relational/ sexual abuse, neglect, degradation, trauma) may lead an individual to adopt rigid/restrictive gender role concepts and at the same time become susceptible to engage in violent extremist behavior. Furthermore, gender methods allow for getting to know alternative modes of male and female identity practices and engage in training alternative patterns of behavior which comply with a human rights based and pro-social sense of democratic citizenship.

For the years to come CI intends to support the build-up of a multi-agency and multi-NGO network of competency on gender methods in deradicalisation in Europe.