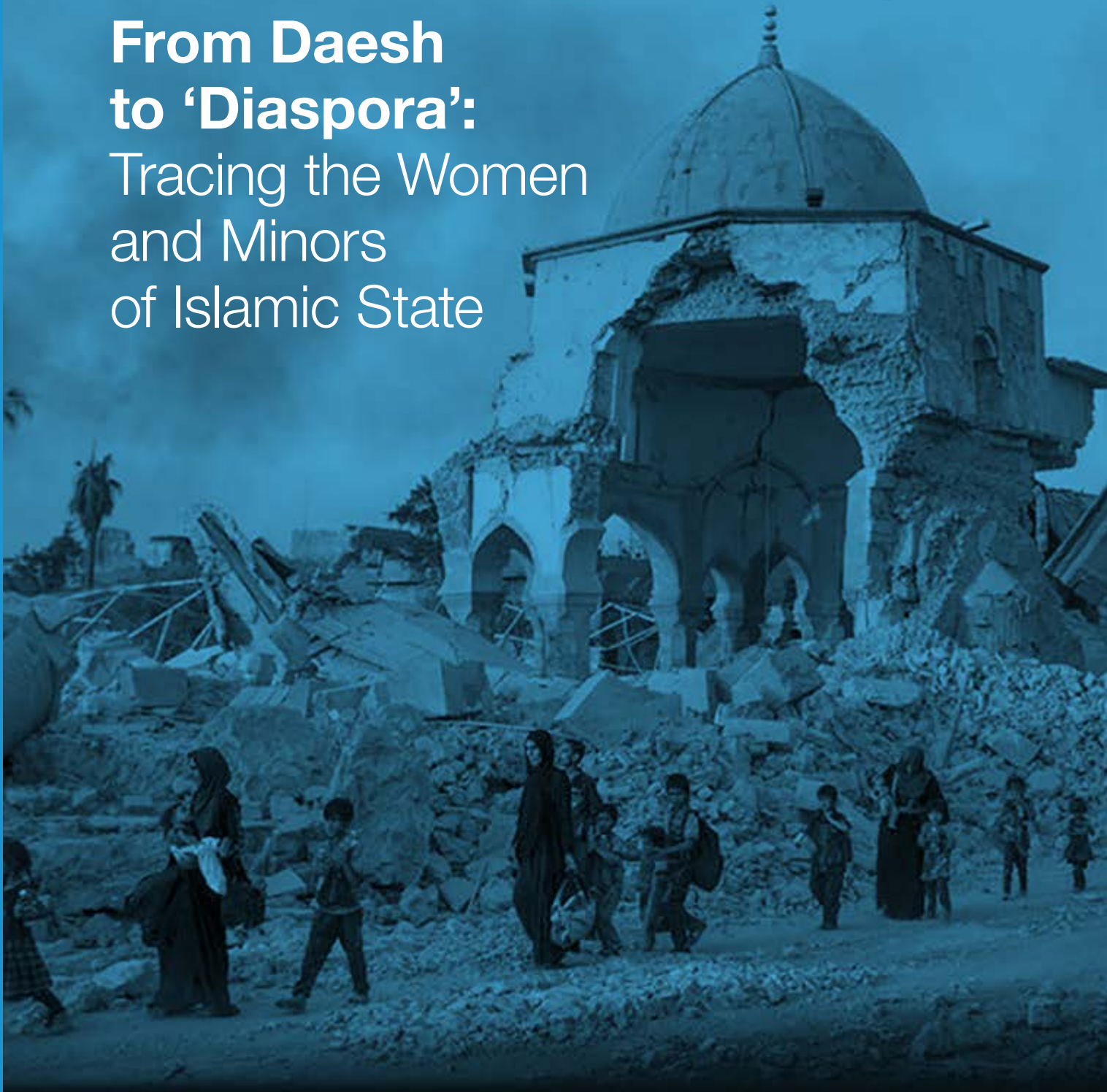




# From Daesh to 'Diaspora': Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State



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By Joana Cook and Gina Vale

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*The authors would like to thank Jillian Hunchak for her extensive research assistance, the fellows at ICSR for assisting in foreign language searches, and Charlie Winter for his review and feedback.*

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# Executive summary

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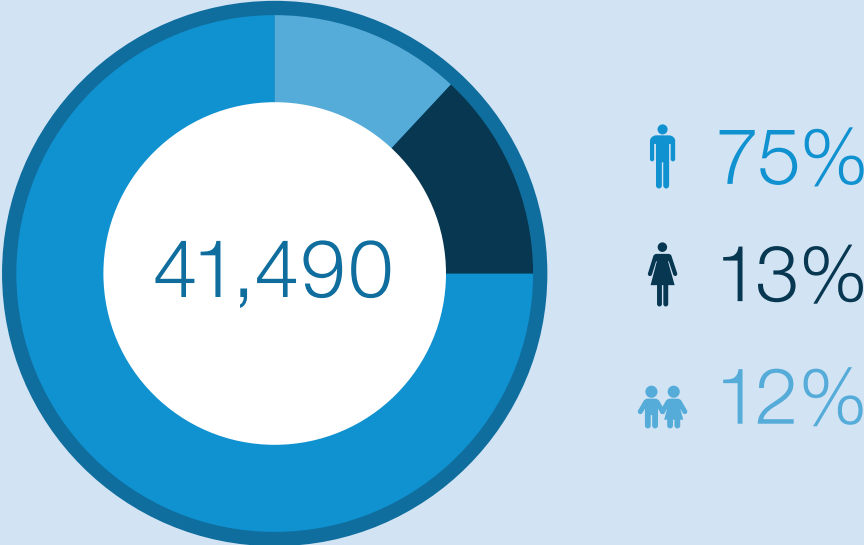
## **Islamic State (IS) affiliates in Iraq and Syria**

- 41,490 international citizens from 80 countries became affiliated with IS in Iraq and Syria.
- In the first global dataset of its scope and detail, up to 4,761 (13%) of these were recorded to be women, and 4,640 (12%) of these minors.
- Eastern Asia saw the highest proportion of recorded IS-affiliated women and minors at up to 70%, followed by Eastern Europe (44%); Western Europe (42%); the Americas, Australia and New Zealand (36%); Central Asia (30%); South-Eastern Asia (35%); Southern Asia (27%); Middle East and North Africa (MENA, 8%); and sub-Saharan Africa (<1%).
- Yet, a gross lack of data for many countries suggests there are significant gaps in real figures for women and minors globally.
- These gaps in data are particularly concentrated in the MENA region which had the highest number of IS affiliates in Syria and Iraq – 18,852.
- The number of recorded infants born inside the IS' 'caliphate' to international parents – at least 730 – has also led to an underestimation of minors that must now be accounted for as foreign returnees.

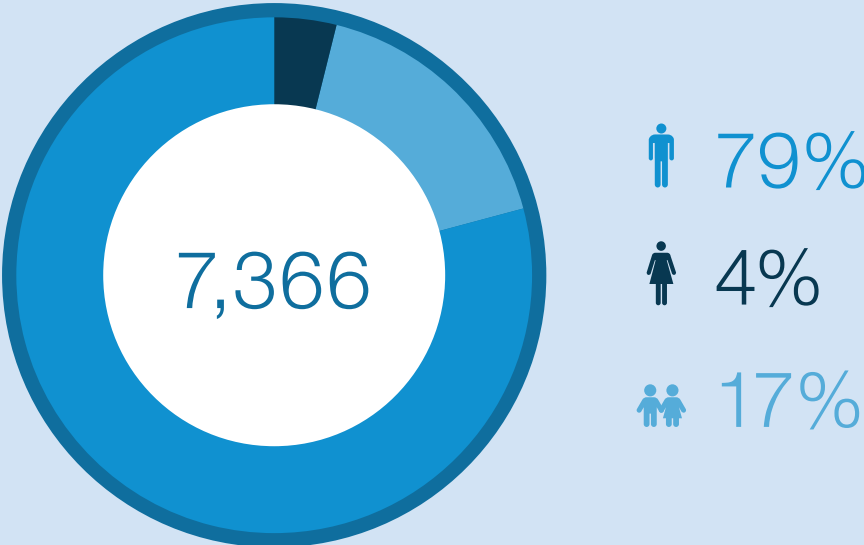
## **IS affiliates and status after the fall of the 'caliphate'**

- This report is the first to map out in detail the diverse trajectories of IS foreign affiliates after the fall of the 'caliphate': from those who were killed in Syria and Iraq; executed by IS from within their own ranks; detained by regional authorities; involved in detainee exchanges; repatriated to their home nations; in third-party countries; or whose status is simply unknown.
- We recorded up to 7,366 persons have now returned to their home countries (20%), or appear to be in repatriation processes to do so.
- Only 256 (4%) of total returnees are recorded as women, accounting for up to 5% of the women who travelled to Syria and Iraq.
- Up to 1,180 (17%) of total returnees are recorded as minors, accounting for up to 25% of minors who travelled to, or were born in, Iraq and Syria.

**Figure 1** Total IS affiliates in Iraq and Syria



**Figure 2** Total IS returnees to countries of departure



- South-Eastern Asia saw the highest proportion of female and minor returnees at up to 59%, followed by Western Europe (55%); Central Asia (48%); Sub-Saharan Africa (33%); Eastern Europe (18%); Americas, Australia New Zealand (8%); Southern Asia (<1%); and MENA (<1%). There were no returnees accounted for in Eastern Asia.
- However, significant discrepancies in accounting for foreign citizens in Iraq and Syria – including those described above – rarely distinguish between men and women, adults and minors, making it particularly problematic to fully assess the current status of these distinct populations.

### **Concerns about women and minors going forward**

- Women and minors are poised to play a significant role in carrying forward the ideology and legacy of IS after the physical fall of its 'caliphate' in late 2017.
- Much attention has rightfully focused on Iraq and Syria, but Libya, Afghanistan and the Philippines have also proven notable countries for women and minors in IS and remain under-examined.
- Women and minors affiliated with and inspired by IS have already demonstrated their prominence as security threats, with numerous foiled and successful attacks plotted and carried out globally.
- There is a risk that many IS orphans will become stateless and fall through the cracks of repatriation and rehabilitation efforts.
- Women and minors detained in Iraq and Syria require specific attention including their access to fair trial, and potential to radicalise while detained.

### **Best practice**

- Women and minors must be considered as distinct and complex categories, each with varying levels of agency. Do not reference them in singular categories ('women and children', families,' and so forth).
- Minors in particular require nuanced consideration. This report suggests categorising them in line with their motivations and proscribed roles within IS, as infants (0–4 years); children (5–14 years) and teenagers (15–17 years).
- Delineate all data of persons affiliated with terror and extremist groups by age and gender.
- Ensure considerations particular to women and minors are integrated in all efforts to respond to and counter violent extremist organisations.





# 1 Introduction

The self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS)<sup>1</sup> has been described as a hybrid terrorist organisation and conventional army,<sup>2</sup> a religious, millenarian group,<sup>3</sup> an insurgency,<sup>4</sup> and a pseudo-state,<sup>5</sup> amongst others. It produced and disseminated propaganda at an unprecedented rate, and reached a wider global audience than any past terrorist organisation in history. As it increasingly seized territory and resources, at its peak in late 2014 it was believed the group controlled over 100,000 km<sup>2</sup> of land and the 11 million residents therein.<sup>6</sup> IS and those inspired by the group have thus far carried out over 4,300 attacks across at least 29 countries, demonstrating the group remains a significant and shared global concern.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps most notable is the diversity of those who formed its ranks that distinguished it from any terror group in history – as demonstrated in our original dataset at least 41,490 citizens from 80 countries travelled to Syria and Iraq, a quarter of which were women and minors. These figures for affiliates peaked at 2,000 per month in 2014, before receding to just 50 per month in 2016.<sup>8</sup> 7,366 of these have now returned to their country of departure (see Figure 5).

The collapse of IS' so-called 'caliphate' (the territory held and administered by IS between 2014 and 2017) marked a turning point in the organisation infamous for its brutality and terror, but the future shape and trajectory of the organisation remains unknown. Yet, the group's original vision, and the meticulous and systematic manner in which it was carried out, suggests that its goals extended beyond the 'state' it had built, and considered how to carry its ideology and organisation forward in the face of the imminent loss of territory. It has been largely recognised that the physical fall of the 'caliphate' is only one step in ultimately discrediting and defeating the organisation and extinguishing its ideology. Recognised as a 'generational struggle' that governments will be responding to for the coming decades, it is imperative to consider and assess the long-term prospects for the

1 Also referenced to as ISIL, ISIS and Daesh.

2 Eric Schmitt, "In Battle to Defang ISIS, U.S. Targets Its Psychology", *The New York Times*, 28 December 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/29/us/politics/in-battle-to-defang-isis-us-targets-its-psychology-.html>

3 Graeme Wood, "What ISIS Really Wants", *The Atlantic*, March 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/03/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>

4 Hassan Hassan, "Insurgents Again: The Islamic State's Calculated Reversion to Attrition in the Syria-Iraq Border Region and Beyond", *Combating Terrorism Centre at West Point*, 10, no.11, December 2017, <https://ctc.usma.edu/insurgents-again-the-islamic-states-calculated-reversion-to-attribution-in-the-syria-iraq-border-region-and-beyond/>

5 Audrey Kurth Kronin, "ISIS Is Not A Terrorist Group", *Foreign Affairs*, 23 February 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/middle-east/isis-not-terrorist-group>

6 Seth G. Jones et al., *Rolling Back the Islamic State*, (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2017), xi, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1900/RR1912/RAND\\_RR1912.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1900/RR1912/RAND_RR1912.pdf)

7 Only 140 of these have occurred outside of Syria and Iraq, which have continued to face the brunt of the group's violence. See: "Perpetrators: (Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL))", *Global Terrorism Database*, accessed 17 June 2018, <https://www.start.umd.edu/>; Tim Lister et al., "ISIS Goes Global: 143 Attacks in 29 Countries Have Killed 2,043", *CNN*, 12 February 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/17/world/mapping-isis-attacks-around-the-world/index.html>

8 Griff Witte, Sudarsan Raghavan, and James McAuley, "Flow of Foreign Fighters Plummets as Islamic State Loses its Edge", *The Washington Post*, 9 September 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/flow-of-foreign-fighters-plummets-as-isis-loses-its-edge/2016/09/09/ed3e0dda-751b-11e6-9781-49e591781754>

group, and provide a broad set of responses required to challenge it.<sup>9</sup> One area remains critical to this assessment – the current and future status of the men, women and minors who were affiliated with the group in Syria and Iraq.

Considerations of IS in Syria and Iraq have thus far largely focused on the status and activities of its male members – often the key actors in perpetrating violence on behalf of the group. Yet, this has simultaneously appeared to neglect the status and response to the females and minors that were affiliated with the organisation. This report discusses these three groups as 'IS affiliates', recognising the important and unique considerations these distinct categories affiliated with IS require. Yet, the very knowledge base for this analysis has until now remained unclear in four particular areas.

First, the global figures for how many women and minors travelled to Syria and Iraq and became affiliated with IS remain vague. Previous estimates have been limited in scope, or geographical proximity mostly focused on Western Europe or the Balkans.<sup>10</sup> Second, the number of infants born in IS territory to foreign parents who must now be assessed as foreign citizens in many cases remains unclear. Third, how many female and minor affiliates have now returned to their home countries are also significantly under-examined. Fourth, the various factors that impacted all IS affiliates and their subsequent trajectories after the fall of the 'caliphate' in late 2017, and the significant discrepancies in accounting for these individuals, remain stark. This report aims to amend this.

Surveying 80 countries whose citizens travelled to Iraq and Syria, as well as those that were born there to foreign parents, this report has established the first global dataset of its scope prioritising a focus on the women and minors associated with IS. Based on methodological research and the compilation of official, academic and other credible figures from around the world, this report argues that the populations of women and minors affiliated with IS have been significantly underestimated and under-analysed. It also highlights how some countries and regions have been much stronger at compiling and publishing gender- and age-delineated data, while others have neglected this, leaving critical gaps in holistically understanding the group, and the implications for shared and coordinated responses developed to counter IS. While this report focuses on women and minors, these are discussed as two distinct and nuanced categories, each recognised as requiring specific considerations and responses (thus avoiding the problematic conflation of 'womenandchildren').<sup>11</sup>

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9 Sabrina Siddiqui, "Barack Obama Says Fights Against Isis Will be 'Generational Struggle'", *The Guardian*, 6 July 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/jul/06/barack-obama-isis-generational-struggle-pentagon>; Lizzie Dearden, "Islamist Attacks will Threaten UK for Decades, Former Head of MI5 Warns as Police Say Isis is Creating Terror 'Cult'", *The Independent*, 11 August 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/terror-threat-uk-isis-alqaeda-former-head-mi5-attacks-threaten-britain-for-decades-generational-a7889156.html>

10 Early reports broadly cited include those from ICSR (2013) and the Soufan Group (2015), which did not cite women and minors though three subsequent reports did begin to expand on these two categories to an extent: Vlado Azinović, and Edina Bećirević, *A Waiting Game: Assessing and Responding to the Threat from Returning Foreign Fighters*, (Sarajevo: Regional Cooperation Council, 2017), <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/54/a-waiting-game-assessing-and-responding-to-the-threat-from-returning-foreign-fighters-in-the-western-balkans>; Bibi van Ginkel, and Eva Entenmann, eds., *The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union: Profiles, Threats & Policies*, (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2016), [https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report\\_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU\\_1-April-2016\\_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf](https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/ICCT-Report_Foreign-Fighters-Phenomenon-in-the-EU_1-April-2016_including-AnnexesLinks.pdf); and Richard Barrett, *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees*, (New York: The Soufan Center, 2017), <http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017-v3.pdf>.

11 Enloe, Cynthia. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. University of California Press, 1993

In terms of the long-term physical and ideological survival of IS, and the globally shared potential security implications these hold, this report argues these two populations hold growing importance and demand increased attention. This report is thus complementary to those who have traced the broader evolution of IS in Syria and Iraq: as male members have been increasingly killed in theatre, what impact or significance may this hold for the role and status of its female and minor members? It may also encourage further inquiry into the types of affiliates most common in certain countries – whether men, women or minors. Where large numbers of women and minors were recorded, does this suggest, for example, that more family units travelled? Where more men travelled were there gender-based motivations that could be determined? Where information is currently publicly unavailable, as seen in the MENA region, and countries such as Uzbekistan, does this mean that gender and minor-conscious considerations are more likely to be neglected in responses to the group? Such gaps may also have explicit implications for tracing movements of populations who have now left Syria and Iraq.

This report also establishes a strong base by which to encourage more gender- and minor-conscious analysis in all efforts to understand and counter IS and its underlying ideology. From the present government responses to dealing with returnees and the punitive, rehabilitation, reintegration, de-radicalisation and other considerations inherent in these, to the forward looking counter-radicalisation and more indirect efforts such as countering violent extremism (CVE), stabilisation, or human security considerations, there has never been a more pertinent time to recognise and integrate gender and minor considerations into all streams of effort to counter IS and prevent its re-emergence in the future.

The body of this report is divided into four chapters. Chapter 2 presents our methodology, and definitions. Most importantly it includes the full dataset for 80 nations of those who have travelled to Iraq and Syria and became affiliated with IS, and those who have now returned. Women and minors are highlighted distinctly in these, and the 80 countries are divided into nine regions.

Chapter 3 analyses these figures for women and minors who travelled to Iraq and Syria, and considers their diverse motivations and roles within IS. It also highlights those that were prevented from travel, noting these as a distinct group which also requires attention. Chapter 3 also includes brief analysis of those that travelled to other conflict zones: Libya, Afghanistan and the Philippines.

Chapter 4 focuses on the status of men, women and minors after the fall of the 'caliphate' in late 2017. Analysed extensively for the first time, it highlights a number of key factors we label as 'the unknowns' – the factors that prove particularly problematic for accounting for foreign men, women and minors in IS today. These include a discussion of problems in accounting for the battlefield deaths of IS affiliates by the Global Coalition Against Daesh killed in Syria and Iraq; those executed by IS from within their own ranks; detained by regional authorities; involved in detainee exchanges; repatriated to their home nations; in third-party countries; or those whose status is simply unknown. These unknowns provide a backdrop for subsequently tracing

women and minors in IS now as returnees; as those who remain in theatre; those who are detained; and those whose status is simply unknown. Finally it considers both women and minors as potential security threats going forward.

The concluding chapter focuses on implications for policy and practice and reiterates the importance of considering women and minors in all research, data and responses related to terror and extremist groups. It also explicitly highlights the multi-sector benefits of considering women and minors in all efforts against IS.

## 2 Dataset and methodology

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**T**his dataset is both expansive and limited in what it is able to tell us in relation to IS affiliates who travelled to, and in some case returned from, Syria and Iraq. Most imperatively, it offers a global picture of the diversity of those who travelled in support of IS in terms of geographical footprint, gender profile, and age demographics (including infants born in theatre). It also brings to light many crucial pieces of this puzzle including the current status of returnees, those detained in Iraq and Syria, those killed on the battlefield, and those who simply remain unaccounted for. It thus assists in better understanding how the formation, membership and status of IS has evolved, and where focus should extend to in current assessments and government responses.

This dataset is unable to offer new insights into the very personal and individualised motivations that drove single persons, friends or entire family units to affiliate themselves with IS. This level of qualitative detail is beyond the scope of figures alone. However, this report has also drawn on academic literature, government reports and real-world examples to highlight what these figures may suggest in practice. Regional and national-level data can also indicate which countries and regions saw higher numbers of men, women or minors travel, thus demonstrating the need for gender and age-specific analysis into the factors surrounding these.

### Dataset

The authors drew information from an extensive range of sources to compile this original dataset. Official government sources and figures were deemed the most reliable, and of the 283 sources ultimately utilised, the majority of the data is drawn from these. However, in the cases where this was not available, figures were taken from academic or institutional publications and media reports deemed credible. In cases where only individual cases were found, these were compiled and highlighted as individual cases recorded (ICR). ICRs are not comprehensive, and offer little numerical value to the dataset, but they do indicate that indeed women and minors were departing from, or returning to, these countries, prompting the need for further examination. The data is drawn from figures reported between April 2013 and June 2018 in line with the formal announcement of ISIL by Abu Bakr al Baghdadi on April 8, 2013, and the most updated government figures available.

This search included utilising two sets of fixed search terms across three search engines. The first search was conducted to identify figures for those who had travelled to join (and infants born into) IS in Syria and Iraq. A second search was subsequently conducted to identify returnees to their countries of origin. The three search engines utilised were: Lexis Nexis, BBC Monitoring and Google.

The authors reviewed approximately 90,500 individual items. 120 countries were first searched on Lexis Nexis with up to 1,000 individual items reviewed per country (though the number of results per country were considerably less in the 30 countries

which were subsequently excluded from the dataset, and from those countries which were included in our dataset but where women were not acknowledged in often very small figures such as Cambodia, Madagascar and Senegal). It was then determined that 80 countries were relevant to be included in the dataset as they had confirmed successful cases of persons traveling to Syria and Iraq. Countries were excluded where the only persons identified were those that attempted to travel but were intercepted before they arrived in theatre in Syria and Iraq. These 80 countries were each then searched in BBC monitoring which produced between 0 and 48 results per country. Finally, a manual Google search was conducted where a minimum of 50 results were reviewed per country.

Each of these brought with it a particular research advantage including being able to access local media in each country, and government and research centre reports. While the majority of searches were conducted in English, additional searches were conducted in Russian, Arabic, French, Turkish and Italian where information was otherwise sparse.

No method or dataset is perfect, and the authors acknowledge a number of limitations faced while researching this report. Most notably, there were many countries where data was simply unavailable, or specifically lacked distinct figures for women and minors. It was also not evident if affiliates who held dual citizenship were counted twice in national figures (both country of birth and of departure). It is also acknowledged that some countries simply did not have the capacity to adequately record all figures, border movement and movement of citizens, and that gaps in knowledge may remain even at the national level. There were also rare cases of parents going to bring their children home, but it was not clear how these were accounted for in national figures.

There was particular difficulty when countries did not distinguish between categories of minors, women and men. Examples of these included figures that were labelled as 'family', 'women and children', 'returnees' or 'killed', where the researchers were unable to distinguish the specific gender or category of person. For the sake of simplicity in the dataset, when women and minors have been grouped together in figures a mean average was taken (resulting in half for minors and half for women) to reflect best practice recognised in quantitative methods. This was done in three countries: China ('families'), Indonesia ('women and children') and Russia ('women and children'). These are distinguished by the tilde symbol (~) to indicate these figures are a mean average. It was also not clear in all countries that female and minor IS affiliates were counted in government 'foreign fighter' figures. For example, the Netherlands did not include children under nine years old in returnee estimates.<sup>12</sup>

The dataset excluded several categories of persons. In cases where countries had nationals travelling to multiple conflict zones over the period of analysis (notably Libya and Afghanistan), the dataset recorded figures only for those who travelled to Iraq and Syria. Figures for Syrian and Iraqi nationals are also excluded, on account of sparsity of local data and the inability to clearly distinguish voluntary IS recruits from coerced civilians.<sup>13</sup> The authors also focused on persons that joined

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12 General Intelligence and Security Service, "Focus on Returnees", *Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations*, 15 February 2017, 2, <https://english.aivd.nl/publications/publications/2017/02/15/publication-focus-on-returnees>

13 In her research on state-building terrorist groups, Mara Revkin explores the discrepancies and necessary considerations for classification of civilians living under IS rule. See Mara R. Revkin, "When Terrorists Govern: Protecting Civilians in Conflicts with State-Building Armed Groups", *Harvard National Security Journal* 9 (2018): 138, [http://harvardnsj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/3\\_Revkin\\_WhenTerroristsGovern-2.pdf](http://harvardnsj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/3_Revkin_WhenTerroristsGovern-2.pdf)

IS and excluded figures for those that joined other jihadist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra (JaN), and later Jahbat Fateh al-Sham and Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) when possible, though this distinction was not always available. While the authors recognise the presence of foreign affiliates in these diverse groups, this analysis focuses on IS on account of their explicit calls for all persons (women, minors, and men) to join and contribute to the organisation. This was also reflected in a significant proportion of government sources and official media quoting IS as the specific organisation their citizens joined, and viewed as the most salient security threat. When distinct figures for groups were available, the authors utilised only those related to IS. Where foreign affiliates in all conflict zones were undistinguished in government figures this is acknowledged in the reference.

'Foreign fighters' that travelled in support of counter-IS operations were also omitted, such as those who supported the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), Kurdish Women's Protection Units (YPJ), and Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Similarly, the dataset omits 'foreign fighters' that travelled to support pro-Assad forces, including state-sanctioned forces from Iran, Russia and Lebanon in particular. The authors separately compiled cases where women or minors had attempted travel but were prevented from doing so. These figures were excluded from the dataset but are discussed briefly in Chapter 3.

## Definitions

*Islamic State (IS) affiliates:* Men who travelled to the conflict theatre of Iraq and Syria are most commonly referenced to as 'foreign terrorist fighters', while women are often referred to as 'migrants'.<sup>14</sup> Minors have been associated in various ways, even while recognised as distinct groups (see 'minors' below). For the sake of simplicity, we categorise all foreign nationals that were born into IS, or travelled to Syria and Iraq (whether willingly or coercively) who became associated with the group as 'IS affiliates'.

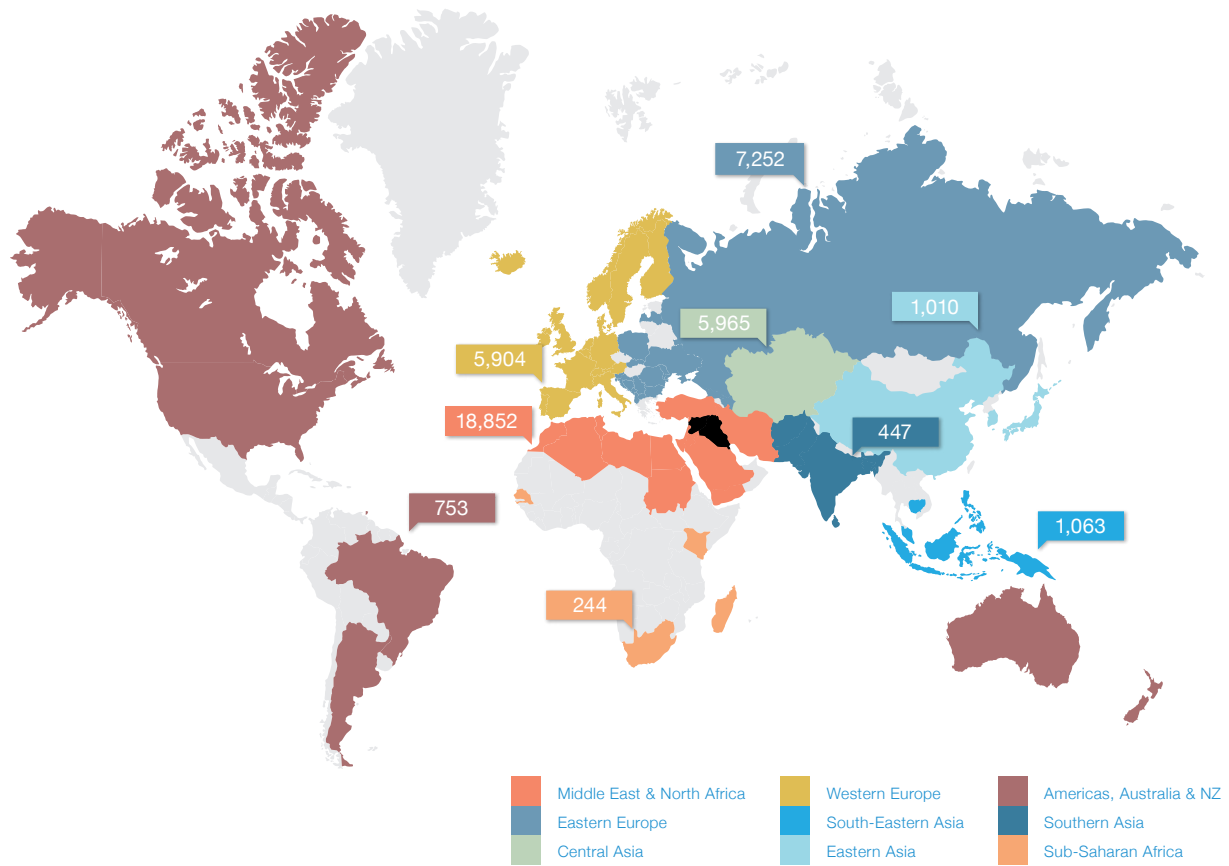
*Minors:* This category comprises minors as defined in each national context, such as when governments self-reported on the number of minors who travelled. The authors worked off the assumption that government figures on minors included all individuals under the internationally recognised age of legal consent (18), even if some distinguished between youth, minors, children, toddlers and infants. This paper sub-categorises minors as infants (0–4 years), children (5–14 years), and teenagers (15–17 years). The number of IS affiliates referenced in this report who are minors also includes those who were born in-theatre, many of whom have a right to the citizenship of their foreign parent(s).

*Returnees:* Persons who successfully travelled to Iraq and Syria and became affiliated with IS, and who have now returned to their country of departure. This includes infants born in IS territory and subsequently returned to their parents' country of origin. Returnee figures exclude those who had attempted travel but were interrupted. This also excludes those that have travelled onwards to third-party countries, whether other conflict theatres or 'transit countries'.

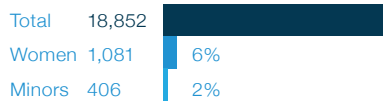
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<sup>14</sup> Coined in Carolyn Hoyle, Alexandra Bradford, and Ross Frenett, *Becoming Mulan? Female Western Migrants to ISIS*, (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015), [https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ISDJ2969\\_Becoming\\_Mulan\\_01.15\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ISDJ2969_Becoming_Mulan_01.15_WEB.pdf)

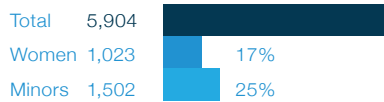
**Figure 3** 41,490 IS affiliates in Iraq and Syria



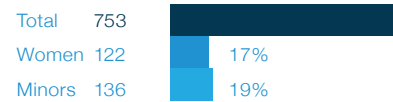
Middle East and North Africa (MENA)



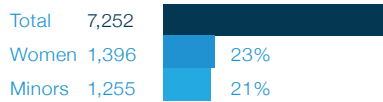
Western Europe



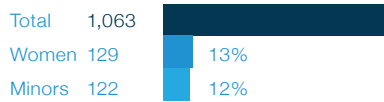
Americas, Australia, New Zealand



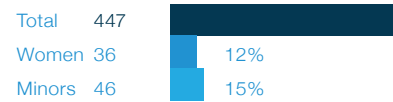
Eastern Europe



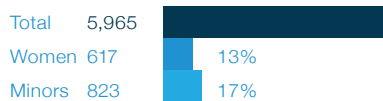
South-Eastern Asia



Southern Asia



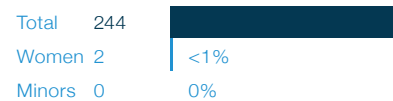
Central Asia



Eastern Asia

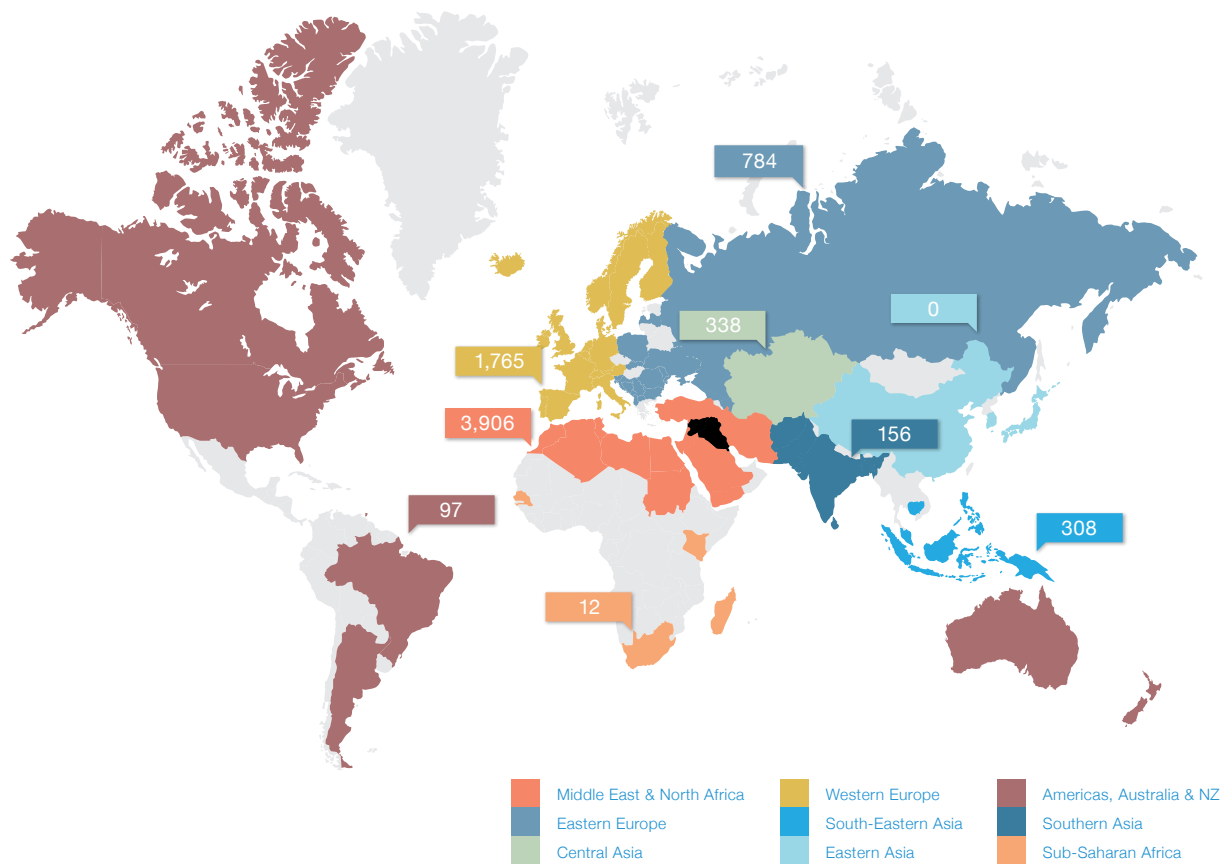


Sub-Saharan Africa





**Figure 4** 7,366 IS returnees from Iraq and Syria



Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Total	3,906	
Women	21	<1%
Minors	23	<1%

Western Europe

Total	1,765	
Women	138	8%
Minors	834	47%

Americas, Australia, New Zealand

Total	97	
Women	2	2%
Minors	6	6%

Eastern Europe

Total	784	
Women	38	5%
Minors	100	13%

South-Eastern Asia

Total	308	
Women	54	28%
Minors	60	31%

Southern Asia

Total	156	
Women	1	<1%
Minors	0	0%

Central Asia

Total	338	
Women	1	<1%
Minors	154	48%

Eastern Asia

Total	0	
Women	0	0%
Minors	0	0%

Sub-Saharan Africa

Total	12	
Women	1	8%
Minors	3	25%

**Figure 5** Male, female and minor affiliates and returnees:  
A global snapshot

	Minor affiliates	Female affiliates	Total affiliates	Minor returnees	Female returnees	Total returnees
<b>Middle East and North Africa (MENA)</b>						
Algeria			87 <sup>1</sup> –278 <sup>2</sup>			87 <sup>3</sup>
Bahrain			100 <sup>4</sup>			
Egypt	6 ICR <sup>5</sup>	4 ICR <sup>6</sup>	600 <sup>7</sup>			600 <sup>8</sup>
Israel	4 ICR <sup>9</sup>	3 ICR <sup>10</sup>	60 <sup>11</sup>	3 <sup>12</sup>	1 <sup>13</sup>	10 <sup>14</sup>
Iran		16 <sup>15</sup>	21 <sup>16</sup>		16 <sup>17</sup>	21 <sup>18</sup>
Jordan			3,000–3,950 <sup>19</sup>			250 <sup>20</sup>
Kuwait			150 <sup>21</sup>			6 <sup>22</sup>
Lebanon	5 ICR <sup>23</sup>		900 <sup>24</sup>	5 ICR <sup>25</sup>	1 ICR <sup>26</sup>	
Libya			600 <sup>27</sup>			
Morocco	391 <sup>28</sup>	293 <sup>29</sup>	1,699 <sup>30</sup>	15 <sup>31</sup>	3 ICR <sup>32</sup>	236 <sup>33</sup> –300 <sup>34</sup>
Saudi Arabia		46 <sup>35</sup>	3,244 <sup>36</sup>			760 <sup>37</sup>
Sudan		19 ICR <sup>38</sup>	70–140 <sup>39</sup>			2 <sup>40</sup>
Turkey	4 <sup>41</sup>	4 <sup>42</sup>	3,000 <sup>43</sup>			900 <sup>44</sup>
Tunisia		700 <sup>45</sup>	4,000 <sup>46</sup>			970 <sup>47</sup>
Yemen			110 <sup>48</sup>			
<b>Total</b>	<b>406</b>	<b>1,081</b>	<b>17,641–18,852</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>3,842–3,906 (20–22%)</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>6%</b>		<b>&lt;1%</b>	<b>&lt;1%</b>	
<b>Eastern Europe</b>						
Albania	38 <sup>49</sup>	29 <sup>50</sup> –35 <sup>51</sup>	144 <sup>52</sup> –150 <sup>53</sup>			44 <sup>54</sup>
Azerbaijan	19 <sup>55</sup>	200 <sup>56</sup>	900 <sup>57</sup>	19 <sup>58</sup>		49 <sup>59</sup>
Bosnia	81 <sup>60</sup>	61 <sup>61</sup>	323 <sup>62</sup>	4 <sup>63</sup>	6 <sup>64</sup>	56 <sup>65</sup>
Bulgaria			10 <sup>66</sup>			
Croatia		4–5 <sup>67</sup>	7 <sup>68</sup>			
Georgia		3 ICR <sup>69</sup>	41 <sup>70</sup> –200 <sup>71</sup>			12–17 <sup>72</sup>
Kosovo	98 <sup>73</sup>	55 <sup>74</sup>	359 <sup>75</sup>	3 <sup>76</sup>	7 <sup>77</sup>	133 <sup>78</sup>
Latvia			2 <sup>79</sup>			
Macedonia		15 <sup>80</sup>	155 <sup>81</sup>			72–86 <sup>82</sup>
Moldova			1 <sup>83</sup>			
Montenegro	4 <sup>84</sup>	5 <sup>85</sup>	27 <sup>86</sup>	1 <sup>87</sup>	1 <sup>88</sup>	10 <sup>89</sup>
Poland			20–40 <sup>90</sup>			
Romania			1 <sup>91</sup>			
Russia (incl. Chechnya, Dagestan)	350 <sup>92</sup> –~1,000 <sup>93</sup>	512 <sup>94</sup> –~1,000 <sup>95</sup>	4,000 <sup>96</sup> –5,000 <sup>97</sup>	73 <sup>98</sup>	24 <sup>99</sup>	380 <sup>100</sup>
Serbia	15 <sup>101</sup>	12–15 <sup>102</sup>	59 <sup>103</sup>			7 <sup>104</sup>
Slovakia			6 <sup>105</sup>			
Slovenia			10 <sup>106</sup>			2 <sup>107</sup>
Ukraine		2 ICR <sup>108</sup>	2 ICR <sup>109</sup>			
<b>Total</b>	<b>~605–1,255</b>	<b>~898–1,396</b>	<b>6,067–7,252</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>765–784 (11–13%)</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>9–21%</b>	<b>12–23%</b>		<b>13%</b>	<b>5%</b>	

ICR represents individual cases recorded. All citations are included at the end of this report. ~ symbol indicates an average between women and children has been taken (see: Methodology).

	Minor affiliates	Female affiliates	Total affiliates	Minor returnees	Female returnees	Total returnees
<b>Central Asia</b>						
Kazakhstan	390 <sup>110</sup>	150 <sup>111</sup>	500–600 <sup>112</sup>	63–113 <sup>113</sup>		113–128 <sup>114</sup>
Kyrgyzstan	130–140 <sup>115</sup>	188 <sup>116</sup>	863 <sup>117</sup>			63 <sup>118</sup>
Tajikistan	293 <sup>119</sup>	279 <sup>120</sup>	1,502 <sup>121</sup>	41 <sup>122</sup>	1 ICR <sup>123</sup>	147 <sup>124</sup>
Turkmenistan			360 <sup>125</sup> –500 <sup>126</sup>			
Uzbekistan			1,500 <sup>127</sup> – 2,500 <sup>128</sup>			
<b>Total</b>	<b>813–823</b>	<b>617</b>	<b>4,725–5,965</b>	<b>104–154</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>323–338 (5–7%)</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>14–17%</b>	<b>10–13%</b>		<b>31–48%</b>	<b>&lt;1%</b>	
<b>Western Europe</b>						
Austria	7–40 <sup>129</sup>	37 <sup>130</sup>	254 <sup>131</sup>		13 <sup>132</sup>	94 <sup>133</sup>
Belgium	150 <sup>134</sup>	47 <sup>135</sup>	498 <sup>136</sup>	18 <sup>137</sup>	26 <sup>138</sup>	123 <sup>139</sup>
Denmark		18 <sup>140</sup>	145 <sup>141</sup>			72 <sup>142</sup>
Finland	42 <sup>143</sup>	20 <sup>144</sup>	122 <sup>145</sup>			43 <sup>146</sup>
France	460 <sup>147</sup> –700 <sup>148</sup>	300 <sup>149</sup> –382 <sup>150</sup>	1,910 <sup>151</sup>	68 <sup>152</sup> –700 <sup>153</sup>	43 <sup>154</sup>	398 <sup>155</sup>
Germany	290 <sup>156</sup>	165 <sup>157</sup>	960 <sup>158</sup>	13 <sup>159</sup> –100 <sup>160</sup>	35 <sup>161</sup>	303 <sup>162</sup>
Iceland			1 <sup>163</sup>			
Ireland			25–30 <sup>164</sup>			
Italy	6 ICR <sup>165</sup>	12 <sup>166</sup>	129 <sup>167</sup>			11 <sup>168</sup>
Luxembourg			1 <sup>169</sup>			
Netherlands	175 <sup>170</sup>	80 <sup>171</sup>	300 <sup>172</sup>	10 <sup>173</sup>	17 <sup>174</sup>	60 <sup>175</sup>
Norway		10 <sup>176</sup>	100 <sup>177</sup>			40 <sup>178</sup>
Portugal	2 ICR <sup>179</sup>	4 ICR <sup>180</sup>	15 <sup>181</sup>		2 ICR <sup>182</sup>	2 ICR <sup>183</sup>
Spain	2 ICR <sup>184</sup>	21 <sup>185</sup>	208 <sup>186</sup>			30 <sup>187</sup>
Sweden	45 <sup>188</sup>	75 <sup>189</sup>	311 <sup>190</sup>	2 ICR <sup>191</sup>		150 <sup>192</sup>
Switzerland		7 <sup>193</sup>	70 <sup>194</sup>			14 <sup>195</sup>
UK	50 <sup>196</sup>	145 <sup>197</sup>	850 <sup>198</sup>	4 <sup>199</sup>	2 ICR <sup>200</sup>	425 <sup>201</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,229–1,502</b>	<b>941–1,023</b>	<b>5,899–5,904</b>	<b>115–834</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>1,765 (30%)</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>21–25%</b>	<b>16–17%</b>		<b>7–47%</b>	<b>8%</b>	

ICR represents individual cases recorded. All citations are included at the end of this report. ~ symbol indicates an average between women and children has been taken (see: Methodology).

	Minor affiliates	Female affiliates	Total affiliates	Minor returnees	Female returnees	Total returnees
<b>South-Eastern Asia</b>						
Cambodia			1 <sup>202</sup>			
Indonesia	100 <sup>203</sup>	113 <sup>204</sup>	800 <sup>205</sup>	~60 <sup>206</sup>	~54 <sup>207</sup>	183 <sup>208</sup> –300 <sup>209</sup>
Malaysia	17 <sup>210</sup>	14 <sup>211</sup>	95 <sup>212</sup> –154 <sup>213</sup>			8 <sup>214</sup>
Philippines			100 <sup>215</sup>			
Singapore	5 ICR <sup>216</sup>	2 ICR <sup>217</sup>	8 ICR <sup>218</sup>			
<b>Total</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>1,004–1,063</b>	<b>~60</b>	<b>~54</b>	<b>191–308 (18–31%)</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>11–12%</b>	<b>12–13%</b>		<b>19–31%</b>	<b>18–28%</b>	
<b>Eastern Asia</b>						
China	~350 <sup>219</sup>	~350 <sup>220</sup>	1,000 <sup>221</sup>			
Japan		1–5 <sup>222</sup>	5 <sup>223</sup> –9 <sup>224</sup>			
South Korea			1 <sup>225</sup>			
<b>Total</b>	<b>~350</b>	<b>~351–355</b>	<b>1,006–1,010</b>			
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>35%</b>				
<b>The Americas, Australia, and New Zealand</b>						
Argentina			23 <sup>226</sup>			
Australia	70 <sup>227</sup>	30–40 <sup>228</sup>	214 <sup>229</sup>	2 ICR <sup>230</sup>	1 ICR <sup>231</sup>	40 <sup>232</sup>
Brazil			3 <sup>233</sup>			
Canada	14 <sup>234</sup>	15 <sup>235</sup> –18 <sup>236</sup>	90–100 <sup>237</sup>	2 <sup>238</sup>		17 <sup>239</sup>
New Zealand		11 <sup>240</sup>	6 <sup>241</sup> –11 <sup>242</sup>			
Trinidad	40 <sup>243</sup>	15 <sup>244</sup>	120 <sup>245</sup> –130 <sup>246</sup>	2 ICR <sup>247</sup>	1 ICR <sup>248</sup>	
U.S.A	12 <sup>249</sup>	38 <sup>250</sup>	272 <sup>251</sup>			40 <sup>252</sup>
<b>Total</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>109–122</b>	<b>728–753</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>97 (13%)</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>18–19%</b>	<b>14–17%</b>		<b>6%</b>	<b>2%</b>	

ICR represents individual cases recorded. All citations are included at the end of this report. ~ symbol indicates an average between women and children has been taken (see: Methodology).

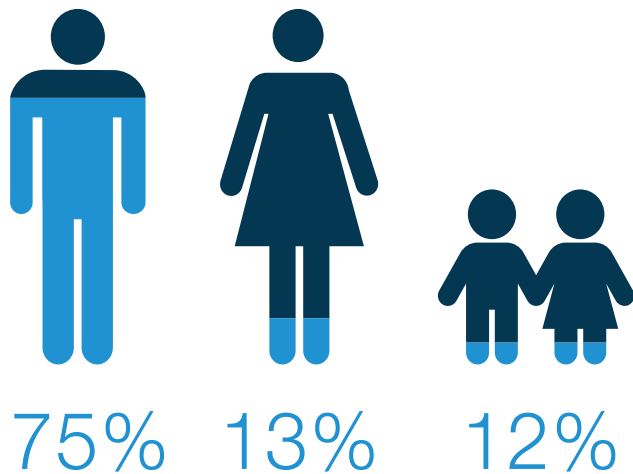
	Minor affiliates	Female affiliates	Total affiliates	Minor returnees	Female returnees	Total returnees
<b>Southern Asia</b>						
Afghanistan						120 <sup>253</sup>
Bangladesh			40 <sup>254</sup>			25 <sup>255</sup>
India	19–22 ICR <sup>256</sup>	6 <sup>257</sup> –8 ICR <sup>258</sup>	67 <sup>259</sup> –75 <sup>260</sup>		1 ICR <sup>261</sup>	5 <sup>262</sup> –11 <sup>263</sup>
Maldives	5 ICR <sup>264</sup>	12 ICR <sup>265</sup>	61 <sup>266</sup> –200 <sup>267</sup>			
Pakistan	12 ICR <sup>268</sup>	15 ICR <sup>269</sup>	100 <sup>270</sup>			
Sri Lanka	7 ICR <sup>271</sup>	1 ICR <sup>272</sup>	32 <sup>273</sup>			
<b>Total</b>	<b>43–46</b>	<b>34–36</b>	<b>300–447</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>150–156 (34–52%)</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>10–15%</b>	<b>8–12%</b>			<b>&lt;1%</b>	
<b>Sub-Saharan Africa</b>						
Kenya		2 ICR <sup>274</sup>	100 <sup>275</sup>			
Madagascar			3 <sup>276</sup>			
Senegal			1 <sup>277</sup>			1 <sup>278</sup>
South Africa			23 <sup>279</sup> –140 <sup>280</sup>	3 <sup>281</sup>	1 <sup>282</sup>	11 <sup>283</sup>
<b>Total</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>127–244</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>12 (5–9%)</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>		<b>&lt;1%</b>		<b>25%</b>	<b>8%</b>	
<b>All countries</b>						
<b>Total all countries</b>	<b>3,704–4,640</b>	<b>4,162–4,761</b>	<b>37,497–41,490</b>	<b>411–1,180</b>	<b>256</b>	<b>7,145–7,366 (17–20%)</b>
<b>Women and minors as % of total</b>	<b>9–12%</b>	<b>10–13%</b>		<b>6–17%</b>	<b>3–4%</b>	

ICR represents individual cases recorded. All citations are included at the end of this report. ~ symbol indicates an average between women and children has been taken (see: Methodology).



### 3 IS affiliates in the 'caliphate'

**Figure 6** Total IS affiliates in Iraq and Syria



Total foreign IS affiliates in Iraq and Syria: 37,497–41,490

Foreign female IS affiliates in Iraq and Syria: 4,162–4,761

Foreign minor IS affiliates in Iraq and Syria: 3,704–4,640

Confirmed children born in Iraq and Syria: 730

IS frequently brings to mind images of masked men waving the black flag of IS, fighting on the battlefield, or in more brutal scenes carrying out theatrically staged executions. While representative of its most barbarous elements, these images do not reflect all who became affiliated with IS between 2013 and 2018. As IS expanded across the region it seized large swathes of land, and in June 2014 announced that it had established a 'caliphate', an 'Islamic state'. IS stated that for all Muslims *hijra* (migration) to the state was obligatory if one was able to do so: 'The State is a state for all Muslims. The land is for the Muslims, all the Muslims'. They specifically noted those with specialised skills in Islamic jurisprudence, judges, those with military, administrative and service expertise, doctors and engineers were encouraged to come and assist in the building of this 'state'.<sup>15</sup> Here women and minors became important for two reasons: symbolically as the presence and support of women and minors helped legitimise this vision, and practically in the roles they played in this state-building process. This also lent to the diversity of persons travelling, including whole families.

<sup>15</sup> Islamic State, "The Return of the Khilafah", *Dabiq*, July, 2014.

Figures uniquely compiled from 80 countries in our original dataset demonstrate 41,490 persons travelled to Iraq and Syria and became affiliated with IS – 10–13% of these were women, and 9–12% were minors (see Fig. 6). Women and minors thus account for up to 25% (one in four) recorded persons in Syria and Iraq who became affiliated with IS. There are many key countries for which this information was not available, and these figures for women and minors are based only on available data, suggesting these figures for women and minors are in fact substantially higher.

## Women affiliated with IS: A global picture

Figure 5 demonstrates the five highest recorded national contributors of female affiliates (based on highest estimates) were Russia (1,000), Tunisia (700), France (382), China (350) and Morocco (293) highlighting the regional and ethnic diversity of affiliates. In proportional terms to male affiliates, these figures also prove particularly interesting. The countries with the five highest proportion of female affiliates were Iran (76%), Croatia (57–71%), China (35%), Kazakhstan (25–30%), and Netherlands (27%). Figures from China highlight 300 “fighters” and 700 “family members” that travelled, demonstrating the diversity of groups travelling whether single individuals, small groups, friends, family, and so forth. Women increasingly began to travel to Syria and Iraq following June 2014 and the announcement of the ‘caliphate’, but some saw figures for women peak in 2015–16 where they represented up to one in three travelling to Syria and Iraq from key countries in Europe like the UK and France.<sup>16</sup>

### *Discrepancies in data for women*

What was most notable in these figures were the countries where data was simply unavailable. This was particularly (in)visible in the eighteen countries of the MENA region, which had the highest regional figures for IS affiliates in theatre at 18,852. Yet, only Morocco and Tunisia provided official government estimates for both women and minors still accounting for 8% of affiliates. Saudi Arabia acknowledged only 46 cases of women amidst 3,244 IS affiliates. Even with Saudi Arabia’s strict custodian system which may have obstructed travel for women, this figure seems particularly suppressed. Jordan had up to 3,950 IS affiliates, but not a single woman or minor publicly accounted for. A similar situation appeared in Lebanon (900 IS affiliates), Libya (600), and other significant contributors such as Turkmenistan (500), none of which cited national figures for women. These figures do not and cannot account for all women affiliated with IS as this information was not publicly accessible. Arguably, the most significant data gaps exist at a localised level within the conflict zone, where figures for adults also have yet to accurately account for Iraqi and Syrian nationals. This suggests there are significant gaps in real figures for women who became affiliated with IS at both a global and local level, which are particularly concentrated in the MENA region, and suggests that the totals in this dataset are vastly underestimated.

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16 Tom Whitehead, “One in Three Jihadists Now Women, Warns Police Chief”, *The Telegraph*, 27 April 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/04/27/one-in-three-jihadists-now-women-warns-police-chief/>



### Categories and motivations of female affiliates

There is no singular profile of female affiliates in Syria and Iraq. However, insights can be gained from evidence reported both from country of departure, and information derived from within the 'caliphate'. One report from the Netherlands highlighted that women have tended to be younger, on average 21 years old compared to men at 25. In line with this, one study demonstrated they were more often underage than men, by a ratio of 17% to 5%.<sup>17</sup> Research on Sweden noted almost no age difference between male and female affiliates,<sup>18</sup> where Bosnian men were on average 32 years old in contrast to women who were 27.<sup>19</sup>

With reports from across the world of women joining IS, women of all ages have travelled, including a case of 12 family members spanning three generations from the UK,<sup>20</sup> mothers who have left their children behind in Australia,<sup>21</sup> and a woman who traveled with her husband and younger brother from the U.S.<sup>22</sup> Countries such as Kosovo saw higher numbers of minors (98) than women travel (55), suggesting that parents may have been more inclined to take their children as family units. Tajik authorities noted 80% of women who joined IS only did so to join their husbands.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, countries such as the UK saw fewer minors (50) than women (145) travel, which suggests women may have been more willing to travel independently or with husbands. A similar argument is made by Perešin, who states a higher proportion of 'women and children have travelled from the Balkans with their families, rather than alone, than from the rest of Europe'. She also highlights that compared to rates in Western Europe, the number of converts from the Balkans who travelled is negligible.<sup>24</sup> The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), however, noted between 6–23% of affiliates from the EU were converts, where countries such as France noted 25% of female affiliates were converts compared to 20% of male affiliates.<sup>25</sup>

Within Syria and Iraq, documents recovered from IS-held territory also offer unique insights. Milton and Dodwell analysed 1,100 women registered in a guesthouse logbook operated by IS (assumed to be between 2014 and 2016), which provides an intriguing snapshot of the diversity behind these numbers.<sup>26</sup> The women had a mean age of 29 years; 77% were married

17 Anton W. Weenink, "Behavioral Problems and Disorders among Radicals in Police Files", *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no.2 (2015), <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/416/html>

18 Linus Gustafsson, and Magnus Ranstorp, *Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq: An Analysis of Open-Source Intelligence and Statistical Data*, (Stockholm, Swedish Defense University, 2017); Vlado Azinović, and Muhamed Jusić, *The Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent*, (Sarajevo: The Atlantic Initiative 2015), <http://wb-iisg.com/wp-content/uploads/bp-attachments/4798/Foreign-Terrorist-Fighters-BiH.pdf>

19 Linus Gustafsson and Magnus Ranstorp, *Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq* (2017) 34, <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1110355/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

20 Tom Brooks-Pollock, "Yes we have joined Isis' say missing British family of 12 who fled to Syria," *The Independent*, 4 July 2015, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/yes-we-have-joined-isis-say-missing-british-family-of-12-who-fled-to-syria-luton-islamic-state-isis-10365915.html>

21 Jessica Ware, "Australian woman leaves two children 'to join Isis in Syria' – telling babysitter she was going to pick up a new car," *The Independent*, 29 May 2015, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/australian-woman-leaves-two-children-behind-and-flees-to-syria-10283569.html>

22 Audrey Alexander, *Cruel Intentions: Female jihadists in America* (2017) 16, <https://scholarspace.library.gwu.edu/downloads/m326m1782>

23 "Tajikistan court jails 71-year old over Islamic State links" Eurasia Net, 19 April 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/s/tajikistan-court-jails-71-year-old-over-islamic-state-links>

24 Vlado Azinović, ed., *Between Salvation and Terror: Radicalization and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon in the Western Balkans*, (Sarajevo: The Atlantic Initiative, 2017), 61, [http://www.atlantskainicijativa.org/bos/images/BETWEEN\\_SALVATION\\_AND\\_TERROR/BetweenSalvationAndTerror.pdf](http://www.atlantskainicijativa.org/bos/images/BETWEEN_SALVATION_AND_TERROR/BetweenSalvationAndTerror.pdf)

25 Elizabeth Pearson, and Emily Winterbotham, "Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation", *The RUSI Journal* 162, no.3 (2017): 62, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/03071847.2017.1353251>

26 Daniel Milton, and Brian Dodwell, "Jihadi Brides? Examining a Female Guesthouse Registry from the Islamic State's Caliphate", *CTC Sentinel* 11, no.5 (2018): 18, [https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2018/05/CTC-Sentinel\\_Vol11Iss5.pdf](https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2018/05/CTC-Sentinel_Vol11Iss5.pdf)

(in contrast to only 30% of men), and 10% of women were single (compared to 61% of men). Their data notes a number of countries of origin for registrars where current data does not acknowledge female affiliates, including South Africa, Jordan, Palestine, Afghanistan, Brazil, Bulgaria, the Philippines, Guyana, Yemen, and Slovenia.<sup>27</sup> The language and target audience of IS materials related to women may also help inform these figures. For example, the all-female Al-Khansa Brigade's media wing under IS released an Arabic publication entitled, *Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study* which was aimed at recruiting women from the region to join IS, specifically Saudi women.<sup>28</sup> Others, such as the English-language magazine *Dabiq* featured stories of women, including Finnish convert Umm Khalid al-Finlandiyyah, which appear aimed at drawing European women (particularly converts) to IS territory.<sup>29</sup> In short, the profiles for female affiliates is very diverse, distinct country to country, and must be considered on a country, regional or even city level.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Charlie Winter, *Women of the Islamic State: A Manifesto on Women by the Al-Khansaa Brigade* (London: Quilliam, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> Islamic State Media, "Break the Cross", *Dabiq*, no. 15 (2016).

### Box 1 Tajikistan: Identifying and responding to IS affiliates and returnees

Tajikistan proves a rare and welcome case of providing clear, gender and age delineated data for all citizens related to IS.\* According to the Interior Ministry, the total number of Tajik citizens fighting in Iraq and Syria reached 1,502, including nearly 300 nationals who have already been killed in the conflict zone.<sup>30</sup> These figures are made up of at least 234 Tajik families,<sup>31</sup> including 279 women and 293 minors. Tajikistan is also the only country in this dataset to provide public gendered data for minors affiliated with IS, stating 142 boys and 110 girls remain inside IS territory, with a further 20 boys and 21 girls having returned over the last two years.<sup>32</sup> Although only one individual case of a female returnee has been reported thus far,<sup>33</sup> it is understood that 147 individuals have returned to Tajikistan,<sup>34</sup> including 19 families demonstrating that 'families' should be distinguished between males, females and minors as well.<sup>35</sup> However, according to the Red Cross in Iraq, a further 70 Tajik women and minors are currently living in shelters in the country, with no confirmed reports on their possible return.<sup>36</sup>

For those who have returned 'voluntarily' to Tajikistan, the government has assured leniency. Earlier this year, Interior Minister Ramazon Rahimzoda confirmed that, in line with a 2015 government pledge, 111 citizens who returned from Syria and Iraq voluntarily are 'free under Tajik law'.<sup>37</sup> However, this has not been a wholly successful policy, as 34 out of 72 returnees to the Sughd region subsequently re-joined IS in Iraq and Syria.<sup>38</sup> Building on the 2015 pardon extended to voluntary returnees, Tajik Prosecutor-General Yusuf Rahmon added that for women who followed their husbands into the conflict zone, 'no criminal proceedings will be instituted against them and their children if they did not fight there'.<sup>39</sup>

Tajikistan offers a case of good practice in distinguishing and accounting for minors and women in most aspects related to IS affiliates. It also demonstrates how imperative it is that efforts such as deradicalization to repatriation, account for gender and minors dynamics. It also provides one example where legislative approaches to returnees are distinguished for men, women and minors, yet it is critical to acknowledge that this also may carry with it its own set of gendered stereotypes and concerns.

\* Other examples of best practice include Belgium, France, Netherlands, Bosnia and Kosovo

30 "Tajikistan in Talks to Return Four Children from Iraq", *BBC Monitoring*, 16 January 2018, <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c1doo0hm>.

31 "Iraqi Authorities Reportedly Holding Wives and Children of Defeated Tajik IS Militants", *Asia-Plus Tajikistan*, 12 September 2017, <https://news.tj/en/news/tajikistan/security/20170912/iraqi-authorities-reportedly-holding-wives-and-children-of-defeated-tajik-is-militants>

32 "Tajik Diplomats Plan Return of Children of ISIS Fighters from Iraq", *Ferghana News*, 13 January 2018, <http://enews.ferghananews.com/news.php?id=3710&mode=snews>

33 Farangis Najibullah, "Tajik IS Militants Told 'Return and Repent, and You'll be Forgiven'", 5 June 2015, <https://www.rferl.org/a/tajikistan-islamic-state-militants-amnesty/27054985.html>

34 Uran Botobekov, "Is Central Asia Ready to Face ISIS?", 8 July 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/07/is-central-asia-ready-to-face-isis/>

35 "Iraqi Authorities Reportedly Holding Wives and Children".

36 "Tajik Diplomats Plan Return".

37 "Tajikistan Pardons More Than 100 Citizens who Returned from Syria and Iraq", *The Defense Post*, 8 February 2018, <https://thedefensepost.com/2018/02/08/tajikistan-pardons-111-syria-iraq-returnees/>

38 *Ibid.*

39 "Many Tajiks Recruited to Fight Alongside IS Returning Home – Chief Prosecutor", *BBC Monitoring*, 31 July 2015, <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/60121856>

## Motivations of IS women

Though initially sparse, there has been a welcome and growing body of research and analysis, particularly focused on western European women, that has considered various aspects of their profiles, motivations that underpinned their decision to travel to Syria and Iraq, and their roles in theatre. This section does not aim to repeat these, but will briefly discuss these to contextualise the significant numbers of female affiliates with IS.

The motivations for women to travel were diverse and generally referred to as drivers or 'push' and 'pull' factors – factors in their individual lives that 'pushed' them out of their society and 'pulled' them toward IS. Some of the more common push factors included feelings of discrimination, persecution or those of not belonging to their society, seeking independence, and grievances related to foreign policy. Pull factors ranged from ideological motivations, efforts by IS to portray women's empowerment in IS, fulfilment of a perceived 'obligation' to make *hijra* and live under strict Islamic jurisprudence and governance, supporting IS' state-building project, seeking adventure, seeking a husband or travelling to join one already in theatre, travelling with family (whether willingly or not), and even seeking free healthcare or education.<sup>40</sup> Women have been often noted to be similarly as 'ideologically motivated' as males.<sup>41</sup> The question of agency also becomes important – while thousands of women appeared willing and eager to travel to Syria and Iraq, it also appears that some were more likely coerced and in some cases forced to travel. It is evident there is no singular profile for women who travelled. Instead, it is the distinct push and pull factors of these persons considered at the regional, national and even city level that require attention, though these are beyond the scope of this analysis. However, this dataset can help inform two pieces of the picture. First, it may help inform the trends of travel related to individual females, or as family or other units, from each country. It also raises questions related to why, in total figures of affiliates, some countries such as the Netherlands (27%) or Kazakhstan (30%) saw such high proportional ratios of women while others such as Spain (10%) or Italy (9%) saw such low ratios.

## Roles for women in IS

Women played a variety of roles beyond those of simplistic 'jihadi brides' – a particularly limited and problematic term, which overlooks the complexity of motivations and roles of these women. While their roles were largely proscribed in the domestic sphere, taking care of jihadist husbands and raising 'caliphate' 'cubs' (which is what the majority of women did), recognising the diversity and complexity of

40 For expansive discussion see: Nelly Lahoud, "Empowerment or Subjugation: An analysis of ISIL's gendered messaging" *UN Women*, June 2018, <http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20arab%20states/attachments/publications/lahoud-fin-web-rev.pdf?la=en&vs=5602>; European Parliament, "Radicalisations and violent extremism – focus on women: How women become radicalised, and how to empower them to prevent radicalisation", *Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality*, December, 2017, 46. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596838/IPOL\\_STU\(2017\)596838\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/596838/IPOL_STU(2017)596838_EN.pdf); Hoyle, *Becoming Mulan?*; Erin Marie Saltman, and Melanie Smith, *Till Martyrdom Do Us Part* (London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2015), [https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till\\_Martyrdom\\_Do\\_Us\\_Part\\_Gender\\_and\\_the\\_ISIS\\_Phenomenon.pdf](https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Till_Martyrdom_Do_Us_Part_Gender_and_the_ISIS_Phenomenon.pdf); Pearson, "Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation"; Erin Marie Saltman, and Ross Frennet, "Female Radicalization to ISIS and the Role of Women in CVE" in *A Man's World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism*, ed. Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Sara Zeiger, and Rafia Bhulai (Abu Dhabi: Hedayah, 2017), 142–64; Nick Paton Walsh et al., "ISIS Brides Flee Caliphate as Noose Tightens on Terror Group", *CNN*, 17 July 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/07/17/middleeast/raqqa-isis-brides/index.html>

41 Anita Peresin, and Alberto Cervone, "The Western Muhajirat of ISIS", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 38, no. 7 (2015): 500; Mia Bloom, and Charlie Winter, "The Women of ISIL", *Politico*, 12 July, 2015, <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-women-of-isil-female-suicide-bomber-terrorism/>

their roles in theatre provides important insights into their potential motivations to travel, as well as future implications related to their physical membership and ideological support of IS.

Both abroad and in theatre, women were active in recruiting other women, disseminating propaganda and fundraising for IS, both individually and in small networks. In Karachi 20 women affiliated with the Idara al Zakra academy were noted to have fundraised, recruited, and even arranged marriages for IS in Syria. Three of these women were also accused of abetting the 2015 Safoora bus attack in which their husbands participated in the killing of 46.<sup>42</sup> 20 men, women and children linked to the network of Bushra Cheema in Pakistan had also travelled to Syria.<sup>43</sup> In Canada, a female recruiter based in Edmonton who offered an online Quran course reportedly radicalised at least one young woman, and facilitated travel for her to Syria (she had fifteen other students).<sup>44</sup> In Cueta, Spain, two friends led a ring that recruited other women for IS in Iraq and Syria before travelling themselves.<sup>45</sup> Women attending female only study sessions in the UK additionally promoted IS ideology and encouraged their members to travel to Syria. Rubana – the woman leading this study group – had once been in charge of the female wing of al Muhajiroun.<sup>46</sup> Such cases raise concerns about the networks at home that radicalised women and facilitated travel initially, their relationships to other local extremist organisations (whether directly or through family members), and who may continue to support the group and its ideology.

In Syria and Iraq, women became active members of IS' state building project most notably as wives and mothers. However, battlefield deaths often saw women widowed and remarried soon after, with some reportedly married and divorced up to six times.<sup>47</sup> Khelgat-Doost also highlighted the role that gender-segregated paralleled institutions played in IS territory, where most IS institutions would have a section dedicated to women's affairs, and employ women to avoid mixing of unrelated men and women. Thus women held diverse roles in education, media operations, healthcare, policing, charity work, and even tax collection. They would help register and place international women who arrived, distribute aid to local women, and conduct surveillance amongst other tasks.<sup>48</sup>

Women's security roles and combat-related training undertaken in IS-held territory is of particular significance as this was the first time a jihadist group had allowed and facilitated such roles for women.<sup>49</sup> The most well-known of these was the al-Khansa brigade, or female

42 Faraz Khan, "Assistants of Terror: How Women Raise Funds for Da'ish in Karachi", *The Express Tribune*, 21 December 2015, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1013558/assistants-of-terror-revealed-how-women-raise-funds-for-daish-in-karachi/>

43 Benazie Shah, and Rimmel Mohyidin, "Pray Your Wife and Children Die in Jihad", *Newsweek*, 20 January 2016, <http://newsweekpakistan.com/pray-your-wife-and-children-die-in-jihad/>; Umar Cheema, "20 Men, Women, Children from Lahore join Daesh, go to Syria", *The News*, 31 December 2015, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/85370-20-men-women-children-from-Lahore-join-Daesh-go-to-Syria>

44 "ISIS Recruiter in Edmonton Enlists Canadian Woman to Join Fight in Syria", *CBC News*, 25 February 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/isis-recruiter-in-edmonton-enlists-canadian-woman-to-join-fight-in-syria-1.2970535>; Hannah James, "Female Recruits to ISIS: The Recruiter's Call", *Global News*, 15 March 2015, <https://globalnews.ca/news/1876491/female-recruits-to-isis-the-recruiters-call/>

45 Lauren Frayer, "In a Spanish Enclave, Women Recruit Women to Join ISIS", *NPR Parallels*, 12 April 2015, <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2015/04/12/398756119/in-a-spanish-enclave-women-recruit-women-to-join-isis>

46 "Channel 4 Investigation Uncovers the British Women Supporting ISIS", *Channel 4 Press*, 22 November 2015, <http://www.channel4.com/info/press/news/channel-4-investigation-uncovers-the-british-women-supporting-isis>

47 Paton Walsh, "ISIS Brides Flee Caliphate as Noose Tightens on Terror Group".

48 Hamoon Khelghat-Doost, "Women of the Caliphate: The Mechanism for Women's Incorporation into the Islamic State (Is)", *Perspectives on Terrorism* 11, no. 1 (2017): 17–25.

49 While AQI utilised female suicide bombers in Iraq beginning in 2005, this is distinct from policing and combat roles which demonstrate an expansion of institutionalised training and roles for women under IS.

morality police. There are well documented cases of these members committing severe violence against other women,<sup>50</sup> and demonstrate that women were now being trained in, and holding active 'security' roles in support of jihadist groups. Speckhard and Almohammad have also noted the diverse operational ranks and roles of women throughout IS, including in 'enforcement of sharia laws, surveillance, combat, intelligence, assassination, and infiltration', for which they were provided training.<sup>51</sup>

IS have also shifted their position on the status of women in combat roles between 2014 and 2018, allowing women to take on increasingly more active roles including most recently stating it is obligatory for women to take up arms. The significance of this shift is profound, and is discussed extensively in the section "Women as potential security threats" in Chapter 4. Combined, these points suggest that women had a variety of motivations to become affiliated with IS, held diverse roles throughout the organisation, and in some cases would also have detailed knowledge of diverse IS institutions, practices and actors.

## Minors affiliated with IS: A global picture

IS have repeatedly publicised its successful recruitment and training of minors, with numbers far exceeding that of any other jihadist group. IS' aim and ability to recruit minors – independently as well as accompanied by friends and relatives – cannot be underestimated. According to our data, at least 4,640 foreign minors have been accounted for within IS in Iraq and Syria, constituting between 9–12% of the group's total foreign affiliates. From states with clear delineated figures for minors, the five highest contributing countries are France (460–700), Morocco (391), Kazakhstan (390), Tajikistan (293), and Germany (290). For France, the number of minors in IS is estimated to exceed or even double that of women, with up to 700 minors (including infants born in theatre) expected to return from the conflict zone. The countries with the five highest proportion of minors were Kazakhstan (65–78%); Netherlands (58%); France (24–37%); China (35%); and Finland (34%).

### *Discrepancies in data for minors*

Despite increased international attention and reporting of minors affiliated with IS, significant data gaps and discrepancies remain. As seen in Figure 5 up to 1,502 minors have been identified as nationals of Western Europe, comprising up to 25% of the total Western European affiliates. Countries where higher figures of IS minors can be expected – for example, due to proximity to the conflict – is where data remains sparse, such as in the MENA region. Here government and local sources have only documented 406 minors affiliated with IS, thus representing a mere 2% of the total affiliates from the region. Moreover, these figures only account for the four of the fifteen MENA countries for which data is available

50 "Iraq: Women Suffer under ISIS. For Sunnis, Lives Curtailed; for Yezidis, New Accounts of Brutal Rapes", *Human Rights Watch*, 5 April 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/04/05/iraq-women-suffer-under-isis>

51 Anne Speckhard, and Asaad Almohammad, "The Operational Ranks and Roles of Female ISIS Operatives: From Assassins and Morality Police to Spies and Suicide Bombers", *International Center for the Study of Violent Extremism* (Research Reports), 23 April 2017, <http://www.icsve.org/research-reports/the-operational-ranks-and-roles-of-female-isis-operatives-from-assassins-and-morality-police-to-spies-and-suicide-bombers/>

– Morocco (391), Egypt (6), Lebanon (5) and Israel (4). With the exception of Morocco, these figures are drawn from individual cases reported, rather than official government totals, thereby highlighting an even greater sparsity of official data.

These figures do not and cannot account for all minors, especially from the MENA region as this information was not publicly accessible. Yet arguably the most significant data gaps exist at a localised level within the conflict zone. Out of the total population within IS' Levantine territory, figures for minors have yet to accurately account for Iraqi and Syrian nationals. Confirmed data that delineates between locals actively engaged in the group, and those forcibly occupied by IS, are either under-reported or wholly absent. This gap in knowledge is particularly relevant for minors, for whom 'voluntary' participation is both a contested and indiscernible factor in their interactions and engagement with IS.<sup>52</sup> The May 2017 issue of *An-Naba*, IS' weekly Arabic newsletter, published a detailed infographic of the reach and impact of the group's 'Ministry of Education'. In the 2015–2016 academic year, IS claimed to have taught 100,423 (male and female) minors across its 1,350 primary and middle schools.<sup>53</sup> Yet, these figures vary significantly from official estimates of children under IS control. In March 2015, Mohamed Ali Alhakim, the Permanent Representative of Iraq to the UN, stated that '[t]here were tens of thousands of children in the areas under the terror and control of the group'.<sup>54</sup> Regardless, the number of minors who became affiliated with IS at both a global and local level has seemingly been vastly underestimated.

### *Categories and motivations of minor affiliates*

Minors affiliated with IS are not a homogenous group. First, the age range of IS minors reflects the organisation's propaganda and *raison d'être* to establish not only a functioning insurgent army, but also a complete alternative 'Islamic' society. Qualitative analysis of local Iraqi and Syrian minors will not be explored in this section.<sup>55</sup> However, countries across the world have reported up to 4,640 foreign minors travelling to IS territory, including cases of teenagers travelling independently,<sup>56</sup> or in groups of friends or families,<sup>57</sup> primary school-age children taken by their parent(s) or relative(s),<sup>58</sup> and infants born 'under the shade of the caliphate'.<sup>59</sup>

52 Gina Vale, *Cubs in the Lions' Den: Indoctrination and Recruitment of Children Within Islamic State Territory* (London: International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, 2018), <http://icsr.info/2018/07/cubs-lions-den-indoctrination-recruitment-children-within-islamic-state-territory/>

53 Islamic State, "The Ministry of Education: During the Academic Year 2015–2016", *An-Naba*, 4 May 2017, 2.

54 United Nations, "Former Child Soldier Describes Forced Recruitment during Security Council Debate, Urges International Community to Aid Other Children Released by Armed Groups", *Security Council* (SC/11832), 25 March 2015, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc11832.doc.htm>

55 For a full investigation into the indoctrination and recruitment of local children within IS territory, see Vale, *Cubs in the Lions' Den*.

56 Dan Oakes, and Samuel Clark, "Jake Bilardi: Melbourne Teenager who Joined Islamic State Left Bomb-Making Materials at Family Home", *ABC News*, 12 March 2015, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-03-12/bilardi-left-bomb-making-material-home-before-leaving-to-join-is/6307370>

57 Martin Evans, "Three Missing London Schoolgirls 'Travelling to Syria to Join Isis'", *The Telegraph*, 20 February 2015, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/11424884/Three-missing-British-schoolgirls-travel-to-Syria.html>; Vlado Azinović, ed., "Between Salvation and Terror: Radicalization and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon in the Western Balkans", *The Atlantic Initiative*, (Sarajevo: 2017), 61. [http://www.atlantskainicijativa.org/bos/images/BETWEEN\\_SALVATION\\_AND\\_TERROR/BetweenSalvationAndTerror.pdf](http://www.atlantskainicijativa.org/bos/images/BETWEEN_SALVATION_AND_TERROR/BetweenSalvationAndTerror.pdf)

58 Marcin Mamon, "The Lost Children of ISIS", *Foreign Policy*, 2 January 2018, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2018/01/02/the-lost-children-of-isis/>; "Four Years of Jail for Arab-Israeli who Joined Islamic State", *The Jerusalem Post*, 21 March 2017, <http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/Four-years-of-Jail-for-Arab-Israeli-who-joined-Islamic-State-484758>

59 Jess Wanless, "Born Under ISIS, the Children Struggling in Iraq", *International Rescue Committee*, 19 January 2018, <https://www.rescue.org/article/born-under-isis-children-struggling-iraq>

In line with the age range of IS minors, analysts have begun to investigate minors' differing motivations and means of recruitment. At the centre of these studies is the question of agency in the interaction and engagement of minors with extremist groups and ideologies. In a recent report by ICCT, researchers provide two categories of IS minors. They argue that 'young children' from 0–9 years old, who are either born in IS territory or brought by their parents at a young age, should be considered primarily as victims.<sup>60</sup> Conversely, '[f]or older children, other factors such as indoctrination, training and potential involvement in violent activities are more likely to play a role, demanding an approach that goes beyond the victim-perspective'.<sup>61</sup> Here, such a delineation between voluntary and coerced involvement in the group is predicated on a key assumption: that minors under nine years old did not travel alone or participate in training and violence. Although there have been no public reports found of foreign minors under 15 years old travelling unaccompanied to IS territory, evidence has shown that IS trained children as young as five years old have participated in violent acts (as will be explored in greater detail below).<sup>62</sup> As a result, this report re-categorises IS minors as infants (0–4 years), children (5–14 years), and teenagers (15–17 years). Such a classification considers their independence in travelling to IS territory, active contribution to and participation in violence, and agency and informed choice in their actions.

According to the timeline of the establishment and decline of the 'caliphate', between 2014 and 2017 respectively, infants (0–4 year olds) are expected to have largely been born inside IS territory. According to available data, at least 730 infants from 19 countries have been born inside the 'caliphate'. Unverified estimates have suggested up to 5,000 children were born to foreign parents.<sup>63</sup> For countries such as Belgium, 70% of all minors were born in IS territory, and for the Netherlands and France half of minors accounted for are under four and five years old respectively, highlighting the growing significance of considering infants of foreign nationals. However, due to considerable data gaps, particularly for the MENA region and births to at least one local Iraqi and Syrian parent, this figure is expected to be significantly higher. Research by Iraq's Ministry of Interior surveyed the areas of Salahaddin, Kirkuk, Diyala and Anbar, and suggested that up to a third of marriage-age women in these cities married members of the group, including foreigners, highlighting the potential for increased numbers of foreign infants.<sup>64</sup> On account of their age and birthplace, these infants were not only unable to choose their IS affiliation, but were likely restricted to purely non-violent roles as 'citizens of the caliphate'. Thus the majority of infants were born (or brought) into the 'caliphate' due to their parents' desire to populate the 'Islamic State'.<sup>65</sup>

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60 van Ginkel, *The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union*, 23.

61 Ibid.

62 Mia Bloom, "ISIS Terrorism Targets Children in Unthinkable Ways", *Newsweek*, 25 May 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/islamic-states-terrorism-targets-children-unthinkable-ways-614573>

63 Martin Chulov, "Scorned and Stateless: Children of Isis Fighters Face an Uncertain Future", *The Guardian*, 7 October 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/07/children-isis-fighters-syria-raqqa-orphan-uncertain-future>

64 Ghazwan Hassan al-Jibouri, "Sins Of the Father: Extremist Fighters' Children Live In Stateless Limbo In Iraq", *Niqash*, accessed 18 June 2018, <http://www.niqash.org/en/articles/society/5267/>

65 Matt Drake, "British Jihadi Bride Wanted to Raise her Children as 'Terrorist Assassins' for ISIS", *The Express*, 6 November 2017, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/875919/ISIS-terror-jihadi-bride-terrorist-dallas-texas-Tania-Georgelas-UK-Syria-USA-Texas>



Similarly, the affiliation of foreign children (5–14 years) to IS is also closely tied to the motivations of their guardians. Often brought to the 'caliphate' by a parent or 'responsible' adult, young children are rarely attributed individual incentives or ambitions for their involvement in terrorist groups.<sup>66</sup> It is, however, widely publicised in IS propaganda and international media that children (predominantly boys) of this age underwent psychological indoctrination and physical training, culminating in their participation in acts of violence and abuse.<sup>67</sup> In many cases, children were brought to IS territory primarily for non-violent material or ideological benefits, such as free education and healthcare, and the 'correct' upbringing under *sharia* law.<sup>68</sup> However, IS has also effectively responded to parents' open calls for their children to become militants and martyrs,<sup>69</sup> producing brochures for mothers to play an active role in the ideological conditioning and physical preparation of their 'cubs'.<sup>70</sup> However, despite children's widespread involvement in all aspects of IS activities, the issue of their individual agency and conscious choice to support or conduct violence is still highly questionable.<sup>71</sup>

With reports from across the world of whole family units joining IS, minors of all age groups have travelled in the company of adults. Yet even within these cases, there is evidence that some teenagers have played a significant or even leading role in the radicalisation and subsequent migration of their adult family members. One such example is that of Nurshardrina Khairadhania, a 17-year-old teenager from Indonesia, who encouraged 26 family members to travel to the IS capital in Raqqa, Syria, in 2015.<sup>72</sup> The stated reasons for her and her family's migration contradict the conventional cliché of aspiring foreign 'jihadi brides'. Instead, her 'pitch' to her family centred on the ability to clear debts, employment and free health care services, and the chance for her to train as a health practitioner, and her sister to continue education in computer science.

Cases such as these provide evidence for the (often underestimated) significance of teenagers' agency. For many such young adults, motivations and radicalisation drivers mirror those of their elders. These include ideological and religious fulfilment, vocational contribution to an 'Islamic state', a sense of purpose and adventure, and material and financial benefits of IS membership. Such independence and agency in radicalisation is of particular relevance for teenagers who have chosen to travel independently from adults, either alone or in small peer groups. For countries such as Belgium, unaccompanied teenagers account for a third of all minors who

66 Abdullah Al-Thuweini, "IS 'Forcing Children to Join Ranks in Mosul'", *Al-Araby Al-Jadeed*, 12 May 2015, <http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/news/2015/5/12/is-forcing-children-to-join-ranks-in-mosul>

67 Josie Ensor, "Inside the underground 'Cubs of the Caliphate' Training Camp Where Brainwashed Iraqi Children are Taught to Fight and Die for Isis", *The Telegraph*, 13 March 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/03/13/inside-underground-isis-cubs-caliphate-training-camp-children/>

68 Charlotte Krol, and George Fuller, "'I am Very Naive': Daughter of Indonesian Family Lured to Raqqa by Islamic State Tells of Ordeal", *The Telegraph*, 3 August 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/08/03/naive-daughter-indonesian-family-lured-raqqa-islamic-state-tells/>

69 Drake, "British Jihadi Bride Wanted to Raise her Children as 'Terrorist Assassins' for ISIS"; Patrick Maguire, "How 'Mrs Terror' Sally Jones Turned Young Son Into Grinning ISIS Killer", *The Daily Star*, 3 September 2016, <https://www.dailystar.co.uk/news/latest-news/542943/sally-jones-jihadi-isis-joe-dixon-daesh-syria-raqqa-islamic-state>, "Sister's Role in Jihad", *Internet Archive*, 2014.

70 A salient example of such studies into young children's motivations for radicalisation and recruitment into armed groups in Iraq and Syria is a 2014 report by Human Rights Watch. This study, however, draws on interviews with only 25 children of varying age groups, as well as resorting to interviews with parents and/or social services representatives. Greater research and evidence is needed to add to this initial study. See Prinyanka Motaparthy, and Zama Coursen-Neff, "'Maybe We Live and Maybe We Die': Recruitment and Use of Children by Armed Groups in Syria", *Human Rights Watch*, June 2014, [https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria0614\\_crd\\_ForUpload.pdf](https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/syria0614_crd_ForUpload.pdf)

72 Krol, "'I am Very Naive': Daughter of Indonesian Family Lured to Raqqa by Islamic State Tells of Ordeal".

travelled to Syria (15 out of 45 cases).<sup>73</sup> Often recruited, at least partially, online,<sup>74</sup> Winter has highlighted the case of Jake Bilardi, one of a number of teenagers who travelled across the world to Syria alone and in secret.<sup>75</sup> Countering common assumptions of naive or 'groomed' child recruits,<sup>76</sup> Bilardi repeatedly stressed his extensive research and determination to join the jihadist group, which culminated in his volunteering for a suicide operation in March 2015.

Western media often deny the agency of young people in their decision to join terrorist or extremist groups. Reports of teenage affiliates – particularly girls – commonly describe these individuals as 'groomed', 'lured' and 'seduced' to join IS without the consent or knowledge of their parents.<sup>77</sup> Salient examples include the three 'Bethnal Green Girls', Amira Abase (15), Shamima Begum (15) and Kadiza Sultana (16), who flew from London to Turkey in April 2015,<sup>78</sup> the 16-year-old 'Terror Twins', Salma and Zahra Halane, who left Manchester in June 2014,<sup>79</sup> and two Austrian friends, Samra Kesinovic (17) and Sabina Selimovic (16) who left Vienna to join IS in April 2014.<sup>80</sup> Although all young girls, the individual commitment of these teenagers to the IS cause cannot be underestimated or overlooked, even as the potential for the role of manipulation, grooming or coercion should also be considered in their affiliation to IS.

### *Roles for minors in IS*

IS propaganda has championed minors as the future 'guardians' of the group's ideology and state-building project.<sup>81</sup> Supposedly 'uncorrupted' by infidel societies and practices, young children are viewed as the most pure, impressionable, and ideologically committed IS subjects.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, through intense psychosocial indoctrination and physical conditioning, IS has dedicated considerable attention to the ideological education and military training of their 'cubs' (boys) and 'pearls' (girls). Due to limitations in access to areas under IS control, and ethical considerations

73 Thomas Renard, and Rik Coolsaet, eds., *Returnees: Who Are They, Why Are They (Not) Coming Back and How Should we Deal with Them? Assessing Policies on Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands*, (Brussels: Egmont – The Royal Institute for International Relations, 2018), 22. [http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2018/02/egmont.papers.101\\_online\\_v1-3.pdf?type=pdf](http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2018/02/egmont.papers.101_online_v1-3.pdf?type=pdf)

74 Charlie Winter, "An Integrated Approach to Islamic State Recruitment", ASPI Special Report, 2016, [https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/import/SR88\\_IS-recruitment.pdf?SDtE\\_PtMeHD7g6AZTe1mFkimuS5P9X](https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/import/SR88_IS-recruitment.pdf?SDtE_PtMeHD7g6AZTe1mFkimuS5P9X)

75 Although martyred in a suicide operation aged 18, Bilardi was 17 when he travelled to Syria: Michael Bachelard, "White Jihadist Jake Bilardi's Blog Posts Reveal Teenager's Journey to Jihadism", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 March 2015, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/white-jihadist-jake-bilardis-blog-posts-reveal-teenagers-journey-to-jihadism-20150311-140yxjhtml>. See also Korean teenager: K.J. Kwon, and Madison Park, "Police: Korean Teen May have Fled to Syria to Join ISIS", *CNN*, 23 January 2015, <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/01/22/world/isis-korea-teenager/index.html>

76 Tammy Mills, "'May Their Organs Implode': How Melbourne Teen Jake Bilardi was Groomed by IS", *The Age*, 2 November 2017, <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/may-their-organs-implode-how-melbourne-teen-jake-bilardi-was-groomed-by-is-20171102-gzd95x.html>

77 Lizzie Dearden, "How Isis Attracts Women and Girls from Europe with False Offer of 'Empowerment'", *The Independent*, 5 August 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/isis-jihadi-brides-islamic-state-women-girls-europe-british-radicalisation-recruitment-report-a7878681.html>

78 Evans, "Three Missing London Schoolgirls 'Travelling to Syria to Join Isis'".

79 Imogen Calderwood, "Teenage 'Terror Twins' who Fled Britain to Join ISIS Tried to Recruit Their Whole Family Telling Brothers: 'We Might Seem Evil to You, but we will all be Happy in the Afterlife'", *Mail Online*, 4 October 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3259363/Teenage-terror-twins-fled-Britain-join-ISIS-tried-recruit-family-telling-brothers-evil-happy-afterlife.html>

80 Debra Killalea, "Samra Kesinovic, Sabina Selimovic: How Islamic State Recruits Teenagers", *News.com.au*, 28 November 2015, <https://www.news.com.au/world/middle-east/samra-kesinovic-sabina-selimovic-how-islamic-state-recruits-teenagers/news-story/9a0ab035c6352e2eb93c93b1733bd76e>

81 Lizzie Dearden, "Isis Training Children of Foreign Fighters to Become 'Next Generation' of Terrorists", *The Independent*, 29 July 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-training-children-of-foreign-fighters-to-become-next-generation-of-terrorists-a7162911.html>

82 National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV) and General Intelligence and Security Service (AVID), *The Children of ISIS: The Indoctrination of Minors in ISIS-Held Territory*, (The Hague: Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, 2017), 5. <https://english.aivd.nl/publications/publications/2017/04/26/the-children-of-isis-the-indoctrination-of-minors-in-isis-held-territory>

restricting interviews with (likely traumatised) minors, official IS propaganda can provide an initial (albeit biased) snapshot of minors' lives and roles inside the 'caliphate'.

First, delineation of roles for IS minors can be clearly seen according to gender. In line with their broader gendered policies on women's appearance and participation in the state-building project, IS rarely includes images of 'pearls' in propaganda videos and publications. The expected age of marriage outlined by the media wing of IS' all-female Al-Khansaa Brigade is particularly young for girls. It is 'legitimate' for girls to marry from the age of nine, with young men expected to be no more than 20 years old.<sup>83</sup> However, even among minors brought to IS territory by their parents, marriages have been reported between young girls and far older adult men. Such cases include that of Zaynab Sharrouf, who migrated to Syria with her parents at the age of 13.<sup>84</sup> Within just a year, Zaynab became the second wife (and, subsequently, widow) of 31-year-old fellow Australian migrant Mohamed Elomar. After the deaths of her parents and husband in Syria, Zaynab was left to raise her own new baby girl and her four younger siblings also stranded in Syria.<sup>85</sup> Like many other foreign female children and teenagers,<sup>86</sup> life in IS required her to adopt the roles of orphan, widow and mother.

Reports of the indoctrination and activities of IS minors have emphasised the group's extensive infrastructure and propaganda focused on education and military training.<sup>87</sup> Although sex-segregation was strictly enforced in schools, girls were also shown to receive primary education that went beyond homemaking skills.<sup>88</sup> However, the education received by boys and girls in IS strictly adhered to the group's extreme interpretation of Islam and the *sharia*. As IS reopened schools in its territory, it also overhauled the curriculum for students, focusing solely on basic mathematics and literacy, all using militarised symbols of bombs, bullets and grenades and text examples of glorified martyrs.<sup>89</sup>

For boys, such psychological and ideological conditioning acts as a precursor to physical training in a number of IS-run military camps.<sup>90</sup> Although difficult to accurately estimate, it is understood that at least 2,000 (male) minors have undergone military training to become 'cubs of the caliphate'.<sup>91</sup> Practical training included military and combat skills, weapons and explosives training, and culminated

83 Ibid, 24.

84 Saltman and Smith, *Till Martyrdom Do Us Part*, 27–28.

85 Candace Sutton, "The Australian Baby Girl Left to be Raised by ISIS: Ayesha Elomar's Terrorist Father and Grandparents are all Dead, Leaving her Orphaned 14-year-old Mother to Raise her on the War-Torn Streets of Syria", *MailOnline*, 11 February 2016, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3441610/The-Australian-baby-daughter-Ayesha-terrorist-Mohamed-Elomar-teenager-Zaynab-Sharrouf-left-raised-Syria-ISIS.html>

86 See Bethan McKernan, "Leaving the Caliphate: The Struggle of One ISIS Bride to Get Home", *The Independent*, 16 September 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/syria-isis-bride-heading-home-raqa-a7950656.html>; and Alissa J. Rubin, "A Swedish Girl, ISIS and a Cautionary Tale of Global Terrorism", *The New York Times*, 2 March 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/03/world/europe/a-swedish-girl-isis-and-a-cautionary-tale-of-global-terrorism.html>

87 Quentin Sommerville, and Riam Dalati, "An Education in Terror", *BBC News*, August 2017, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/an\\_education\\_in\\_terror](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/an_education_in_terror)

88 The Al-Khansaa Brigade manifesto emphasises that in order for women and girls to fulfil their duties, education cannot be completely abandoned: 'She cannot fulfil this role if she is illiterate and ignorant, though. Hence, Islam does not ordain the forbidding of education or the blocking of culture from women'. See Winter, *Women of the Islamic State*, 18.

89 Robbie Gramer, "J is for Jihad: How the Islamic State Indoctrinates Children with Math, Grammar, Tanks and Guns", *Foreign Policy*, 16 February 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/02/16/j-is-for-jihad-how-isis-indoctrinates-kids-with-math-grammar-tanks-and-guns/>

90 See "Specimen 3X: Opening of the Central Cub Scouts of the Caliphate Institute, Raqqa Province" at "Archive of Islamic State Administrative Documents", *Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi*, 27 January 2015, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/2015/01/archive-of-islamic-state-administrative-documents>

91 Sommerville and Dalati, "An Education in Terror".

in the execution of prisoners.<sup>92</sup> Such intensive training serves to desensitise children to violence, which becomes 'normalised'. Upon 'graduation', such psychological and physical conditioning enables minors to adopt, and even compete for, violent roles within the organisation such as combatants, suicide operatives, torturers, and executioners. IS minors may be viewed as providing multiple tactical advantages on the frontlines, and children and teenagers have reportedly been assigned to guard checkpoints, espionage, reconnaissance duties, and weapons manufacturing.<sup>93</sup> Often viewed as 'innocents', young children have also acted as human-shields for adult fighters,<sup>94</sup> and as successful suicide attackers.<sup>95</sup> There is also evidence of foreign minors participating – individually and in groups – in Hollywood-style propaganda videos as executioners; the largest of which was a mass-shooting of Syrian regime soldiers by 25 IS teenagers at Palmyra in May 2015.<sup>96</sup> Yet, this role is not reserved for older children. Minors as young as four have been filmed killing IS captives by remote-controlled explosives, shootings and even beheadings.<sup>97</sup> Such cases challenge assumptions of children as purely passive victims, even while still recognising the complexities of their status as minors.

Foreign minors have also been featured in IS propaganda through non-violent means. For boys seen to be gifted in public speaking and influential among their peers, roles as IS promoters, preachers and spokespersons are available.<sup>98</sup> Children and teenagers may be encouraged to be trusted and impactful proselytisers, motivating recruitment and allegiance of other minors through peer pressure or the formation of friendship groups.<sup>99</sup> Minors can act as figureheads in both informal – displaying uniforms and weapons – and more formal settings, such as *da'wa* (proselytising) events.<sup>100</sup>

## Women and minors prevented from travelling

The official government and media figures for foreign IS-affiliates inside the 'caliphate' analysed in this dataset do not account for those who have attempted the journey but have been intercepted *en route*, though we believe these to be an important population for further analysis. Throughout this research the authors noted nationals from 36 countries who were prevented from entering the conflict zone. For some states, numbers were delineated according to gender and age, with the total confirmed individual cases of 86 women and 88 minors among those prevented either within their countries of origin, in-transit, or at the Turkey-Syria border. Yet, these figures do not represent the full picture.

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92 Noman Benotman, and Nikita Malik, *The Children of Islamic State*, (London: Quilliam, 2016), 37–40. <https://f-origin.hypotheses.org/wp-content/blogs.dir/2725/files/2016/04/the-children-of-islamic-state.pdf>

93 *Ibid.*, 42.

94 "Mosul From the Sky: Evidence of IS Using Human Shields", *BBC News*, 3 April 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-39475591>

95 Tom Michael, "ISIS Fanatics Show Baby-Faced Child Suicide Bomber Blowing Himself up in the Desert in Chilling New Propaganda Video", *The Sun*, 28 September 2017, <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/4567806/isis-fanatics-show-baby-faced-child-suicide-bomber-blowing-himself-up-in-the-desert-in-chilling-new-propaganda-video/>

96 Islamic State, "Healing the Chests of the Believing People – Wilāyat Ḥims", *Jihadology*, 4 July 2015.

97 Bloom, "ISIS Terrorism Targets Children in Unthinkable Ways."

98 Mia Bloom, "Cubs of the Caliphate: The Children of ISIS", *Foreign Affairs*, 21 July 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2015-07-21/cubs-caliphate>

99 Benotman and Malik, *The Children of Islamic State*, 41.

100 Islamic State, "Da'wah Convoy for the Cubs of the Caliphate – Wilāyat Nīnawā", *Jihadology*, 20 April 2015.

As early as July 2015 Turkish authorities reportedly banned 15,000 persons representing 98 nationalities from entering the country, and deported 1,500 who sought to join IS.<sup>101</sup> Some states have reported vast gender/age neutral numbers of travellers prevented from entering Syria and Iraq, including 9,000 individuals from Tunisia.<sup>102</sup> Indonesia noted in one case amongst the numerous cases of deportations of its citizens from Turkey, 79% of 137 deportees from Turkey in 2017 were women and minors.<sup>103</sup> In total 490 were returned to Indonesia from Turkey where no gender/minor breakdown was stated.<sup>104</sup> Such figures demonstrate the extent to which IS drew numbers far beyond those figures accounted for in its territory, and highlight the extent to which women and minors must be considered within these.

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101 Humeyra Pamuk, "Turkey blocks access to pro-Islamic State websites in crackdown," Reuters, 14 July 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-turkey-islamists/turkey-blocks-access-to-pro-islamic-state-websites-in-crackdown-idUSKCN0PO1E720150714>

102 Kevin Sullivan, "Tunisia, After Igniting Arab Spring, Sends the Most Fighters to Islamic State in Syria; The Record Number of Tunisians in Syria is Largely an Unintended Consequence of the 2011 Revolution", *The Washington Post*, 29 October 2014, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/tunisia-after-igniting-arab-spring-sends-the-most-fighters-to-islamic-state-in-syria/2014/10/28/b5db4faa-5971-11e4-8264-deed989ae9a2\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.c6c5ede9e807](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/tunisia-after-igniting-arab-spring-sends-the-most-fighters-to-islamic-state-in-syria/2014/10/28/b5db4faa-5971-11e4-8264-deed989ae9a2_story.html?utm_term=.c6c5ede9e807)

103 It was not clear if all these cases had been prevented at the border, or if some had in fact returned from Iraq and Syria. Cindy Wockner, "Indonesia in Number Two in Worldwide List of Foreign Islamic State Jihadists Arrested in Turkey", *News.com.au*, 14 July 2017, <https://www.news.com.au/world/asia/indonesia-in-number-two-on-worldwide-list-of-foreign-islamic-state-jihadists-arrested-in-turkey/news-story/75f00d11a254935fb49a9925c379c25e>

104 Tom Allard, and Manuel Mogato, "Indonesia Investigates Report Top Islamic State Commander Killed", *Reuters*, 24 April 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-indonesia-militant-death/indonesia-investigates-reports-top-islamic-state-commander-killed-idUKKBN1HV0IJ>; "8 Indonesian ISIS Fighters Deported by Turkey Amid Heightened Alert for Year-End Attacks", *Straits Times*, 20 December 2017, <https://www.straitstimes.com/world/middle-east/8-indonesian-isis-terror-fighters-deported-by-turkey-amid-heightened-alert-for>

## **Box 2** The other destinations: Libya, Afghanistan, and the Philippines

Due to combination of the expansion of IS provinces or *wilayat*, pledges of allegiance from affiliate organisations, and increased pressures placed on it in Syria and Iraq, two specific shifts occurred in relation to IS affiliates beginning in late 2014. First, as opposed to initially travelling to Iraq and Syria, some individuals started travelling directly to these other theatres, oftentimes those in closer proximity, or which were easier to access than Syria and Iraq. Second, increasing pressure in Syria and Iraq saw affiliates relocate to other territories. Libya, Afghanistan and the Philippines have been some of the most important of these.

### *Libya*

Libya proved to be a notable destination for affiliates, particularly around 2014–2015. IS were active in the Fezzan, Cyrenaica and Tripolitania provinces, announcing three distinct wilayat in November 2014: wilayat al-Fizan, wilayat al-Barqa and wilayat al-Tarabulus respectively. Research by Aaron Zelin has concluded that since 2011 between 2,600 and 3,500 foreigners travelled or attempted to travel to Libya, including around 1,500 Tunisians.<sup>105</sup> Approximately 1,000 of these total travellers were women (or 29–38% of the total).<sup>106</sup> Libya proves an important case for this research for three reasons.

First, Libya replicated the significant proportion of women who travelled to Syria and Iraq. Women were active in recruiting other women to the region and in August 2015, it was reported that three English-speaking women were calling for supporters to make *hijra* to Libya, framing it as the most accessible location to join the 'caliphate'.<sup>107</sup> Though it did not appear that large numbers of Western, English-speaking women heeded this call, for women based in the region, geographical proximity was a likely draw, and 300 Tunisian women were affiliated with IS in Libya (equating to 20% of total Tunisians in Libya).<sup>108</sup> There were also numerous stories of Tunisian detainees in Libya, with approximately 48 Tunisian women and minors reportedly held in Maitiga and Misrata prisons in early 2018. Here, a 'child first' repatriation process to Tunisia has been suggested, though it was reported that many women refused to be separated from their children for

105 Aaron Y. Zelin, *The Others: Foreign Fighters in Libya* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, PN45, 2018), 3. <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/PolicyNote45-Zelin.pdf>

106 Bel Trew, "Hundreds of Jihadi Brides Sent for Combat Training", *The Times*, 19 April 2016, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/hundreds-of-jihadi-brides-sent-for-combat-training-cg8pn55nh>

107 Shiv Malik, and Chris Stephen, "English-Speaking Female Jihadis in Libya Issue Islamic State Call to Arms", *The Guardian*, 27 September 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/27/english-speaking-female-jihadis-libya-islamic-state>

108 Trew, "Hundreds of Jihadi Brides Sent for Combat Training". For further discussion, see Zelin, *The Others*, 11–12.

fear of being forgotten about in prison.<sup>109</sup> Sudan proves an interesting and seemingly proactive example in terms of repatriation of its female and minor citizens from Libya. There have been three cases since 2017 of a total of seven women and twelve minors repatriated.<sup>110</sup> The Sudanese government also identified a further six women and four minors in detention centres in Misrata.<sup>111</sup>

Second, Libya expands the number of countries from which female and minor affiliates originated from, most notably several African nations such as Chad, Eritrea, and Niger.<sup>112</sup> This also prompts questions about the number of minors who travelled: figures for minors who travelled to Libya were unavailable, but as the cases of Tunisia and Sudan demonstrate, minors were certainly taken to, or born in, Libya.

Third, IS' first reported instances of female suicide bombers were in Sabratha in February 2016. It was claimed by the head of Sabratha's military council that 'several' female operatives had conducted suicide attacks, even though they often 'carried out logistics'.<sup>113</sup> If confirmed, this is significant as it would predate their deployment in Mosul in July 2017. It was also reported that 'hundreds' of women were being trained for combat operations.<sup>114</sup> In December 2017 Emirates Airlines restricted Tunisian women traveling to the UAE citing 'serious security information' about alleged plans for attacks from Tunisian women, setting off a diplomatic row and highlighting the security concerns women were believed to pose.<sup>115</sup>

### *Afghanistan*

After pledges of allegiance from different local groups dating back to 2014, the official 2015 announcement of IS in Khurasan Province also saw affiliates travelling directly to Afghanistan, and more recently appeared to be a destination for a small number departing Syria and Iraq. Many of the members affiliated with IS Khorasan were already drawn from local regional organisations, particularly Pakistanis from Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) and Islamic Movement Uzbekistan.<sup>116</sup>

109 Asma Ajroudi, "Stranded in Libya: ISIL's Tunisian Women and Children", *Al-Jazeera*, 28 February 2018, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/02/stranded-libya-isil-tunisian-women-children-180228163426561.html>

110 "Sudan Repatriates Seven Female 'ISIS Members' from Libya", *News 24*, 5 April 2018, <https://www.news24.com/Africa/News/sudan-repatriates-seven-female-isis-members-from-libya-20180405>; "Sudan Brings Home 8 Children of ISIS Fighters in Libya", *Sudan Tribune*, 20 June 2017, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article62785>.

111 "Sudan Brings Home 8 Children of ISIS Fighters in Libya", *Sudan Tribune*, 20 June 2017, <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article62785>

112 Zelin, *The Others*, 3.

113 Bel Trew, "ISIS Sends Women into Battle in Libya", *The Times*, 29 February 2016, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/isis-sends-women-into-battle-in-libya-rjmhqc7k7>

114 Trew, "Hundreds of Jihadi Brides Sent for Combat Training".

115 "Tunisia Demands Formal UAE Apology Over Women Ban", *Al-Jazeera*, 26 December 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/tunisia-demands-formal-uae-apology-women-row-171226101815628.html>

116 Pamela Constable, "'I Believe in the Afghan People', Says Top U.S. Military Commander in Afghanistan", *The Washington Post*, 26 August 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/08/26/i-believe-in-the-afghan-people-says-top-u-s-military-commander-in-afghanistan/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.c13e1fd36754](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/08/26/i-believe-in-the-afghan-people-says-top-u-s-military-commander-in-afghanistan/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.c13e1fd36754)

Current estimates by the U.S. Department of Defense suggest there are approximately 1,100 members of IS in the country.<sup>117</sup>

Women and minors have been reported in these figures, though to a lesser degree than Libya. In January 2015, 200 'foreign fighters with links to IS, and their families' were reported to be settling in Afghanistan.<sup>118</sup> In February 2018, at least two women were recorded among a group of French, Algerian, Chechens and Uzbeks in Afghanistan. Perhaps most disconcertingly, the Jowzjan provincial spokesperson noted that French-speaking Caucasian men and women had been seen training IS fighters in Darzab. He also noted 50 minors had been recruited by the group.<sup>119</sup> This IS link to the TTP is also of interest as, in August 2017, the Pakistani TTP released a magazine, *The Way of Kaula*, which called for women to join the mujahideen and engage in physical and arms training and dissemination of propaganda.<sup>120</sup> It is not evident if or how this is informing women's roles in IS in Afghanistan, where women's participation in violence is much more rare.

### *The Philippines*

In 2014 a pledge of allegiance from Isnilon Hapilon (a leader of Abu Sayyaf) to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi (the leader of IS in Iraq and Syria) emerged from the Philippines. IS has called for those unable to reach Syria to travel to the Philippines to conduct jihad in Mindanao, where in May 2017 fighters from Saudi Arabia, Malaysia,<sup>121</sup> and Singapore were identified.<sup>122</sup> At least 40 also came from Indonesia.<sup>123</sup>

In May 2017 the capital of Mindanao – Marawi – was seized by militants who held the city for approximately five months, resulting in 1,131 people killed, including 919 militants, also displacing thousands of local residents.<sup>124</sup> While it is unclear how many women and minors were among the foreigners who travelled to the Philippines, the role of women and minors in this siege was visible. 36-year-old Filipino, Karen Aizha Hamidon, was considered the top IS female recruiter and

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- 117 John W. Nicholson Jr., "Department of Defense Press Briefing by General Nicholson via Teleconference from Kabul, Afghanistan", *U.S. Department of Defense News Transcript*, 28 November 2017, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/1382901/department-of-defense-press-briefing-by-general-nicholson-via-teleconference-fr/>
- 118 Lauren McNally, Alex Amiral, Marvin Weinbaum, and Antoun Issa, *The Islamic State in Afghanistan: Examining its Threat to Stability*, Washington: Middle East Institute (Policy Focus Series), 2016, 3, [https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PF12\\_McNallyAmiral\\_ISISAfghan\\_web.pdf](https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PF12_McNallyAmiral_ISISAfghan_web.pdf)
- 119 "French Fighters Appear with Islamic State in Afghanistan", *The Local*, 10 December 2017, <https://www.thelocal.fr/20171210/french-fighters-appear-with-islamic-state-in-afghanistan>
- 120 Haroon Janjua, "Pakistani Taliban Starts Magazine for Would-Be Female Jihadists", *The Guardian*, 8 August 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/08/pakistani-taliban-starts-magazine-for-would-be-female-jihadists>. For more discussion of TTP and women, see: Amira Jadoon, and Sara Mahmood, "Militant Rivalries Extend to Female Recruitment in Pakistan", *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point*, 2017, <https://ctc.usma.edu/ctc-perspectives-militant-rivalries-extend-to-female-recruitment-in-pakistan/>
- 121 Tom Allard, "Ominous Signs of an Asian Hub for Islamic State in the Philippines", *Reuters*, 30 May 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-militants-foreigners/ominous-signs-of-an-asian-hub-for-islamic-state-in-the-philippines-idUSKBN18Q000>
- 122 Raul Dancel, "Singaporeans Among Foreign Fighters Involved in ISIS-Linked Insurgency in Southern Philippines' Marawi", *Straits Times*, 26 May 2017, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/singaporean-among-foreign-fighters-involved-in-isis-linked-insurgency-in-southern>
- 123 Allard, "Ominous Signs of an Asian Hub for Islamic State in the Philippines".
- 124 Jim Gomez, "Philippines Declares pro-ISIS Militants in Marawi 'Finished'", *USA Today*, 23 October 2017, <https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/10/23/philippines-declares-pro-isis-militants-marawi-finished/789612001/>



had allegedly married Mohammad Jaafar Maguid, the leader of IS-linked Ansar al-Khilafah in the Philippines. Aizha had called on social media for recruits to come and reinforce militants in Marawi before her arrest, including confirmed cases of Indian citizens.<sup>125</sup> It was also widely reported that both women and minors had taken up arms against Filipino troops in the final stages of the battle, and were believed to be the family members of militants.<sup>126</sup>

These cases suggest a number of points in relation to this research. First, they highlight that foreign women and minors have also been active in diverse roles in IS *wilayat* beyond Syria and Iraq. Second, they highlight that women have been active in combat training (Libya), as actual combatants in combat operations (Philippines), and highlight regional affiliates calling for women to prepare for combat activities (Afghanistan). This should put to rest any myth that women may not engage in violence on behalf of the organisation, even if they remain in the minority. This also raises questions about the distinct local dynamics present in affiliate groups, which may further enable or restrict both foreign and local women and minors' diverse roles in the organisation. These include local cultural norms or the histories of pre-existing organisations and how they have engaged women and minors. Finally, and similar to Syria and Iraq, these countries also highlight the gaps in data pertaining to women and minors travelling to, present in, or returning from these areas.

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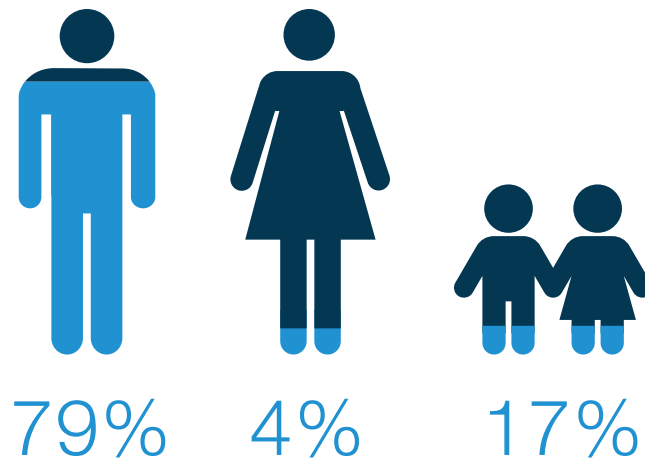
125 Jack Moore, "Philippines Arrests Top Female Recruiter of Foreign Fighters for Marawi Battle", *Newsweek*, 18 October 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/philippines-arrests-top-female-isis-recruiter-foreign-fighters-marawi-battle-687496>

126 Manuel Mogato, "Philippine Army Says Taking Fire from Women, Children in Marawi Battle", *Reuters*, 4 September 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-militants/philippine-army-says-taking-fire-from-women-children-in-marawi-battle-idUSKCN1BF0NY>



## 4 IS affiliates after the fall of the 'caliphate'

**Figure 7** IS affiliates returned to country of departure



Total returnees from Iraq and Syria: 7,145 – 7,366

Female returnees from Iraq and Syria: 256

Minor returnees from Iraq and Syria: 411 – 1,180

### **'The unknowns': The challenges in accounting for IS affiliates in Iraq and Syria**

There are some key considerations that prove problematic for further verifying the status of IS affiliates in theatre and thus their status after the fall of the 'caliphate' (including as returnees). These include how IS affiliates in theatre were distinguished, particularly in relation to military targeting and actions, battlefield deaths, and IS executions from within its own ranks. These uncertainties are described as 'the unknowns' – the considerations that impacted the numbers, status and movements of foreign men, women and minors affiliated with IS in Iraq and Syria. These points are particularly problematic as they are generally absent of male-female and adult-minor distinctions.

#### *Identifying and targeting 'IS' on the battlefield*

The blurred lines between the multiple actors, roles, and levels of engagement in IS raises concerns over the perceived affiliation of individuals to IS, specifically in relation to targeting for military action. In February 2017, General Raymond Thomas, head of U.S. Special Operations, stated that the U.S. and its allies 'have killed in

conservative estimates 60,000 to 70,000' IS followers.<sup>127</sup> 6,000 IS fighters were killed in the battle for Kobani alone.<sup>128</sup> However, only two months earlier, U.K. Defence Secretary Michael Fallon provided a considerably smaller estimate: 'more than 25,000 Daesh fighters have now been killed'.<sup>129</sup> As of March this year, a total of 29,254 strikes had been conducted as part of Operation Inherent Resolve, 'to disrupt Daesh terrorists and their activities'.<sup>130</sup> Although the Coalition provided detailed weekly and monthly reports on strikes conducted,<sup>131</sup> a definition to identify the specific target of these attacks was not provided.

Although there is evidence that some foreign IS members (including women and minors) have been targeted/killed by aerial bombardments,<sup>132</sup> it appears likely that a significant proportion of the fatalities were local Syrians and Iraqis. There are also strong indications that a disproportionate number of foreign citizens killed in theatre were male. For example, Sweden has acknowledged at least 49 of its citizens have been killed, but none of these were women.<sup>133</sup> Bosnia recorded 71 citizens have been killed, which included three women and four minors (10%) even as women and minors accounted for 44% of Bosnian affiliates in theatre.<sup>134</sup> Kosovo also has accounted for 74 men, one woman and one minor killed (from natural causes), while women and minors accounted for 43% of Kosovars in theatre.<sup>135</sup> A lack of reporting on-ground also further problematises the clarification of such figures for both local and foreign battlefield casualties.

### *IS or civilian? The complexities of IS governance*

Not only is the total number of local IS affiliates unclear, the distinction between IS affiliates and civilians is particularly problematic, and has been a salient point of contention.<sup>136</sup> Mara Revkin highlighted the blurred lines between civilians and combatants in territory held by state-building actors such as IS. The inability to clearly distinguish between IS affiliates and civilians is based on two factors: their roles and status that can contribute to IS' goals and activities, and the unknown level of agency in their participation. Revkin argues for the need to clearly define targetable objects and persons, as '[c]ivilians cannot be expected to refrain from conduct that renders them

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- 127 The Aspen Institute, "Aspen Security Forum 2017 Socom: Policing The World", 21 July 2017, [http://aspensecurityforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/SOCOM\\_Policing-the-World.pdf#page=7](http://aspensecurityforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/SOCOM_Policing-the-World.pdf#page=7)
- 128 U.S. Government, "From Iraq and Syria to Libya and Beyond: The Evolving Isil Threat", *Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives*, 2016, 5, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA00/20160210/104449/HHRG-114-FA00-Transcript-20160210.pdf>.
- 129 *Ibid.*
- 130 CJTF-OIR, "CJTF-OIR Monthly Civilian Casualty Report", *U.S. Central Command*, 26 April 2018, <http://www.centcom.mil/MEDIA/NEWS-ARTICLES/News-Article-View/Article/1504033/cjtf-oir-monthly-civilian-casualty-report/>
- 131 "Coalition Strikes Target ISIS Terrorists in Syria, Iraq", *U.S. Department of Defense*, 18 May 2018, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1525500/coalition-strikes-target-isis-terrorists-in-syria-iraq/>
- 132 Ewen MacAskill, "British Isis member Sally Jones 'killed in airstrike with 12-year-old son'", *The Guardian*, 12 October 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/oct/12/british-isis-member-sally-jones-white-widow-killed-airstrike-son-islamic-state-syria>
- 133 Linus Gustafsson and Magnus Ranstorp, *Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq* (2017) 6, <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1110355/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- 134 Vlado Azinović, and Edina Bećirević, *A Waiting Game: Assessing and Responding to the Threat from Returning Foreign Fighters*, (Sarajevo: Regional Cooperation Council, 2017), 32 <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/54/a-waiting-game-assessing-and-responding-to-the-threat-from-returning-foreign-fighters-in-the-western-balkans>
- 135 "Kosovo women that joined ISIS gave birth to 40 children in Syria and Iraq," *Oculus News*, 5 April 2018, <http://www.ocnal.com/2018/04/kosovo-women-that-joined-isis-gave.html>
- 136 Kareem Shaheen, "'Staggering' Loss of Civilian Life from US-Led Airstrikes in Raqqa, says UN", *The Guardian*, 14 June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/14/staggering-civilian-deaths-from-us-led-airstrikes-in-raqqa-says-un>; Paul Sonne, "Pentagon: 'No one Will Ever Know' how Many Civilians U.S. has Killed in Fight Against ISIS", *The Washington Post*, 5 June 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/amphhtml/world/national-security/pentagonno-one-will-ever-know-how-many-civilians-us-has-killed-in-fight-against-isis/2018/06/05/4b3fec30-6900-11e8-bbc5-dc9f3634fa0a\\_story.html?\\_twitter\\_impression=true&noredirect=on](https://www.washingtonpost.com/amphhtml/world/national-security/pentagonno-one-will-ever-know-how-many-civilians-us-has-killed-in-fight-against-isis/2018/06/05/4b3fec30-6900-11e8-bbc5-dc9f3634fa0a_story.html?_twitter_impression=true&noredirect=on)

targetable, and to avoid targetable locations, if they do not know where the lines between permissible and prohibited behavior lie'.<sup>137</sup>

Although one can argue that all persons in IS territory have financed the terrorist group through public taxation or employment, the circumstances surrounding individual volition and support are also complex. This problematised who was considered IS and thus who was accounted for in the figures discussed above. IS considered refusal of tax payment apostasy, for which the sentences were severe. As IS took over the city of Mosul, they also directed public servants to return to their positions and work under their direction or face severe punishment.<sup>138</sup> In these circumstances, levels of coercion erode the possibility of full consent and agency in civilians' engagement with the group. In short, it is difficult to distinguish those who willingly joined and benefited from their affiliation with IS, and those who forcibly had to engage with the group in the territory it controlled.

### *Unclear civilian casualties*

There have been vast discrepancies in the number of civilian casualties by Coalition forces, which also have implications for assessing the status of foreign IS affiliates. By the end of April 2018, U.S. CENTCOM assessed 'at least 883 civilians have been unintentionally killed since the start of Operation Inherent Resolve'.<sup>139</sup> However, in June 2018, Airwars, an independent monitoring organisation, stated a minimum of 6,321 civilians have been killed by coalition strikes.<sup>140</sup> The same month the Pentagon acknowledged 'no one will ever know' how many civilians were killed in operations against IS in Syria and Iraq.<sup>141</sup> A subsequent investigation released by the *New York Times Magazine* also recorded 466 civilian deaths by Coalition forces since 2014 based on Coalition reports, but research based in three IS-held areas of Iraq further demonstrated a rate of civilian deaths 31 times higher than Coalition figures.<sup>142</sup> Such figures also exclude broader civilian harm that extends beyond casualties, which can similarly have acute detrimental impacts on local populations.<sup>143</sup>

Besides such uncertainty having profound implications for the long-term recovery of the region and assessing the impact of Coalition actions on the local populations, such unknowns are also consequential for the estimated numbers of IS affiliates still to be accounted for. This includes women and minors who may have been concentrated in urban centres, or otherwise living amidst civilian populations.

137 Mara R. Revkin, "When Terrorists Govern: Protecting Civilians in Conflicts with State-Building Armed Groups", *Harvard National Security Journal* 9 (2018): 138.

138 Rukmini Callimachi, "The ISIS Files", *The New York Times*, 4 April 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/04/04/world/middleeast/isis-documents-mosul-iraq.html>

139 CJTF-OIR, "CJTF-OIR Monthly Civilian Casualty Report".

140 "Airwars" homepage, accessed 15 June 2018, <https://airwars.org/>

141 Sonne, "Pentagon: 'No one Will Ever Know'".

142 Azmat Khan, and Anand Gopal, "The Uncounted," *New York Times Magazine*. 16 November 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/11/16/magazine/uncounted-civilian-casualties-iraq-airstrikes.html>

143 For more discussion on the topic of implications of civilian harm see: Christopher D. Kolenda, Rachel Reid, et al., "The Strategic Cost of Civilian Harm: Applying Lessons from Afghanistan to Current and Future Conflicts." *The Open Society Foundation*, 2016, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/strategic-costs-civilian-harm-20160622.pdf>

## *IS executions in its ranks*

IS has also taken a harsh stance towards those it sees as apostates or traitors, and has also executed many within its own ranks. From March 2016, a number of senior IS officials were killed by precision drone strikes, sparking paranoia and an extensive witch hunt for spies and informants. Within three months the group had executed 38 of its own members, charged with providing targeting or geolocational information to the Coalition.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, in addition to its public penalties for misconduct, IS has also sought to stem the outward flow of its fighters, brutally executing those accused of defection (including foreign female affiliates).<sup>145</sup> As a result, cases of IS deaths – whether by the Coalition or the group itself – highlight the complexity of accounting for foreigners (men, women and minors) in these. Such figures also do not consider or account for the number of casualties suffered by local populations under IS rule.

## **The physical fall of the 'caliphate' and missing IS affiliates**

The status of IS took numerous devastating blows in its final months in 2017 with the loss of its territorial capitals Mosul (July) and Raqqa (October), the city of al-Mayadeen (October), and its final urban strong hold in Syria Abu Kamal (December). The end of IS' physical 'caliphate' also marked an important turning point for IS affiliates, with many ultimately being killed on the battlefield, detained, or dispersing to other locations (including returning home), or even being deported to third party countries to which they had no relation.

For the (almost exclusively) men who fought in IS, a policy of elimination on the battlefield seemingly became the accepted approach. U.K. citizen Sally Jones, one of the few female U.S. State Department Specially Designated Global Terrorists,<sup>146</sup> reportedly also met such a demise with her 12 year-old son.<sup>147</sup> As Brett McGurk, the Special Presidential Envoy for the Global Coalition to Counter ISIS stated, 'Our mission is to make sure that any foreign fighter who is here, who joined ISIS from a foreign country and came into Syria, they will die here in Syria'.<sup>148</sup> These sentiments were echoed in countries like the U.K. where Defence Secretary Gavin Williams suggested the U.K. was deliberately targeting its citizens fighting in Syria.<sup>149</sup>

By late 2016, there were an estimated '15,000 fighters' remaining in Syria and Iraq.<sup>150</sup> However, figures from June 2018 suggest only 1,000 senior IS commanders and fighters continued to defend positions in

144 Qassim Abdul-Zahra, and Bassem Mroue, "Islamic State Kills Dozens of Its Own in Hunt for Spies", *AP News*, 5 June 2016, <https://apnews.com/98512c11bc72441c95f5a6657837d9ca/islamic-state-kills-dozens-its-own-hunt-spies>

145 Alexander Semer, "Isis Teen 'Poster Girl' Samra Kesinovic 'Beaten to Death' as she Tried to Flee the Group", *The Independent*, 25 November 2015, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/isis-teenage-poster-girl-samra-kesinovic-beaten-to-death-by-group-as-she-tried-to-flee-killings-a6747801.html>

146 Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, "Designations of Foreign Terrorist Fighters", *U.S. Department of State*, 29 September 2015, <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/266516.htm>

147 "British IS Recruiter Sally-Anne Jones 'Killed by Drone'", *BBC News*, 12 October 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41593659>

148 Lori Hinnant, and Sarah el Deeb, "Foreigners Who Joined IS Faced Almost Certain Death in Raqqa", *AP News*, 21 October 2017, <https://apnews.com/745daed8aa624b04994c5f8d91eab88a/Foreigners-who-joined-IS-faced-almost-certain-death-in-Raqqa>

149 Jessica Elgot, "British Isis Fighters Should be Hunted Down and Killed, says Defense Secretary", *The Guardian*, 8 December 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/dec/07/british-isis-fighters-should-be-hunted-down-and-killed-says-defence-secretary-gavin-williamson>

150 INTERPOL, "INTERPOL Chief Warns of Dangerous Gaps in Global Screening for Foreign Terrorist Fighters", *INTERPOL News*, 21 October 2016, <https://www.interpol.int/News-and-media/News/2016/N2016-136>

the region.<sup>151</sup> It is not clear if women or minors were amongst these. Many foreign nationals also returned to their countries of departure – upwards of 7,366 as recorded in Figure 5, or 20% of total foreign affiliates in IS, though this varies greatly by country. However, up to 14,910 'foreign fighters' have been said to have departed Iraq and Syria, suggesting that a significant number have moved onwards to third party countries, or whose status is simply unknown.<sup>152</sup>

These rates of return vary significantly country to country. The UK have confirmed over 50% of its 850 citizens who travelled have now returned, approximately 20% died, while the status of the rest remains largely unknown.<sup>153</sup> Up to 300 of the 800 (38%) Indonesian citizens who travelled to Syria have also returned.<sup>154</sup> Other countries such as Russia have reported only 380 (7%) have returned, a figure and proportion comparable to Jordan's 250 returnees (6%). Other affiliates have simply vanished.

### *Unaccounted for deportees*

There have been cases of detained persons affiliated with IS also being deported to third party countries. Kim Cragin of the U.S. National Defense University has highlighted 2,678 'unaccounted for deportees' who had returned to Turkey from Syria and Iraq, been held by Turkish authorities for up to a year, and were then subsequently deported to countries to which they do not hold citizenship, sometimes without the knowledge of local authorities. These are, 'individuals who have been deported to a third country for their ties to the Islamic State, but not been incarcerated. Some of these individuals are foreign fighters and others are not'.<sup>155</sup> These third-party countries have included Malaysia,<sup>156</sup> and Ukraine,<sup>157</sup> countries that had visa-free agreements with Turkey. Beyond the exceptionally problematic prospect of these IS affiliates ending up in countries not expecting them, or whom may disappear from the sight of security services all together, again, figures for women and minors are not clear in these.

### *IS affiliates in negotiated departures and detention exchanges*

IS affiliates – men, women and minors – have been involved in negotiated departures out of cities previously held by IS, and also involved in detainee exchanges. A November 2017 BBC investigation reported that, in a deal in which IS fighters and their families were able to depart Raqqa, 250 fighters and 3,500 family members (approximately seven family members per fighter) left the city. The status of these affiliates remains unknown.<sup>158</sup> SDF forces

151 Josie Ensor, and Brenda Stoter Boscolo, "European Isil Jihadists Released Under Secret Deals Agreed by UK's Allies in Syria", *The Telegraph*, 15 June 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/06/15/european-isil-jihadists-released-secret-deals-agreed-uks-allies/>

152 Kim Cragin, "Foreign Fighters 'Hot Potato'", *Lawfare*, 26 November 2017, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/foreign-fighter-hot-potato>

153 Gordon Rayner, "Half of UK's Isil Jihadists Unaccounted For, Minister Admits", *The Daily Telegraph*, 6 January 2018, <https://www.pressreader.com/uk/the-daily-telegraph/20180106/281767039612998>

154 "Indonesia Turns to China as Ethnic Uighurs Join Would-Be Militants", *The Straits Times*, 6 January 2016, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/indonesia-turns-to-china-as-ethnic-uighurs-join-would-be-militants>

155 Ibid.

156 "Malaysia Protests Over Suspected Militants Deported from Turkey Ahead of Southeast Asian Games", *Reuters*, 8 August 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-security-games/malaysia-protests-over-suspected-militants-deported-from-turkey-ahead-of-southeast-asian-games-idUSKBN1AO19W>

157 "How Former 'Islamic State' Militants Wind up in Ukraine", *Hromadske International*, 8 August 2017, <https://en.hromadske.ua/posts/how-former-islamic-state-militants-wind-up-in-ukraine>

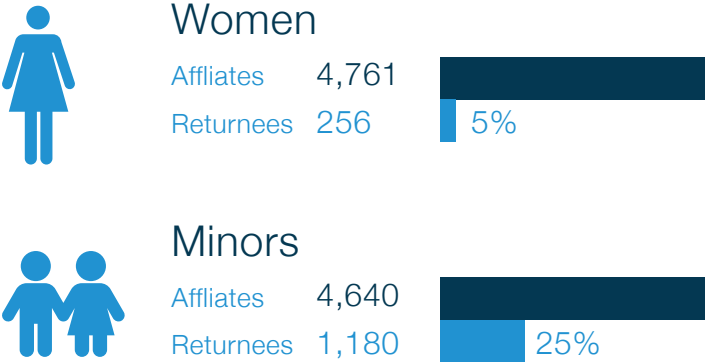
158 Quentin Sommerville, and Riam Dalati, "Raqqa's Dirty Secret", *BBC News*, 13 November 2017, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/raqqas\\_dirty\\_secret](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idt-sh/raqqas_dirty_secret)

who had captured IS suspects have also engaged in at least three deeply controversial detainee swaps including the exchange of at least 215 fighters since February 2018, which included an additional 55 women and minors (family members and wives of militants) from Belgium, Morocco and the Netherlands, amongst others.<sup>159</sup>

### Female affiliates: Where are they now?

There are a number of plausible trajectories for women and minors following the fall of the 'caliphate'. Similar to men, some may have returned to their home countries, remain unaccounted for in theatre, be held in detention centres in theatre, have travelled onwards or been transferred to other regions (including conflict zones), or been killed in theatre. For many their status is simply unknown. Figure 5 records that only 256 women have returned to their home countries. Proportionally in relation to total foreign affiliates, women thus represented 4% of all returnees, and only 5–6% of the up to 4,761 foreign women affiliated with IS in Iraq and Syria.

**Figure 8** Proportion of women and minors returned to country of departure



<sup>159</sup> Ensor and Stoter Boscolo, "European Isil Jihadists Released Under Secret Deals".



### Female returnees

Several explanations may help account (in part) for this lower number of female returnees. Similar to their male counterparts, female affiliates often surrendered their passports upon arrival as a sign of dedication to IS. Additionally, women were also often unable to travel freely without a *mahram* (male guardian), making the opportunity to escape and return if desired more challenging, particularly for those with children. Women often also had multiple husbands – remarrying a new one after the previous was killed, or experiencing divorce (sometimes multiple), thus further complicating this process. There are cases of women paying large fees to human smugglers to facilitate their departure, sometimes with their children.<sup>160</sup> Yet, in 2015 only two cases of Western women returning were reported, in contrast to up to 30% of males, suggesting many of these remain in Iraq and Syria.<sup>161</sup>

Countries like Denmark have reported that one in eight affiliates were women, but as of 2017, women accounted for one in three remaining in conflict zones.<sup>162</sup> 43% of the 690 French citizens still in theatre (approximately 295) are women, while women comprised up to 20% of affiliates who travelled.<sup>163</sup> Bosnia has recorded only six of their 61 female affiliates have returned, while Russia has recorded only 24 of up to 1,000. Tunisia have 970, and Jordan 250 returnees recorded, yet no women are accounted for in these figures. Some women have simply indicated they do not want to return to their home countries,<sup>164</sup> while hundreds had reportedly fled to Turkey where they were seeking repatriation through their embassies.<sup>165</sup> These women occupy a problematic area in the UN definition of 'foreign terrorist fighter' (FTF), which emphasises persons who travel to participate in terrorist training and violent acts.<sup>166</sup> Women may thus not be considered extensively in efforts to manage returning FTFs. Each individual country has diverse legal frameworks for prosecuting those classified as FTF, and the diverse roles of women played in IS may be difficult to define within these.<sup>167</sup>

The process of repatriation and prosecution of women and minors also differs country to country, though some states appear to perceive women's and minors' roles with more leniency, which may have an impact upon their status as returnees.<sup>168</sup> France has pushed for its citizens (including women) to be tried in the region,<sup>169</sup> while women who return are increasingly likely to face prosecution (particularly in light of a number of plots including female IS

160 Paul Maley, "Aussie ISIS Baby and Wife of Dead Terrorist Back Home After Fleeing Syrian Conflict", *The Australian*, 23 February 2018, <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/national-security/aussie-isis-baby-and-wife-of-dead-terrorist-back-home-after-fleeing-syrian-conflict/news-story/176f168473473a6c429b421e3f43d8de>

161 Lori Hinnant, "European Women who Join ISIS Almost Never Leave", *Business Insider UK*, 28 May 2015, <http://uk.businessinsider.com/european-women-who-join-isis-almost-never-leave-2015-5>

162 Politiets Efterretningstjeneste (PET), *Assessment of the Terror Threat to Denmark*, (Copenhagen: Center for Terroranalyse, 2017), 5. <https://www.pet.dk/English/-/media/VTD%202017/VTD2017ENpdf.ashx>

163 Alyssa J. Rubin, "She Left France to Fight In Syria. Now She Wants to Return. But Can She?", *The New York Times*, 11 January 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/11/world/europe/emilie-konig-france-islamic-state.html>

164 "Female ISIS Member from Germany Surrender to SDF in Deir ez-Zor", *ANF News*, 30 March 2018, <https://anfenglish.com/women/female-isis-member-from-germany-surrenders-to-sdf-in-deir-ez-zor-25810>

165 Souad Mekhennet, and Joby Warrick, "ISIS Brides Returning Home and Raising the Next Generation of Jihadist Martyrs", *National Post*, 27 November 2017, <http://nationalpost.com/news/world/isis-brides-returning-home-and-raising-the-next-generation-of-jihadist-martyrs>

166 United Nations, "Foreign Terrorist Fighters", *Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee*, accessed 15 June 2018, <https://www.un.org/sc/ctc/focus-areas/foreign-terrorist-fighters/>

167 For an excellent summary of global legislation for foreign fighters, see: "Treatment of Foreign Fighters in Selected Jurisdictions", *Library of Congress*, last updated 10 June 2015, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/foreign-fighters/country-surveys.php>

168 Discussed further in: <https://www.prio.org/utility/DownloadFile.ashx?id=1219&type=publicationfile>

169 Nik Martin, "800 female 'Islamic State' Recruits Detained in Northern Syria", *Deutsche Welle*, 10 February 2018, <http://www.dw.com/en/800-female-islamic-state-recruits-detained-in-northern-syria-report/a-42528547>

affiliates in France). In contrast, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov announced the safe return of women.<sup>170</sup> Albania has only largely monitored, not prosecuted, both returning foreign fighters and family members.<sup>171</sup> Countries that have developed de-radicalisation programmes to respond to returnees also do not always consider family members, or gender and youth specific concerns, risking neglecting a key segment of returnees and only fractionally addressing cognitive and even behavioural radicalisation of some women and minors. For example, in Kosovo, only individual, not institutionalised, reintegration efforts consider family members.<sup>172</sup>

### *Women and minor detainees*

Thousands of local and foreign men, women and minors have been detained throughout the region. In January 2018, nearly 29,000 (including local) detainees had been held in various Iraqi detention centres largely due to their ties to IS, including family members. As of March 2018, nearly 9,000 had been convicted of terrorism-related charges, and 19,000 were awaiting trial. 3,000 of these had already been sentenced to death.<sup>173</sup> The number of cases, the speed of these trials (some only lasting 10 minutes), and the rates of conviction (as high as 98%), have raised significant concerns. The UN has noted these risk 'resulting in gross, irreversible miscarriages of justice'.<sup>174</sup> Human Rights Watch (HRW) has also noted the lack of judicial documentation of crimes, and of victim participation in trials, which also risk a lack of justice for victims.<sup>175</sup> Iraq's Anti-Terrorism law criminalises membership of a terrorist group, regardless of whether criminal acts were committed. Thus, those that committed the most horrific violations in the groups may be tried similarly to locals who were coerced into submission, which raises serious concerns about long-term recovery and reconciliation in the region.<sup>176</sup>

Foreign women and minors have also been detained throughout the region, though exact figures are particularly challenging to ascertain. 1,400 foreign women and minors from countries such as France, Germany, Russia and China who surrendered in August 2017 were subsequently held by Iraqi authorities in an informal detention site in Tal Kayf near Mosul.<sup>177</sup> Other female and minor foreigners have reportedly been held in the Ain al-Issa camp north of Raqqa city,<sup>178</sup> while yet 220 more widowed or divorced IS wives were held in 'safe houses' in northwest Syria around Marea.<sup>179</sup> A more recent figure from February 2018 noted 800 Western women are being detained

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170 Mansur Mirovalev, "How Russia Spawned More Isil Fighters than Most Nations", *Al-Jazeera*, 1 November 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/171031235146462.html>

171 Azinović and Bećirević, *A Waiting Game*, 29.

172 *Ibid.*, 38.

173 Qassim Abdul-Zahra, and Susannah George, "Iraq Holding More Than 19,000 Because of IS, Militant Ties", *AP News*, 22 March 2018, <https://www.apnews.com/aece6571de54f5dba3543d91deed381>

174 *Ibid.*

175 "Flawed Justice: Accountability for ISIS Crimes in Iraq", *Human Rights Watch*, 5 December 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2017/12/05/flawed-justice/accountability-isis-crimes-iraq>

176 *Ibid.*, For more discussion of this see: Velda Felbab-Brown et al., *The Limits of Punishment: Transitional Justice and Violent Extremism*, (Tokyo: United Nations University – Center for Policy Research, 2018), <https://i.unu.edu/media/cpr.unu.edu/attachment/2766/FINAL-The-Limits-of-Punishment-01062018.pdf>

177 Raya Jalabi, and Ulf Laessing, "Exclusive: Iraq Holding 1,400 Foreign Wives, Children of Suspected Islamic State Fighters", *Reuters*, 10 September 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-iraq-families-exclusive/exclusive-iraq-holding-1400-foreign-wives-children-of-suspected-isis-fighters-idUSKCN1BL0SF?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews>

178 Sara Manisera, "'I Came for the Jihad': Women Tell of Life in the Islamic State", *News Deeply: Syria Deeply*, 29 September 2017, <https://www.newsdeeply.com/syria/articles/2017/09/29/i-came-for-the-jihad-women-tell-of-life-in-the-islamic-state>

179 Josie Ensor, "Escape from Isil, Part 2: Syrian Prisons and Safe Houses Overrun with Fleeing Jihadists", *The Telegraph*, 3 December 2017, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/12/03/escape-isil-part-2-syrian-prisons-safe-houses-overrun-fleeing/>

by Kurdish forces in northern Syria.<sup>180</sup> In March a judge from the High Court of Baghdad confirmed 560 foreign wives of IS fighters and 900 children were being detained, and their husbands were largely assumed to be dead, detained or missing.<sup>181</sup> Human Rights Watch have also reported that Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Iraqi authorities had detained 1,000 IS suspects who had been arrested under the age of 18.<sup>182</sup> It was not possible to determine amidst these reports the total number of foreign women and minors detained, and it was not clear if these are all unique cases, or have involved the transfers of persons as well. The legality of the detention of family members that have not been charged with crimes has also been challenged by organisations such as Human Rights Watch.<sup>183</sup>

While prison radicalisation of males is often most infamously associated with Camp Bucca (where many of the relationships critical to the emergence of IS were established), there was no evidence to suggest such concerns have extended broadly or systematically to women currently in detention or additionally in camps for internally displaced persons (IDP), risking a rise in female radicalisation for some women being held.

Many of these women continue to be tried in Iraq. By April 2018 at least 100 foreign women had been sentenced to death,<sup>184</sup> while dozens have been sentenced to life in prison.<sup>185</sup> IS have, in the past, committed revenge attacks, such as the killing of 21 Coptic Christians from Egypt, which they claimed was in revenge for their 'sisters' who were detained in Egypt.<sup>186</sup> There have already been indications of such retaliatory attacks by IS in response to the growing number of cases of detained women affiliated with IS, such as the recent execution of eight persons detained by IS.<sup>187</sup>

Regardless of some individual state policies, there is a worrying trend that many countries are opting to leave their citizens in theatre. Such a course risks overburdening local authorities in terms of judicial capacities and detention facilities, increases the risk of human rights violations, opens up the potential for increased radicalisation of women in detention centres, and, in the case of prisoner exchanges, risks having currently-detained IS fighters and their family members free to disappear completely. All scenarios are likely to only compound threats related to IS in the future and the long-term recovery and stability of the region more generally.

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180 Shehab Khan, "Hundreds of Foreign Women who Joined Isis Captured by Kurdish Forces in Syria", *The Independent*, 10 February 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-foreign-women-islamic-state-detained-human-rights-watch-a8204686.html>

181 "Foreign Wives of Islamic State Fighters Sentenced to Death in Iraq", *Voice of America*, 20 March 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/foreign-wives-islamic-state-death-in-iraq/4308150.html>

182 "Flawed Justice: Accountability for ISIS Crimes in Iraq".

183 Bill van Esveld, "Iraq/KRG: 1,400 Women, Children from ISIS Areas Detained", *Human Rights Watch*, 20 September 2017, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/09/20/iraq/krq-1400-women-children-isis-areas-detained>

184 AFP in Baghdad, "Iraq to execute Islamic State prisoners in revenge for killings", *The Guardian*, 28 June 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/28/iraq-execute-isis-prisoners-revenge-eight-hostage-killings>

185 Martin Chulov, "'They Deserve no Mercy', Iraq Deals Briskly with Accused 'Women of Isis'", *The Guardian*, 22 May 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/22/they-deserve-no-mercy-iraq-deals-briskly-with-accused-women-of-isis>

186 Islamic State, "From Hypocrisy to Apostasy: The Extinction of the Grayzone." *Dabiq*, February 2015.

187 AFP in Baghdad, "Iraq to execute Islamic State prisoners in revenge for killings"

## Minor affiliates: Where are they now?

Out of the foreign minors accounted for as IS affiliates up to 1,180 are known to have already returned to their countries of origin, or appear to be in the process of doing so. Proportionally, in relation to total affiliates, minors represent up to 17% of all returnees, and 25% of the 4,640 recorded foreign minors that were affiliated with IS in Iraq and Syria. Though this suggests some effort by states to repatriate their nationals, there remains a notable absence of public information for researchers to track the movements of those remaining in theatre.

### *Minor returnees*

To confirm figures and trends of IS minors returning to their countries of origin, it is critical to ensure consistency in their identification and classification at a global level. Yet, there are many minors that 'bridge' existing categories of returnees, particularly teenagers who became adults while in theatre. For countries where broader national-level figures were available for minors in theatre and returnees, the nuance in this classification is absent. However, in some individual cases of returnees reported by government or media sources, this was discernible. Prominent examples include Dilber Artur, a young woman from Azerbaijan. It is estimated that she was (at most) 15 years old when she travelled to IS territory with her father. Since then, she became the wife and widow to two IS militants and gave birth to her now two-year-old infant.<sup>188</sup> Such a shift in the status of IS-affiliate minors not only requires careful reclassification upon their return, but also consideration of the experiences which have necessitated the psychological maturation of children and teenagers into young adults.

Cases like Artur's also raise the issue of accurately classifying minor jihadist parents. Over the course of the group's four-year territorial rule, a considerable number of new births were recorded inside the 'caliphate' to both local civilians and foreign IS members. There are multiple individual examples of foreign IS minors (and adults) who have given birth within the 'caliphate'. Some, like then 15-year-old Swedish teenager Marilyn Nevalainen, travelled when already pregnant and have returned to their home countries with their newborn.<sup>189</sup> Others, such as now 20-year-old Nour al-Huda from Lebanon, have merely borne additional children (to multiple IS militant husbands) whilst under IS rule, and have now returned home as a family unit.<sup>190</sup>

Such cases of unofficial marriages and births within IS territory are problematic for reporting accurate and consistent figures of global IS affiliates and returnees. As minors have become adults in theatre, it is understandable that the figure of underage returnees may fall accordingly. Yet, with the pressure for IS females to procreate for the 'caliphate', it is expected that the number of IS newborns and infants is significantly higher than current verified reports. For countries such as Belgium, it is understood that 70% (105) of minors accounted for in IS territory were born there.<sup>191</sup> Similarly, France has estimated that out

<sup>188</sup> "ISIS Wives Dream of Returning Home", *Asharq al-Awsat*, 2 November 2017, <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1071236/isis-wives-dream-returning-home>

<sup>189</sup> Rubin, "A Swedish Girl, ISIS and a Cautionary Tale of Global Terrorism."

<sup>190</sup> McKernan, "Leaving the Caliphate: The Struggle of One ISIS Bride to Get Home".

<sup>191</sup> Renard and Coolsaet, *Returnees: Who Are They, Why Are They (Not) Coming Back and How Should we Deal with Them?*

of its 460 IS minors, a third (153) were born inside the 'caliphate';<sup>192</sup> however, a total of 700 minors are expected to return from the conflict zone.<sup>193</sup> These figures are welcome examples of detailed investigations and public reporting by state authorities that assist in the return and reintegration of their youngest nationals. Such cases also highlight unique challenges to those charged with child welfare in individual states.

The number of returnee minors accounted for in the dataset not only relies on detailed and accurate reporting, but also on states' willingness to receive IS-affiliated minors, including infants born to nationals inside IS territory. To date, Russia has confirmed 73 minor returnees have already returned home in the territories of Russia, including Chechnya and Dagestan. Such figures can be seen as a result (at least in part) of the proactive Chechen authorities, who have directly negotiated and facilitated the return of its nationals (both adults and minors).<sup>194</sup> In May 2018, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov announced wide-scale DNA testing 'to ensure the unimpeded repatriation of our children born in the Middle East into Russia'. According to Kadyrov, such measures are intended to 'not only help determine family kinship, but also grant the children Russian citizenship'.<sup>195</sup> However, for infants born to a Dutch parent, they are not officially recognised and the Dutch authorities have stated that DNA tests are required to obtain Dutch citizenship.<sup>196</sup>

Complications arise in cases where states are less proactive or willing to facilitate the return of their nationals. From as early as 2014, countries including the U.K.,<sup>197</sup> Germany,<sup>198</sup> Norway,<sup>199</sup> Switzerland,<sup>200</sup> Belgium,<sup>201</sup> Canada,<sup>202</sup> Denmark,<sup>203</sup> Netherlands,<sup>204</sup> and Australia<sup>205</sup> passed legislation to revoke citizenship for those found guilty of travelling abroad to join a terrorist organisation. In some cases, citizenship can only be stripped from individuals who were naturalised or hold dual nationality. However, in Australia, amendments to citizenship legislation have been explicitly extended to minors as young as 14 years old.<sup>206</sup> Such legal action to prevent the return and reintegration of foreign IS minors poses a risk to their own individual post-conflict rehabilitation, and thus increases security concerns for

192 Gustafsson and Ranstorp, *Swedish Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq*

193 "700 mineurs français vont rentrer de Syrie", *Le Figaro*, 2 February 2017, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2017/02/02/97001-20170202FILWWW00230-700-mineurs-francais-vont-rentre-de-syrie.php>

194 Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova, Moscow, April 19, 2018", *MFA Russia*, 19 April 2018, [http://www.mid.ru/en/press\\_service/spokesman/briefings/-/asset\\_publisher/D2wHaWMCU6Od/content/id/3178301](http://www.mid.ru/en/press_service/spokesman/briefings/-/asset_publisher/D2wHaWMCU6Od/content/id/3178301)

195 "Chechen Leader Announces Mass DNA Tests to Repatriate Russian Children from Iraq", *The Moscow Times*, 28 May 2018, <https://themoscowtimes.com/news/chechen-leader-announces-mass-dna-tests-to-repatriate-russian-children-from-iraq-61602>

196 The Hague, *The Children of ISIS: The Indoctrination of Minors in ISIS-Held Territory*, 6.

197 Alan Travis, "UK Can Strip Terror Suspects of Citizenship, European Judges Rule", *The Guardian*, 9 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/mar/09/terror-suspects-british-citizenship-european-ruling>

198 Justin Huggler, "Dual Nationals who Fight for Terror Groups to be Stripped of German Citizenship", *The Telegraph*, 11 August 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/11/dual-nationals-who-fight-for-terror-groups-to-be-stripped-of-ger/>

199 "Terrorists May Lose Norwegian Citizenship", *The Local*, 25 August 2014, <https://www.thelocal.no/20140825/norway-to-revoke-citizenship-of-terror-warriors-fighting-abroad>

200 John Miller, "Switzerland Wants to Strip Citizenship from Jihadist Suspect", *Reuters*, 10 May 2016, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-swiss-idUKKCN0Y1280>

201 Johanne Montay, "Déchéance de Nationalité: en Belgique, Votée sans Tragédie Mais Limitée", *Radio Télévision Belge Francophone*, 29 December 2015, [https://www.rtbf.be/info/dossier/alerte-terroriste-en-belgique/-/detail\\_decheance-de-nationalite-en-belgique-votee-sans-tragedie-mais-limitee?id=9174153](https://www.rtbf.be/info/dossier/alerte-terroriste-en-belgique/-/detail_decheance-de-nationalite-en-belgique-votee-sans-tragedie-mais-limitee?id=9174153)

202 Jordana Globerman, "Ottawa Moves to Revoke Citizenship of Convicted Terrorist for First Time Since Controversial Law Took Effect", *National Post*, 1 July 2015, <http://nationalpost.com/news/ottawa-moves-to-revoke-citizenship-of-convicted-terrorist-for-first-time-since-controversial-law-took-effect>

203 "Supreme Court Strips Terrorist of Danish Citizenship", *The Local*, 8 June 2016, <https://www.thelocal.dk/20160608/supreme-court-strips-terrorist-of-danish-citizenship>

204 Janene Pieters, "Government Revokes Dutch Nationality of First Convicted Jihadist", *Netherland Times*, 23 August 2017, <https://nltimes.nl/2017/08/23/government-revokes-dutch-nationality-first-convicted-jihadist>

205 Michael Safi, "ISIS Members can now be Stripped of Australian Citizenship", *The Guardian*, 5 May 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/may/05/isis-members-can-now-be-stripped-of-australian-citizenship>

206 Ibid.

locally engaged authorities and populations. Furthermore, minors left in the conflict zone increasingly shifts the burden of societal de-radicalisation and reintegration efforts to the already over-stretched local authorities, adding greater numbers of traumatised minors to local detention centres and orphanages.

### *IS orphans and stateless minors*

The potential for significant numbers of IS orphans and stateless minors in Iraq and Syria is stark. In 2013, the Iraqi Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights revealed more than 520 stateless infants born to al-Qaeda (AQ) fighters between 2004 and 2009 had been recorded.<sup>207</sup> At the time AQ was estimated to have 16,000 fighters.<sup>208</sup> With the influx of up to 41,490 foreign affiliates over four years (in addition to the unknown number of local affiliates), and direction to women to bear the next generation of 'cubs', IS' 'caliphate' project has compounded and internationalised this issue.

Though IS took pains to keep stamped records to support its societal services and bureaucratic administration,<sup>209</sup> such unofficial documentation is not recognised by the international community. Infants' uncertain citizenship is not only tied to their unofficial or absent birth registration, but also the potential illegitimacy of their parents' marriage under IS. A prerequisite condition for granting identification papers to minors is proof of parentage. For local Iraqis, although authorities have thus far been 'open to registering children whose Iraqi parents are not IS-affiliated, there is no indication that the same applies to families in which one or both parents are suspected of being IS members or are foreigners'.<sup>210</sup> For IS-affiliated families, proof of parenthood is further constrained or rendered unachievable by the high likelihood that one or both parents may be dead, detained, in hiding, or deployed on a frontline.<sup>211</sup> This is particularly problematic for the infants of Syrian or Libyan widowed mothers. Discriminatory laws in these countries deny women the right to pass on citizenship to their children, thus automatically assigning newborns the nationality of the father. For Syrian wives or widows of foreign militants, infants face possible separation from their mothers to the father's country of origin, on account of their statelessness and/or legal 'orphanhood'. In cases of dual-national parenthood, states' responsibility and willingness to assign primary citizenship also becomes problematic.

With the number of minors taken by or born to foreign nationals under IS, the issues of citizenship and statelessness extend beyond the Iraqi and Syrian borders. Data is absent for many countries and regions; however, according to our data at least 730 children have been born inside the 'caliphate' to foreign nationals, including 566 recorded born to Western Europeans alone. In some cases, such as Belgium, the number of infants born under IS (105) is over double that of child and teenage travellers (45), thus underlining the necessity for states to

207 D. Barwari, and S. Gehad, "Children of Al-Qaeda Fighters in Iraq Face Legal Strife, Social Stigma", *Al-Monitor*, accessed 3 March 2017, <http://www.almonitor.com/pulse/culture/2013/04/iraq-children-al-qaeda-fighters-legal-problems.html>

208 Hans Krech, "Has al Qaeda in Iraq Been Destroyed? Reasons for the Power Struggles in Iraq After the Withdrawal of US Forces", *ENDC Proceedings* 18 (2014): 30, [http://www.ksk.edu.ee/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/KVUOA\\_Toimetised\\_18\\_Iraak\\_3\\_Krech.pdf](http://www.ksk.edu.ee/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/KVUOA_Toimetised_18_Iraak_3_Krech.pdf)

209 Callimachi, "The ISIS Files".

210 Nadim Houry, "Children of the Caliphate: What to do About Kids Born Under ISIS", *Human Rights Watch*, 23 November 2016, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/11/23/children-caliphate>

211 Ibid.

prepare for even greater numbers of returnee minors and particularly infants. Earlier this year Julian King, EU Commissioner for the Security Union, stressed the need for EU member states to recognise these infants and adopt a case-by-case basis for their return and reintegration.<sup>212</sup> However, many European governments have yet to announce concrete policies.<sup>213</sup>

The Iraqi government has been working with foreign nations to secure the return of their citizens, particularly minors who have not actively contributed to IS violence. However, the task ahead remains daunting. It is estimated that as many as 1,000 Russian minors have been orphaned or abandoned inside the conflict zone, with around 600 registered enquiries into missing children taken to Iraq and Syria.<sup>214</sup> It is expected that these figures are minimum estimates, on account of relatives' fear of retribution from their children's link with terrorism. Thus, despite efforts by foreign governments and authorities to repatriate their citizens, some of the most vulnerable IS affiliates remain isolated in camps, detention centres or rebel-controlled areas and are unable to return to their countries of origin.

The trauma experienced by minors (and adults) has not stopped with the physical liberation from IS. For some, placement in detention centres or segregated IDP camps not only prolongs physical isolation and deprivation, but also solidifies their new identity as 'IS families'.<sup>215</sup> At a local level within Iraq, organisations working to facilitate reconciliation have observed communities' reluctance to accept and reintegrate families bearing this label.<sup>216</sup> For young orphans or stateless minors who were born and raised inside IS territory, their affiliation with IS has been their only known identity. Post-IS policies to stabilise the region and promote reconciliation must also acknowledge the need to facilitate psychological rehabilitation for these minors. Without careful intervention and thorough reintegration into society, those bearing the 'IS' label may find such societal stigma becomes the fuel for future radicalisation.

## Women as potential security threats

The figures highlighted throughout this report also raise questions about the prospect of women as security threats. There are several factors that justify this concern, particularly in relation to women. First, there are the physical security roles and related training that women have undertaken in IS-held territory and the potential to transfer or apply skills or practices learned to other locations (discussed in section 'Roles for women').

Important for the potential impact of these threats, the narratives related to women's roles in combat operations have evolved within IS itself. As Winter and Margolin discuss, while IS originally restricted roles for women in combat operations, since 2015 there have been

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212 Ghassen Fridhi, "What should Europe do with the children of returning ISIS militants?", *Al Arabiya English*, 4 February 2018, <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2018/02/04/What-should-Europe-do-with-the-children-of-returning-ISIS-militants-.html>

213 Chulov, "Scorned and Stateless: Children of Isis Fighters Face an Uncertain Future".

214 Sabra Ayres, "Thousands of Russians Joined Islamic State and Brought Their Children. Now Relatives are Trying to Bring them Home", *Los Angeles Times*, 26 October 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/world/europe/la-fg-russia-isis-baby-20171026-story.html>

215 al-Jibouri, "Sins of the Father: Extremist Fighters' Children Live in Stateless Limbo in Iraq".

216 War Child UK, *I Want to go Home, but I am Afraid*, War Child UK, 2017, 17–18, [https://www.warchild.nl/sites/default/files/bijlagen/node\\_30653/9-2017/i\\_want\\_to\\_go\\_home\\_but\\_i\\_am\\_afraid\\_the\\_impact\\_of\\_war\\_on\\_mosuls\\_childre.pdf](https://www.warchild.nl/sites/default/files/bijlagen/node_30653/9-2017/i_want_to_go_home_but_i_am_afraid_the_impact_of_war_on_mosuls_childre.pdf)

numerous and increasing indications that their position is changing, particularly in defence operations. This was fully confirmed in late 2017 when the group announced 'jihad against the enemies' as obligatory for women in its local Arabic language newsletter *An-Naba*.<sup>217</sup> In February 2018, IS also produced and released a video of a woman appearing in combat on the battlefield for the first time alongside male soldiers,<sup>218</sup> signalling that such roles were now permitted and even encouraged by the group. The significance of this shift cannot be overstated.

The second factor is women's evolving and seemingly increasing roles as perpetrators of terrorist attacks, which have appeared to take three general forms: women-only cells, family cells, or individual women perpetrating attacks. Their relationship to IS also appear to have three general formats: persons who are abroad and unaffiliated with the group, but who have been inspired by, and pledged allegiance to IS. There are also those who are abroad but have a direct link to an IS affiliate in theatre and may be guided or directed in relation to an attack. Finally, they may be persons in theatre who may be similarly guided or directed by IS (particularly in the case of suicide bombers). Global datasets such as START do not record the gender of perpetrators of terrorist attacks, which makes global trends more difficult to determine. However, giving some indication of women's increased activity (though not exclusive to perpetrating jihadist attacks) Europol noted that 96 women were arrested for terrorism related charges in 2014, 171 in 2015,<sup>219</sup> 180 in 2016 (which also highlighted the increasingly operational roles of women),<sup>220</sup> though this fell to 123 in 2017.<sup>221</sup>

There are several high-profile cases of women who have been inspired by IS and pledged allegiance to the group, though had no apparent formal affiliation previously. Tashfeen Malik remains one of the first, where she had pledged allegiance to IS before her and her husband killed 14 people in San Bernardino, California in 2015.<sup>222</sup> IS praised "the husband and wife who march out together to fight the crusaders in defense of the Khilafah" even when "combat is not obligatory on her."<sup>223</sup> Additionally, three women in Mombasa were killed by police in 2016 after pledging allegiance to IS, entering a police station and stabbing an officer. IS acknowledged these Kenyan women as 'supporters'.<sup>224</sup>

This has also been visible in family cells, including those with children, to perpetrate attacks as was particularly notable in Indonesia. In three interconnected cases, husbands, wives and their children perpetrated terrorist attacks against churches, a police station, and, in one instance, prematurely detonated their bomb before carrying out an attack. While these three families reportedly had not travelled to Syria,

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217 Charlie Winter, and Devorah Margolin, "The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and the Islamic State", *Combating Terrorism Center (CTC)* 10, no. 7 (2017): 23–29.

218 IS' Al-Hayat Media Centre, "Inside the Caliphate #7", accessed from *Jihadology* on 7 February 2018.

219 Europol, "Terrorism Situation and Trend Report", European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, 2016, 11, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-te-sat-2016>

220 Europol, "Terrorism Situation and Trend Report", European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, 2017, 22, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/newsroom/news/2017-eu-terrorism-report-142-failed-foiled-and-completed-attacks-1002-arrests-and-142-victims-died>

221 Europol, "Terrorism Situation and Trend Report", European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation, 2018, 56, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2018-tesat-2018>

222 "Source: California Attacker Pledged Allegiance to ISIS", *CBS News*, 4 December 2015, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/san-bernardino-shooting-tashfeen-malik-allegiance-isis/>

223 Islamic State, "The Rafidah: From Ibn Saba' to the Dajjal," *Dabiq*, January, 2016.

224 Joseph Akwiri, "Kenyan Police Find Note Suggesting Islamic State link to Mombasa attack", *Reuters*, 15 September 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kenya-attacks-idUSKCN11L136>



they were thought to be inspired by an IS directive calling for revenge attacks, and inspired by individuals recently returned from Syria.<sup>225</sup>

The second are those that have had direct links to IS militants in Syria and Iraq, and have been guided and directed by these persons. These have appeared to often take the shape of female cells. In October 2016 in Morocco, ten women were arrested for plotting a suicide attack during parliamentary elections, a case which reflected aims of the Madrid bombings in 2006. Four of these women had seemingly married IS members in Iraq and Syria over the Internet.<sup>226</sup> In Paris in September 2016, five women in a terrorist cell were arrested after a faulty car bomb near Notre Dame was found. The group was stated to be 'remotely guided' by IS and had connections to IS militants both in France and Syria. One of the perpetrators, Ines M., had written a note pledging allegiance to IS.<sup>227</sup>

A final category is women who have carried out attacks individually, including suicide operations. Suicide attacks appeared to largely occur in defence operations where, as Iraqi forces reclaimed Mosul between June and early July 2017, at least 38 female suicide bombers (some with infants) carried out attacks.<sup>228</sup> However, earlier examples included a suicide attack plot by Dian Yukua Novi in Indonesia (2016),<sup>229</sup> and a successful attack by Diana Raminova in Turkey on a police station (2015), highlighting the risk from these women that extends beyond the 'caliphate', although both examples were linked to militants inside Syria.<sup>230</sup>

It is notable that in these cases (a snapshot of the many involving women in relation to IS since 2014) women tended to operate in either family cells, female-only cells, or as individual perpetrators, which would reduce concerns of transcending norms related to gender mixing of unmarried persons that IS vehemently opposes. There were no cases of unrelated male and female units perpetrating attacks found, even as the February 2018 video released by IS showed women on the battlefield alongside men.<sup>231</sup> There is seemingly a continued debate within IS as to what (if any) combat roles women should be allowed to have in their organisation. However, these evolving organisational discourses and real-world cases have created a disturbing marketplace of justifications and precedents for women to draw on to justify their roles in IS operations and wider activities, if they seek it.

IS is acknowledged to be an inter-generational concern, and one in which challenging its ideology will remain critical to efforts to counter it. While this section has identified scenarios in which women should be considered potential security threats, the transfer of skills and ideological beliefs to other women or inter-generationally to their

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225 Devianti Faridz, Euan McKirdy, and Eliza Mackintosh, "Three Families were Behind the ISIS-Inspired Bombings in Indonesia's Surabaya, Police Said", *CNN*, 15 May, 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/13/asia/indonesia-attacks-surabaya-intl/index.html>

226 James Rothwell, "Morocco Arrests Ten Female Isis Suicide Bombers who 'Planned to Strike on Election Day'", *The Telegraph*, 5 October, 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/05/morocco-arrests-ten-female-isis-suicide-bombers-who-planned-to-s2/>

227 Aurelien Breeden, "Women in Terror Cell Were 'Guided' by ISIS, Paris Prosecutor Says", *New York Times*, 9 September, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/10/world/europe/france-paris-isis-terrorism-women.html>

228 Bel Trew, "Isis Turns to Jihadist Brides in Last-Ditch Attempt to Hold off Iraqi Forces in Mosul", *The Times*, 5 July, 2017, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/isis-turns-to-jihadist-brides-in-last-ditch-attempt-to-hold-off-iraqi-forces-in-mosul-v9gzndb6l>

229 David H. Wells, "ISIS Unveiled: The Story Behind Indonesia's First Female Suicide Bomber", *Time*, 3 March 2017, <http://time.com/4689714/indonesia-isis-terrorism-jihad-extremism-dian-yulia-novi-fpi/>

230 Toygun Atilla, "Suicide Bomber who Attacked Istanbul Police was Married to Norwegian ISIL Jihadist", *Hürriyet Daily News*, 16 January 2016, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/suicide-bomber-who-attacked-istanbul-police-was-married-to-norwegian-isis-jihadist-77070>

231 IS' Al-Hayat Media Centre, "Inside the Caliphate #7"

children also remains a potent source of concern. Media interviews with women have suggested that even while the 'caliphate' has fallen, some remain committed to carrying forward the ideology of IS, and raising their children to be the next generation of IS while awaiting the return of the 'caliphate'.<sup>232</sup>

## Minors as potential security threats

IS has followed the example set by al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) with regard to the extensive use of minors as combatants and attackers. In 2010, 96% of all suicide attacks conducted by AQI in Diyala province were perpetrated by minors aged 16 and under as part of the Tuyur al-Jannah children's organisation.<sup>233</sup> However, IS' reach and influence of minors has not been limited to inside its territorial 'borders'. Multilingual propaganda and news of attacks have increased global awareness of the group, and fostered multiple opportunities and means for minors to engage both ideologically and physically. It has been well documented that, inside the 'caliphate', young children and teenagers were indoctrinated and trained at military camps for frontline combat, prisoner executions and 'martyrdom' operations (see section 'Roles for minors in IS)). IS propaganda videos have already shown numerous 'cubs' driving vehicles laden with explosives to be detonated upon entry into enemy territory.<sup>234</sup>

With the fall of the physical 'caliphate', IS has increasingly directed and encouraged minors to conduct attacks beyond its immediate territory. Within the region, cases of both successful and thwarted attacks by minors have been reported. These include a former IS-trained 'cub' as young as 12-years-old, who, in August 2016, successfully conducted a suicide attack killing at least 51 people attending a Kurdish wedding party in southeast Turkey.<sup>235</sup> The following day in Kirkuk, Iraq (an area not held by IS), a 15-year-old boy was prevented by local police from detonating his suicide vest in a Shia mosque. The would-be attacker, originating from Mosul, was not a lone wolf, but was believed to be part of a sleeper cell trained and sent by IS.<sup>236</sup> These cases exemplify the longer-term threats posed by minors directly indoctrinated and trained by IS in theatre, and thus are relevant for assessing the potential threat posed by foreign returnees.

Earlier this year, Germany's domestic intelligence chief Hans-Georg Maassen vocalised concerns over further attacks by returning IS minors. 'We have to consider that these children could be living time bombs', he said. 'There is a danger that these children come back brainwashed with a mission to carry out attacks'.<sup>237</sup> This statement follows a worrying upward trend in attacks conducted by minors in the West. Between September 2014 and December 2016, at least 34 plots involved 44 teen and pre-teen participants in seven Western

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232 Souad Mekhennet, and Joby Warrick, "The Jihadist Plan to use Women to Launch the Next Incarnation of ISIS", *The Washington Post*, 26 November 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/the-jihadist-plan-to-use-women-to-launch-the-next-incarnation-of-isis/2017/11/26/e81435b4-ca29-11e7-8321-481fd63f174d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/the-jihadist-plan-to-use-women-to-launch-the-next-incarnation-of-isis/2017/11/26/e81435b4-ca29-11e7-8321-481fd63f174d_story.html)

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237 Andrea Shalal, and Sabine Siebold, "'Brainwashed' Children of Islamist Fighters Worry Germany – Spy Chief", *Reuters*, 31 January 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-germany-security-children/brainwashed-children-of-islamist-fighters-worry-germany-spy-chief-idUKKBN1FK1FR>

countries,<sup>238</sup> with the youngest suspect just 12 years old.<sup>239</sup> Such cases demonstrate IS' ability to not only direct underage attackers, but also inspire minors to plan and carry out their own atrocities. A recent example is the then 17-year-old girl, Safaa Boular, who, after 'marrying' her Syria-based jihadi boyfriend online (at age 16), planned to attack the British Museum with knives and grenades. When she herself was arrested and detained, Safaa then encouraged her older sister and mother to complete the mission.<sup>240</sup> For Safaa, inspiration and logistical guidance was provided by her personal contact based inside IS territory; yet, for others, IS' open calls to target enemy nations has been sufficient for teenage 'lone wolves' to plot and carry out attacks independently.<sup>241</sup>

IS' public use and training of underage militants has served as its global rallying call, attempting to spark inspired minors to conduct guided and independent attacks for the group's cause. Currently, the number of global attacks successfully conducted by returning IS minors is still comparatively low. However, without effective de-radicalisation and reintegration initiatives tailored to children and teenagers, indoctrinated and trained minors will continue to pose a significant threat in the future, wherever they end up.

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238 Robin Simcox, "The Islamic State's Western Teenage Plotters", *CTC Sentinel* 10, no.225 (2017): 21–26. <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-islamic-states-western-teenage-plotters/>

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## 5 Conclusion: What next for IS women and minors? Implications for policy and practice

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**T**his report has highlighted two under-examined populations in IS in Syria and Iraq: foreign women and minors, which accounted for up to 25% of all recorded foreign IS affiliates in theatre and up to 21% of returnees. It has discussed the varied and individualised motivations, roles and potential outcomes for those affiliated with IS, and has emphasised the nuanced considerations that underpin these. Women and minors were at times victims, forced or lured to travel and become affiliated with the group, while others demonstrated ideological commitment and support for IS and helped facilitate and perpetrate some of its greatest atrocities. It has also expanded on the current status of men, women and minors as returnees more expansively, raising significant concerns about their status whether alive, deceased, in detention, remaining in Iraq and Syria, in third party countries, or whose status is simply unknown.

The future shape and trajectory of IS is currently unclear, but a number of factors will have an important impact. These include how persons currently associated with the group are identified, managed and responded to in Syria and Iraq, in returning to their home countries, and in third-party countries to where they may travel onwards. Women and minors are poised to play a significant role in the organisation going forward – they may assist in keeping the ideology alive, passing it to the next generation, continuing to recruit new members, support IS in other ways such as fundraising, or perpetrating violence on behalf of the group. Some such persons who have disengaged from IS may also be qualified to speak out against IS, its ideology and actions, or challenge positive myths about life under the 'caliphate', and prevent others from supporting IS.

Multiple actors including interior and foreign ministries, military, judicial, penitentiary, social services, faith groups and non-governmental actors (to name but a few) will be required to align and coordinate efforts against IS in Iraq and Syria, at home, and in third-party countries. There are several recommendations that can help ensure women and minors are considered at every step of the way, and that gender- and minor-conscious programming can operate most effectively.

## Considering gender and age in all assessments related to IS

- Data in relation to all persons affiliated with extremist and terror groups should be delineated by gender and age at all stages, including (but not limited to) threat assessments, affiliates in theatre, and those detained, killed, returned, or unknown.
- Bolster such data with gender and minor-conscious qualitative assessment at all stages to understand what might motivate (or coerce) women and minors to participate in extremist and terrorist groups, and what may assist in their disengagement.
- Special effort should be made to gather data from countries and regions where information currently does not exist such as Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Saudi Arabia and Turkmenistan. Such gaps risk overlooking particularly vulnerable populations such as minors in regional responses to IS.
- Special consideration should be given to identifying minors and age groups that distinguish infants, children and teenagers. Such classifications may serve as a guideline for the identification, de-radicalisation and rehabilitation of foreign IS minors both in-theatre and upon return to countries of origin.
- Do not reference groups in combination, particularly 'women and children', or 'families' without accounting individually for women and minors within these. Both are distinct categories requiring multiple and uniquely adapted responses and considerations.
- The term 'foreign terrorist fighter' does not fully encapsulate the diversity of those that may become affiliated with such groups and limit considerations and responses to demographics such as women and minors. Greater definitional nuance, consistency and clarity are needed to effectively identify, classify and respond to all those affiliated with foreign terror groups who must be considered in long-term, holistic responses and strategies.

## Multi-sector benefits of considering women and minors

- Data on persons affiliated with extremist and terror groups that delineate gender and age demographics allow for more nuanced and effective policies and responses at national, regional and international levels.
- Such detailed data allows for the development of gender- and age-sensitive legal frameworks that acknowledge the extent of women and minors' engagement in these groups, and the agency they may have in that engagement.
- Public availability of this data also has direct implications for non-governmental organisations and partners working in this field who can consider this accordingly to their work.
- Highlighting the significance of women and minors in IS further encourages engagement with partner organisations who have extensive knowledge and experience working with women and

minors in all aspects and stages of de- and counter-radicalisation, and reintegration efforts.

- Increased awareness of the scale and scope of radicalisation of women and minors can help to ensure government support and funding for programmes and organisations focused on these specific populations.

### **General recommendations for dealing with IS affiliates now**

- Gender and minor-conscious considerations should be reflected when devising all actions in theatres of engagement including the strategies, tactics, aims, targets, objectives and impacts/ implications of efforts, including military efforts.
- Governments are encouraged to work with local regional authorities to identify the location and status of their citizens and ensure they are dealt with in accordance with international law, also bearing in mind the substantial burden foreign IS affiliates place on local institutions including judicial and detention centres.
- Clear rehabilitative (rather than punitive) policies for returning minors may encourage more families to report missing children suspected of joining or being taken to IS, and thus can facilitate repatriation. This would not only reduce the burden of local IDP camps and detention centres within Iraq and Syria, but would also serve to reduce the risk of statelessness for IS-affiliated minors.
- Benefits may also be had by reaching out to persons with experience dealing with the demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration of women and child soldiers in other contexts such as Sierra Leone, Mozambique, and Liberia (amongst others) to identify and consider historic problems faced when addressing these populations and identifying 'best practice' that may be adapted to IS in Syria and Iraq.
- National de-radicalisation efforts need to account not only for potential returnee nationals from the 'caliphate', but also those who hold extremist views within state borders (including those prevented from physically joining the group), within the conflict zone (detainees in prisons and IDP camps), and in other foreign theatres.
- All invested parties must be encouraged and adequately supported to integrate gender and minor-conscious considerations in all post-conflict legal, judicial, and recovery and transitional justice processes.





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