

APRIL 2021

# THE ISIS FILES

Rehabilitating Children of ISIS:  
Extracting Recommendations from  
the Education-Related ISIS Files

SARA ZEIGER

FARANGIZ ATAMURADOVA

LILAH ELSAYED

MUNA CHUNG

Program on Extremism

---

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

---



Hedayah

countering violent extremism

All rights reserved.

©2021 by Program on Extremism

Program on Extremism

2000 Pennsylvania Avenue NW

Washington, DC 20006

[www.extremism.gwu.edu](http://www.extremism.gwu.edu)

APRIL 2021

# THE ISIS FILES

Rehabilitating Children of ISIS:  
Extracting Recommendations from  
the Education-Related ISIS Files

SARA ZEIGER

FARANGIZ ATAMURADOVA

LILAH ELSAYED

MUNA CHUNG

Program on Extremism

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



Hedayah

countering violent extremism

## **About the Project**

This recommendations report is part of a broader project conducted in partnership between the George Washington (GW) University Program on Extremism and Hedayah, the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism. This project analyzes education-related primary source ISIS documents that are part of the ISIS Files project. A research report, “Planting the Seeds of the Poisonous Tree: Establishing a System of Meaning through ISIS Education,” analyzed the ISIS Files related to children’s education, and revealed the main values, norms, and narratives leveraged by ISIS through their education system and targeted towards children. This document identifies key recommendations for governments and practitioners working on cases related to ISIS-affiliated children.

## **About the Partners and Sponsors**

This research was primarily conducted by Hedayah, the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). Hedayah was created in response to the growing desire from members of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) and the wider international community for the establishment of an independent, neutral, and multilateral center devoted to dialogue and communications, capacity building programs, research and analysis to counter violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations. During the ministerial-level launch of the GCTF in New York in September 2011, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) offered to serve as the host of Hedayah. In December 2012, Hedayah was inaugurated with its headquarters in Abu Dhabi, UAE. As a leader within the CVE community, Hedayah works to enhance understanding and share good practices to effectively build the capacity of CVE actors across the globe to promote tolerance, stability, and security. For more information visit, <https://www.hedayahcenter.org/>.

This project was sponsored and conducted in partnership with the European Institute for Counter-Terrorism and Conflict Prevention (EICTP). EICTP is a research association operating worldwide which aims at creating policy-related recommendations based on scientific research and expert assessments for stakeholders and decision-makers from

diverse areas. As an independent, non-partisan, and non-profit institution its main focus is on key topics around security policy-related issues, research on the causes and effects of terrorism and on suitable ways and means to prevent and counter terrorist activities. On the whole, EICTP wants to add value to confidence-building measures in the areas of security and stability.



European Institute for  
Counter Terrorism and  
Conflict Prevention

This project was also sponsored by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Union Cooperation, Government of Spain.



The authors would like to thank Ahmed Al Qasimi, Ivo Veenkamp, Murat Uzunparmak, Denis Suljic and the reviewers at the GW Program on Extremism and EICTP for their comments on this document.

**The views in this report are of the authors, and do not represent the views of GWU Program on Extremism, Hedayah, EICTP or the Government of Spain.**

## Introduction

As part of the broader ISIS Files project,<sup>1</sup> Hedayah and the George Washington University Program on Extremism published a research report, “Planting the Seeds of the Poisonous Tree: Establishing a System of Meaning through ISIS Education,”<sup>2</sup> that analyzed a selection<sup>3</sup> of the ISIS Files related to children’s education under ISIS-controlled territory in Mosul and the surrounding areas. The research aimed to reveal the main values, norms, and narratives leveraged by ISIS through their education system and targeted towards children.

The ISIS Files provide an opportunity to glimpse into the lives of communities that were living under ISIS control in the Mosul area from 2014 to 2017. Together with the testimonies of Iraqis previously living under ISIS-controlled territory and the existing body of propaganda that ISIS promoted on social media and the internet, these ISIS Files help to piece together a what Haroro Ingram calls a ‘competitive system of meaning’ that was integrated throughout all aspects of life.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, educational systems are often a reflection of the core values and identities that comprise a nation, and in the case of ISIS, its education system is reflective of its main aims for its ‘caliphate.’ The research report examining the education-related ISIS Files unraveled this ‘competitive system of meaning,’ and revealed a template for how ISIS intended to continue to radicalize its followers and justify its violent ideology. It also argued that despite the fact that the education system run by ISIS was largely a failure due to circumstances (control of their territory was lost), the materials in the ISIS Files reveal the core ideology and future purpose of the group.

The research report found several common recurring themes throughout different subjects. First, the report found a significant emphasis placed on the identity of Islam in most of the teachings, with religious references from Quran and Hadith made not only in Islamic subjects but also in non-Islamic subjects such as Geography, and practical examples given using everyday practices of Islam. Governance was another recurring theme in the education curriculum of ISIS, with political claims that their ‘umma’ of true believers is led by the ‘caliph’ (Abu Bakr Al Baghdadi) and manifested through the ‘caliphate,’ a physical ‘state.’ ISIS leverages

education to instill the feeling of belonging to and identification with this state, with frequent references to the flag, leaders, and claim of territory and physical resources. Furthermore, ISIS selectively leveraged common Islamic interpretations to demonstrate its vision for ‘ideal’ and ‘loyal’ citizens of the state. Third, emphasis is made on Islamic tenets, particularly the oneness of God (*tawhid*), to distinguish between the in-group members of ISIS and others, or out-group. Systematically, through such approach, ISIS creates an ‘us vs. them’ construct that dehumanizes and demonizes the out-group members, which in the real world helps justify the atrocious acts taken against them. From this tension, ISIS also identifies the main ‘enemies of monotheism,’ to include the unbelievers and hypocrites. Violence is another prominent theme found throughout the textbooks. For example, the integration of violent elements such as images of guns, swords, weapons, and other sorts of ammunition into the curriculum allowed ISIS to desensitize children to violence and normalize it as a practice. Furthermore, more concrete examples referencing violent historical events in the Prophetic times are leveraged to justify violence as a mean to an end against the ‘out-group’ members.

This research has implications for children previously living under ISIS, not just those who attended ISIS-affiliated schools, but also those that may have been exposed to ISIS’ propaganda and ideology in their everyday lives. An October 2020 report from the Middle East Institute estimates that the Al Hol camp alone holds approximately 43,000 children that may have been living under ISIS-controlled territory.<sup>5</sup> This is in addition to any children that may have returned to their home countries through various means, either with their families or through repatriation efforts, or children that are being housed in refugee camps around the Middle East. As such, this research also has potential implications for developing programs for education, rehabilitation, and reintegration for children in Iraq and Syria, children fleeing ISIS-controlled territory, and children of returning foreign terrorist fighters across the world.

Twin suicide bombings in Baghdad in January 2021<sup>6</sup> serve as a stark reminder that ISIS’s ideology has not been eradicated, and this ideology can grow into violent action if given sufficient room. As Iraq transitions

from post-ISIS defeat to re-establishing its own governance, infrastructure and systems, it is important to effectively address grievances of its citizens. Along these lines, Iraq is facing a number of challenges in reviving the education sector in territories previously controlled by ISIS since its territorial defeat.<sup>7</sup> For example, the Ministry of Education has struggled to appropriately distribute textbooks, and it has been noted that a lack of resources, illegal printing and distribution of textbooks, and overcrowded classrooms were all contributing factors to the textbook shortage.<sup>8</sup> Schools are also over-crowded, partially due to the fact that a significant number of schools in and around Mosul were completely destroyed as a result of the battles to defeat ISIS.<sup>9</sup>

As for internally displaced person (IDP) camps, students are on shortened or limited schedules, and are unable to go to school outside the camp because of extreme travel restrictions preventing them from leaving camps.<sup>10</sup> There are also issues with documentation—access to free education in Iraq requires several types of documentation before children can register in school. Those include identification cards of children and parents, or in case of the father’s death, a death certificate. The challenge many face is that there are no provisions in place to address the absence of documentation for fathers missing or detained. In addition, families in areas once ruled by ISIS are required to apply for a security clearance before they can obtain any form of documentation. However, according to an April 2019 report, there are approximately 45,000 children living in various camps that are missing civil documentation.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, the findings of the research report have implications for the wider world where countries struggle to repatriate, rehabilitate and reintegrate foreign fighters and their families, to include men, women and children. That is, concerns around children exposed to ISIS ideology is not ‘only’ an issue for Iraq and Syria, but a truly transnational challenge. As nations struggle to identify their priorities for rehabilitation and reintegration, all states should consider the basic measures to promote and foster the recovery (both physical and psychological) and social reintegration of children in alignment with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, states that are repatriating children from Al Hol and other camps should consider the effects of consistent and



damaging narratives aimed at children, the fundamentals of which were revealed through the analysis of the ISIS Files documents.

Recent attacks outside of Iraq and Syria illustrate how influential and dangerous the ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ ISIS narratives can be, and raise concerns that child returnees may continue their involvement in political violence as adults. For example, the beheading of French middle-school teacher Samuel Paty in October 2020, which took place in the Parisian suburb Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, illustrates the polarizing nature of the ISIS ideology. Abdoullakh Anzorov, a Chechen-born 18-year-old French immigrant, claimed affiliation with ISIS, and killed Paty as a response to Paty showing a cartoon of the Prophet Muhammad in his classroom. The non-violent frustration of Muslim groups for showing depictions of Prophet Muhammad has been well-documented, and indeed has been the subject of fierce debate in many European countries.<sup>13</sup> However, Anzorov took a path of extreme violence as a reaction. According to BBC reports, Anzorov told witnesses he wanted to ‘hit’ and ‘humiliate’ Mr. Paty, despite Anzorov having no prior contact with Paty.<sup>14</sup> The ISIS ideology categorized Paty as the ‘enemy’ in its competitive system of meaning, and for Anzorov, this resulted in taking extreme measures to carry out the murder of Paty.

Another example for implications of violent extremist indoctrination is the violent shooting in Vienna in November 2020 that caused four deaths and left over 20 injured.<sup>15</sup> The perpetrator, Kujtim Fejzulai, was a 20-year-old dual citizen of Austria and North Macedonia. During the investigation that followed the attack, it was revealed that Fejzulai had tried to join ISIS in Syria, and had even underwent a de-radicalization program after his conviction.<sup>16</sup> This raises concerns about the extent to which rehabilitation and reintegration programs can effectively address the experiences of children who have been exposed to ISIS ideology. In any case, profound rethinking of measures, approaches and ideas is demanded on both local and international level.

Given this context, and after a careful analysis of the education-related documents in the ISIS Files as highlighted in the previously-published report, the following recommendations are made:

## Recommendations

### For Governments

*Encourage transnational and multidisciplinary cooperation to develop and implement programs handling cases of children having been exposed to ISIS narratives.*

Countries interested in handling cases of children exposed to ISIS narratives—both in terms of those returning from conflict zones and those that may have been radicalized at home—should exchange experiences, insights and information on how to handle these cases. Countries can learn from each other’s experiences, and make adjustments based on what has worked and what has not worked in other situations. In particular, it is also important for there to be open and transparent information-sharing between Iraq, Syria and the countries where children are returning. This is important to inform the tailored approaches necessary for handling child returnee cases, especially if this information can provide more insight into the child’s conditions and experiences while living under ISIS control.

Assessment of the child returnees and the implementation of appropriate interventions can be best served through a multidisciplinary approach. For example, meeting the needs of child returnees must be informed by existing child protection best practices, and conducted within national and established child services networks. Security and intelligence services may also need to be involved in order to ensure successful reintegration into networks and communities that reduce the risk of continued affiliation with ISIS. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or charity groups can also support the process of rehabilitation and reintegration, but often do not have the capacity or the connections with all necessary services to conduct interventions alone.

In many cases, there is no need to entirely reinvent the wheel; existing best practices, professional codes of ethics, disciplinary decision making protocols and local and national policy should guide the means for dealing with child returnees and any disclosure of past or indications of future violence. For former child soldiers, it is known that isolation,

discrimination and further exposure to trauma in the absence of appropriate therapeutic services could affect any rehabilitation or reintegration efforts. This means it is important to meet the biological and psychosocial needs of child returnees by maximizing their and their families' well-being and reducing the long term consequences of trauma such as ill health, unemployment, poor educational attainment and involvement with the criminal justice system. It may be useful for the relevant departments and services involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration of child returnees to form a formal or informal council or body to advise on the processes and communication procedures related to child returnees as a whole.

*Determine which children may have been exposed to ISIS's 'competitive system of meaning' and the extent to which the ISIS narratives have been internalized.*

Before embarking on the development of any policies or programs to support children that have been living under the control of ISIS, it is first important to conduct several assessments to evaluate the extent to which the child had been exposed to the narratives of ISIS, as well as the extent to which those narratives had been internalized. These assessments should first and foremost protect the rights of the child, and seek to do no harm to further exacerbate vulnerabilities to radicalization or trauma. These assessments should be conducted by an appropriately-trained professional that can interact with the child to extract the information in a way that is non-threatening and based in developmental psychology. Importantly, the assessments need to consider that children that have been exposed to this 'system of meaning' may have "dual identities of victims and perpetrators,"<sup>17</sup> which can impact their self-perception and needs.

Adapted to the age of the child, the assessments could build upon existing, validated psychometric tools that look at trauma, identity and resilience. First, the child should be assessed and screened for the effects of trauma and violence that they may have been exposed to during ISIS control, based on culturally-relevant adaptations of tools that look at post-traumatic stress.<sup>18</sup> After this is conducted, there can also be an

assessment that approximates the extent to which ISIS narratives had been internalized. For example, assessors could use a modified version of an assessment such as the Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV)<sup>19</sup> that asks a child to rank the importance of different elements of their identity on a Likert scale. Or, assessments could use a child-friendly version of an implicit association test (IAT) that evaluates values and attitudes that the child may have towards specific aspects of ISIS's teachings.<sup>20</sup> The assessment can be modified based on the outcomes of the research on the ISIS Files curriculum, taking care not to re-expose the children to content unnecessarily.

It is also important that these assessments are only utilized to aide in the design of a more effective program, and that the outcomes of the assessments are not nefariously used to label the child as 'radicalized.' This label could lead to stigmatization, which could ultimately have counterproductive effects on their ability to reintegrate into society. Moreover, it is also important that these tests attempt to factor in any gender or cultural differences that may influence the outcome.

*Avoid using terms like 'extremism' or 'terrorism' to label individuals and activities related to education, youth and children to avoid stigmatization.*

When working with vulnerable groups, and with children in particular, it is important to avoid further exacerbating the situation by labeling individuals and ideas as 'extremists' or 'terrorists.' Use of such terms will only deepen the divide between communities and likely decrease the chances of establishing trust and dialogue with these individuals. Similarly, it should be carefully considered before activities targeted at these groups or wider audience are labelled as 'countering violent extremism.'<sup>21</sup> Especially when working with youth, this may create a backlash from the target audience and stigmatization from the community or the 'out-group.' As similarly mentioned in instances when dealing with prison inmates, law enforcement agents, and local communities, it important to think twice before labeling an activity as CVE "to avoid further destabilizing already vulnerable communities."<sup>22</sup>

This is important when dealing with those originally from the Middle East, as well as repatriated individuals. It may be argued that countries not as familiar with customs or practices from the Middle East, or related to a Muslim identity, may be at higher risk for unintentionally stigmatizing returning children. For instance, expecting a pious young Muslim woman to suddenly ‘unveil’ as a sign of her new identity or loyalty to her country in Europe is not a realistic expectation for a rehabilitation and reintegration program. Rather, the program could focus on building a Muslim identity that was more inclusive, and rejects the polarized ‘us vs. them’ narrative that ISIS propagated.

*Generate public awareness on the topic in general, including providing forums for public debate regarding potential concerns.*

As evidence in the research report on the ISIS Files shows, ISIS sought to create an all-encompassing narrative that involved not only children, but the broader community and society. ISIS sought to replace all other community-level identities with their own vision. Therefore, in any processes whereby ISIS-affiliated individuals and families are to re-enter their previous societies, community buy-in is critical to ensuring that returning families and children receive appropriate support and reduce stigmatization. In this regard, public awareness about the government’s repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration efforts is critical to ensuring the public is equipped with accurate and up-to-date information. Campaigns should work at the national, regional and local levels together with experts, institutions, stakeholders and target groups.

Public awareness campaigns and public debate on this topic will not come without challenges. A 2021 community perceptions survey in Iraq conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) indicates that communities are extremely skeptical of individuals returning to their communities that have a perceived affiliation with ISIS. For example, in the survey of 2,400 respondents across six districts of Iraq (Mosul, Tel Afar, Heet, Ramadi, Tikrit and Baiji), almost 50% of the respondents were opposed to the return of children of known ISIS members, stating that they were afraid of these children and they had been indoctrinated by ISIS.<sup>23</sup>

Community members may raise important concerns and grievances over potential risks and challenges to individuals returning to their countries and communities. It is important that these concerns and grievances are based on correct information, and that they are acknowledged and addressed appropriately by authorities. In the IOM survey on community perceptions, some of the potential concerns include lack of trust in the individuals returning to the community and fear of retaliation from those affiliated with ISIS.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, those that oppose the return of families with a perceived ISIS affiliation tend to be direct victims of ISIS's violence, including family members of the security forces. Importantly, the same survey indicated that communities “appear to trust a government-led process, provided it is systematic and transparent. People saw government (federal and local) as the key facilitator of the process of return.”<sup>25</sup>

Communications campaigns should be conducted in alignment with national and local laws, and aim to communicate transparently about potential risks and challenges while at the same time protecting privacy and the human rights of those individuals that may be returning from conflict zones.

### **For Education Ministries and Curriculum Developers**

*Consider working with psychologists to design and implement education programs to avoid separating children from their fundamental reality and identity.*

For those children that may have internalized the ISIS identity and narratives, it is important that any intervention that takes place does not completely dismantle their concept of self without providing alternatives. Especially for those children who spent a significant amount of their life—or all of their life—under ISIS, a complete rejection of all that they know could be extremely traumatizing.

Moreover, certain aspects of the ISIS identity may be difficult to entirely replace. For example, dedication to one's religion or one's family are not

inherently flawed values. Instead, educational curriculum can aim to cultivate those aspects of a child's identity that are not dangerous or traumatic, and seek to replace other aspects that normalize polarization, dehumanization (labeling the 'enemy') and violence.

Additionally, it is crucial to take into careful consideration the identity of repatriated children. It is likely to be more challenging to work with children who are being reintegrated into a society completely opposite to what they were exposed to in Iraq and Syria. For example, children being repatriated to Western societies in Europe or North America, having spent a significant time in Iraq or Syria, will struggle with the adjusting to the norms and customs of their new home. In addition, these children may face stigmatization from their peers or bullying for their previous experience in an ISIS-controlled territory. Educational facilities and other outlets should consider how stereotypes may affect rehabilitation and reintegration, and provide support-groups that will make it more possible for repatriated children to exist in these societies.<sup>26</sup>

One of the important factors related to identity may be related to different experiences related to gender. Boys may have had different experiences and exposure related to ISIS than girls. For instance, it was reported that boys that were taken by ISIS by force were sent to either religious education camps (ages 5-10) or military training camps (ages 10-15).<sup>27</sup> Girls may have been forced to marry at a younger age, or may have witnessed abuse aimed at their mothers within the confines of their households. Girls and boys may have experienced different kinds of abuse (domestic violence, sexual violence or rape), and may also deal with the trauma differently due to gender stereotypes or perceptions of self. For example, one study has shown that females tend to have more resilient, pro-social reactions to child sexual abuse than males, partially due to gender perceptions and stereotypes.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, after leaving the ISIS-controlled areas, women and girls may have been exposed to sexual violence than men and boys; there is some evidence that women and children accused of being affiliated with ISIS may have been sexually exploited in IDP camps.<sup>29</sup>

Age may also be a factor with respect to how the child is perceived—or stigmatized—related to their experiences. For example, one study has shown that older children (e.g. 14 years old) are more likely to be blamed in cases of sexual assault than younger children (e.g. 5 years old), who are more likely to be believed.<sup>30</sup>

*Embed proactive narratives in the educational curriculum that help to rebuild a sense of identity and purpose that is multifaceted.*

For children exposed to ISIS content, their new schools should undergo a review of the curriculum to ensure that it is appropriately overcoming polarizing identity narratives construed by ISIS. In particular, ISIS's use of Islamic creed, focused on *tawhid* (oneness of God), was demonstrated to have a polarizing effect in the way it was presented in their textbooks. ISIS's claims that only those who truly believe in the oneness of God (in the same way as they do) are eligible to be part of the 'caliphate'. For ISIS, this means that Shia, Christians, Jews, and other religious groups are all considered 'unbelievers,' and therefore treated with animosity.<sup>31</sup> While there is nothing problematic about the religious claims about *tawhid* in general, and secular education system should avoid promoting certain religious ideologies and interpretations, the polarizing rhetoric that ISIS promotes in their narratives about other groups is one aspect of ISIS' narrative that can be addressed in educational settings. That is, education can show that other groups—such as Shia, Christians, and Jews—should not be treated with animosity.

Developmental psychology literature identifies the age of social and personal identity formation to begin around 4-5 years old,<sup>32</sup> but identity continues to evolve throughout life. Still, these early years are critical to crafting worldviews, and it is at this stage where children are most susceptible to framing the world in a certain way. In this sense, ISIS's simplistic and exclusivist construct of what it means to be part of the 'caliphate' likely will have an impact on how the children exposed to that narrative will continue to see the world.

Educational curriculum for those students that were previously exposed to ISIS material should focus on building multifaceted identities. That is,



the polarizing ‘us vs. them’ narrative can only be deconstructed by showing that it is possible to hold multiple identities in tension, and these identities need not be in conflict with each other. For example, a child can be Iraqi, Kurdish, Muslim, and male—and all of those identities can be important to the child without the need for conflict between them.

Using a technique that ISIS used in its textbooks, new educational curriculum for children exposed to ISIS narratives can also demonstrate how to hold multifaceted identities through the examples that they are given in their textbooks. A reading lesson might highlight a passage where Kurdish and Arab children are cooperating on a project together. Or, a history lesson may provide examples of different religious groups finding a solution to a conflict. Taking an example from the ISIS textbook, teaching material can reverse this polarizing narrative with different lessons:

ISIS Textbook	Replacement Lesson
<p>Fill in the following gaps by placing a proper verb in the following sentences:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>The judge ..... the truth.</i></li> <li>2. <b><i>A mujahid.....in the cause of God.</i></b></li> <li>3. <i>Muhammad.....</i></li> <li>4. <b><i>The martyr..... himself among the apostates.</i></b></li> </ol>	<p>Fill in the following gaps by placing a proper verb in the following sentences:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The judge ..... the truth.</li> <li>2. <b>A student.....with all of his classmates.</b></li> <li>3. Muhammad.....</li> <li>4. <b>An Iraqi..... his family and his friends.</b></li> </ol>

Thus, a review of the educational curriculum that will be delivered to children exposed to ISIS’s narratives needs to identify how to intentionally and deliberately deliver a different message that undercuts ISIS’s dichotomous worldview.

*Dismantle ‘us vs. them’ narratives by providing experiences and exposure to individuals with identities different than them.*

It is important to highlight that ‘us vs. them’ mentality, individuality, and the longing to belong to a group or community is part of human nature often coined by social psychologists as the ‘social identity theory.’<sup>33</sup> It is,

therefore, crucial to work with social psychologists to develop a safe way to establish dialogue between children, to allow them to learn from different experiences, embracing diversity of their community and world without stripping them of their feeling of individuality and uniqueness.

An example of a successful program that provides exposure to multifaceted identities is the Generation Global<sup>34</sup> program at the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. The aim is to provide students skills of dialogue, which is first practiced within their own classroom. After the students' skills for listening and conversation in a safe space are cultivated, their skills are practiced through videoconferencing with other classrooms across the globe. Students hold discussions on pre-arranged topics to share their views and perspectives with each other. The exposure to such diverse views, and the creation of friendships between individuals from different countries and cultures, helps children to internalize the idea that despite their differences in culture or religion, they can still have positive experiences and interactions.

In Australia, a study showed that interschool visits could be another way to expose children to diverse viewpoints and identities. This study describes the efforts led by one Islamic school, Minaret College in Melbourne, along with other Islamic, Christian, and Jewish faith-based schools, in promoting interschool cooperation to improve interfaith and intercultural understanding. Muslim students felt rejected from society and not part of Australia after 9/11. Minaret College observed that its local Muslim community underwent a 'hybridization' of cultures where Muslim students who were proud of their heritage and wanted to adopt an Australian lifestyle and culture felt marginalized and alienated.<sup>35</sup> As a result Minaret College partnered with a number of schools and began a program for interschool visits. These visits are integrated into the curriculum under sports and leadership programs where students meet and discuss issues of concern to their faiths and communities, under teacher moderation, among a variety of other educational and entertainment activities.

By contrast, lessons can be learned from the UK's Prevent program. The program first aimed to create networks within the UK's Muslim

community through schools, community centers, and mosques. However, they failed to invest in meaningful processes that build trust such as political and citizenship education. Paul Thomas argues that in focusing only on Muslims, the Prevent program appears to stigmatize and alienate Britain's Muslims by portraying terror as a "problem of Islamic practice and community life," and young Muslims "as both 'risky and at risk.'" <sup>36</sup> Muslims who are part of the Prevent 'Community Cohesion' networks have explained that they feel they are part of a surveillance network rather than part of a meaningful cooperation towards mutual goals.

Lynn Davies suggests that anti-extremism education is not the same as multiculturalism that promotes tolerance between distinct and separate 'communities'; instead, education should provide a safe space where young people can voice their opposing views, even those seen as extremist, so that they can be interrogated by their peers.<sup>37</sup> This approach allows young people to express their grievances, and Davies argues that it is a better approach than avoiding controversial issues in the classroom. Avoiding controversial issues altogether shifts the conversation to the online space, where conversations cannot be mediated by teachers, and dangerous actors (such as recruiters) can prey on frustrated young people in search for meaning.

*Develop programs that build resilient and tolerant students through interaction, games, and play.*

Building resilience in children through various interactive activities is a common approach in education.<sup>38</sup> Programs directed at building resilient children aim to support them in their life journey, recognizing various hardships a child might come across. One of the ways to engage children and increase their resilience and support co-existence is through interactive activities. Some common initiatives directed at this are after-school activities, art, debate teams, theater, and sports.<sup>39</sup> Theater and other art activities is often seen as a good platform encouraging self-expression, self-esteem, sense of belonging, self-identification, relationship building.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, use of performance art encourages critical thinking. Sports is another outlet often leveraged to build resilience as well as bridge any gaps between communities. Such

programs “can be used to develop a sense of community for at-risk youth, as they provide grounds for increased resilience and cultural adjustment, though to varying degrees.”<sup>41</sup> Leveraging a common interest and a neutral platform such as sports or arts, individuals are learning not only to communicate and work in teams, but also practice “positive identity formation.”<sup>42</sup>

## **For Administrators and Teachers**

*Train teachers on mechanisms and narratives used by ISIS to radicalize children.*

Before knowing how to counter the narratives of ISIS aimed at children, teachers must be aware of the types of content that had been promoted by ISIS while they controlled territory in Iraq and Syria. The analysis of the education-related ISIS Files can serve as a starting point for explaining to teachers the basic components of ISIS’s ‘competitive system of meaning.’

However, care should be taken to avoid re-traumatizing both teachers and students who may have already been exposed to ISIS propaganda. Moreover, teachers themselves may be sympathetic to elements of the narratives that were promoted by ISIS, so it is important that teachers are able to recognize their own biases before embarking on any attempts to prevent and counter the narratives of ISIS in their classrooms.

*Train teachers on methods to prevent further radicalization and to counter the narratives used by ISIS.*

Because the narratives of ISIS aimed at children are constructed in a holistic way—that encompass all aspects of life—the process of reversing this exposure needs to be equally as holistic. Teachers are one significant component of a child’s life that have the ability to counter key messages and narratives of ISIS that children may hear, speak about, and internalize. Because teachers can be seen as an authority figure, children are more likely to listen to and respect what a teacher says.

However, the teacher's approach to countering the ISIS narrative is not easy. Teachers need appropriate training on the following knowledge and skills:

1. Teachers must be able to handle the situation in a way that does not stigmatize the child;
2. Teachers must build trust and create opportunities for dialogue with the child that can help to change their worldview; and
3. Teachers must be equipped with content knowledge of what types of narratives can help change that worldview.

Some training courses and resources already exist that could be adapted to the context of camps, schools and centers where children that have been exposed to ISIS might be living. For example, the Generation Global<sup>43</sup> program by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change equips teachers with skills to prepare students to navigate differences in a peaceful way. Their *Essentials of Dialogue*<sup>44</sup> resource is already available in Arabic, and could be adapted with small changes to the material to encompass specific case studies from the ISIS Files. Similarly, Hedayah's *Classroom Activities: Preventing Violent Extremism through Education in East Africa* could be adapted and tested in the Iraqi context, accompanied by teacher-training based on Hedayah's existing program that has been delivered in East Africa, South Asia, and South East Asia.

*Work with teachers to reverse the process of normalizing violence by creating a safe space in the classroom.*

First and foremost, the classroom should be a place where violence is not tolerated, and the student feels physically safe. The child should not feel threatened by an insecure environment, to include being protected from bullying or harassment from peers.

Second, the classroom should be a safe space psychologically and socially. This approach involves establishing an environment whereby the children can speak freely without fear of reprisal. For example, there should be ground rules for the discussion set by the teacher which all must abide by

and each participant should speak about how they feel regarding a particular topic. This approach allows the opportunity for the students to understand each other's perspectives and reinforces the positive about themselves. The teacher facilitating such discussions needs to be appropriately trained on the principles of the safe spaces for dialogue in order to ensure its effectiveness.

Moreover, the teachers should realize that there may be acts of violence or trauma experienced by the children, and children may be triggered to aggressive behavior if their safety is perceived to be threatened. For example, rape, domestic violence or significant loss may have been experienced by children in ISIS-controlled territories. In a survey of 545 children in Iraq interviewed by Save the Children, many cited “domestic violence as much as the loss of loved ones as a source of distress, and children themselves became more aggressive in response to a violent environment.”<sup>45</sup> In addition, there is evidence from the ISIS Files that normalizing violence for children was an aim of ISIS's propaganda; children were taught to count explosives,<sup>46</sup> identify weapons, revere suicide bombers, and desire to be strong warriors.

Some experts have recommended that a trauma systems therapy (TST) approach may be a relevant way to help students overcome trauma and exposure to violence, particularly those children that are coming from previously-controlled ISIS territories.<sup>47</sup> Teachers may be trained in this method so that they can assist the students in: 1) addressing needs across multiple domains of development, 2) reducing environmental stressors, and 3) helping with emotional and cognitive dysregulation. TST training could help teachers identify multiple areas of intervention that are possible in the classroom, recognize triggers for emotional and cognitive threats to the child, and act in a way that helps the child develop resilient cognitive processes to handle conflict or threats.

*Include staff of formal and informal Quran schools in areas once occupied by ISIS in training courses for teachers.*

International development agencies are usually hesitant to work with Islamic non-profits and schools and charities they support. This is

because of the perceived lack of transparency in funding and for fear that these non-profits have hidden agendas. While these concerns are not unfounded, these Islamic charities have a long-standing history and trust of communities that are economically valuable and most susceptible to extremism. Operating formal and informal schools is one of the main activities of Islamic non-profits, and it would be counter-productive to neglect these schools when developing education initiatives that tackle extremism.

Mosul city, for example, was home to some of Iraq's earliest Quran schools. Pre-ISIS, Quran schools in Mosul were usually in the form of informal after-school classes offered by mosques to train students to memorize and recite the Quran and understand the basics of Hadith and *fiqh*. These mosques have become more regulated post-ISIS under the supervision of the Sunni Endowment.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, the Sunni Endowment operates intermediate and secondary Islamic schools. The Endowment is responsible for developing these school curricula and organizing extra-curricular activities such as cultural events and festivals.<sup>49</sup> To sustain themselves these schools were funded by affluent families in the form of endowments. Pupils studied for free and were taught to read, write, do basic math in addition to reciting the Quran and understanding sharia. These schools have historically attracted the less affluent communities, but also have the community's trust.

In sum, there should be an effort to bring the teachers of the Quran schools in Iraq to similar trainings and workshops as the state-led Ministry of Education so that they are equipped with the same knowledge and skills to address radicalization and trauma, and support better rehabilitation and reintegration.

*Review existing coursework teaching about religion, and provide teachers with required tools and skills on how to teach about different religions.*

In some countries such as Iraq, teaching religion (e.g. world religions) is a standardized course in the education system. If this is the case, formal education facilities that have religion as part of their education

curriculum should ensure that their teachers have the necessary tools and skills to teach about different religions and religious beliefs.

Since religion can be a sensitive subject, teachers may not feel comfortable giving information about a religion different than their own, or may even feel uncomfortable explaining difficult concepts in their own or other religions. Through appropriate training, teachers should be able to not only teach students about different religions, but also be able to answer questions about other religions without increasing animosity or polarization between children of different faiths. Moreover, teachers should be provided with the appropriate references and resources to supplement their own knowledge of religion. For example, teachers may have access to a database of religious leaders in their community that they can call to answer questions, or that they can invite to participate in classroom activities.

This knowledge and these skills affiliated with teaching religion may also be useful for teachers in schools where religion is not part of the formal curriculum. Since inevitably conversations around religions may come up in classroom discussions, appropriate tools and training will help educators to answer any questions children may have on religion, bearing in mind different interpretations to avoid polarization or misunderstandings.

### **For Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programs for Children**

*Maintain a client-centered approach to rehabilitation and reintegration of ISIS-affiliated children, and ensure the ‘Do No Harm’ principle is applied.*

Any rehabilitation and reintegration efforts involving children should first and foremost put the needs of the child at the center of any intervention. Programs should follow international and national laws regarding the handling of child cases, including laws around juvenile justice and social services. For instance, the conditions outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child should be followed.<sup>50</sup> Countries interested in the rehabilitation and reintegration of child returnees may also find guidance in the United Nations in the publication, “Key Principles for the Protection, Repatriation, Prosecution, Rehabilitation



and Reintegration of Women and Children with Links to United Nations Listed Terrorist Groups”<sup>51</sup> a useful resource.

Furthermore, as the research on the ISIS educational system revealed, ISIS worked to create a ‘system of meaning’ to reinforce its own values, identity, and culture and to dehumanize and discredit its enemies. In considering the ‘do no harm’ principle, care should be taken to not completely remove all familiar identities for the child. This may mean that rehabilitation and reintegration programs may reinforce behaviors familiar to the child, such as prayer, or focus on values such as closeness to family. Moreover, it is important to provide child returnees with alternative values that build resilience to ISIS’s narratives, helping them organically redefine themselves and their identities.

Also in alignment with the ‘do no harm’ principle, rehabilitation and reintegration for children should avoid situations where they are unnecessarily stigmatized for their previous affiliations with ISIS. In some circumstances, children will already be facing challenges with ‘integrating’ into a society with which they had limited or no experiences previously, especially those that had traveled to Iraq and Syria at a young age, or were born in ISIS-affiliated territory.

The rehabilitation and reintegration efforts should also consider potential stigmas that may be affiliated with certain communities in the post-ISIS Iraqi context that can trickle-down to how children are viewed and treated. For example, Christians in Hamdaniya and Yazidis in Sinjar have reacted with hostility towards the return of displaced Arab Muslims, fearing their sympathy towards ISIS ideology and potential resurgence.<sup>52</sup> The same applies to Tal Afar’s Sunni Turkmen population, who decided not to flee ISIS-controlled territories, and are widely accused by Tal Afar’s Shia Turkmen of siding with ISIS.<sup>53</sup> It would be important to assess the potential stigmas that may be associated with that child, and tailor reintegration efforts appropriately.

*Leverage a multifaceted pool of experts to inform appropriate rehabilitation and reintegration interventions for children and provide a platform to share lessons learned internationally.*

In terms of experts that could potentially inform rehabilitation and reintegration efforts for children, it is important to leverage a diversity, to include educators, teachers, psychologists, and social workers that may be able to give advice on different aspects of the child's rehabilitation and reintegration process. Training or holding workshops with these different experts together may be an effective approach to design and implement the multifaceted and complex programs that may be necessary to address the needs of children and child returnees.

Additionally, since this is an issue of a global scale, there is a need to provide relevant international experts with a platform to share the challenges faced, lessons learned, and feedback on 'what works' and 'what works even better' in different contexts on this subject. While it is clear that countries may have different approaches to this, it is nonetheless vital to remember that these children come from a broadly shared experience, and lived under the same 'Islamic State.' It is not to say that approaches should be standardized completely, however, sharing experiences may help develop more effective ways to respond to the issue at stake.

*Provide social, psychological, and emotional rehabilitation that includes addressing trauma.*

For the children who have lived under ISIS control or were exposed to ISIS propaganda, one ideal solution is that they are placed in a rehabilitation facility to undergo psychological and social programs designed by qualified psychologists, social workers, and religious scholars especially for them. An effective model may draw on experiences from the Sabaoon Center for Rehabilitation and Monitoring in Pakistan, which has been identified as a model of best practice for successful rehabilitation and reintegration of young former violent extremists.<sup>54</sup> The program worked with 242 boys coming from different villages with different cultural norms. Implementers of the program found that one of the most

important techniques for rehabilitation and reintegration of those boys was to be able to learn as much as possible about their community of origin. This makes the children feel more accepted and understood and help in reshaping their ‘in-group’ what they socially and psychologically identify as being members of their communities of origin addressing what the children may have developed of the polarizing ‘in-group’ and ‘out-group’ understanding and identifying that ‘us’ entails in comparison to ‘them’ or ‘others.’

Furthermore, to ensure a successful reintegration of the child, Sabaoon program implementers found out that preparing the child’s community is key in the reintegration process. This starts with the program implementers themselves learn about the child’s community, the cultural similarities and differences in particular, before meeting with the elders and community leaders explaining the background of the child and emphasizing his/her positive achievements before the child’s actual visit back to the community. Only after receiving reassurance from the community elders and leaders, the child can be allowed to go back to his/her community of origin to ensure community acceptance and avoid stigmatization and re-traumatization of the child.

Finally, the rehabilitation should also include an element of psychological support to deal with severe stress and trauma. Studies have shown that trauma can manifest in different ways—from depression to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to aggressive behavior.<sup>55</sup> Children in particular, but also adults, may also suffer mental health issues and disorder when they begin to process their experiences and/or involvement in violence. For example, children were sometimes forced to participate in violent acts by their families and wider community under ISIS; the 10-year-old child of Samantha Elhassani, an American ISIS fighter originally from Indiana, was forced to threaten US President Donald Trump in an ISIS propaganda video.<sup>56</sup> Processing this act will be an important component of his rehabilitation process, so that he can accept his past and build an identity that is different than what ISIS wanted of him. It is therefore important that the rehabilitation and reintegration of children previously under ISIS includes a psychological support element to mitigate trauma and guilt associated with being part of that group’s activities.

As mentioned previously, trauma systems therapy (TST) may be an effective approach that systematically deconstructs the trauma that children may have experienced under ISIS. TST is based on Emotional Security Theory (EST), which suggests that children exposed to prolonged conflict may become emotionally reactive, naturally aim to regulate their exposure to danger in ways that may include aggressive behavior, and develop new and negative ways of thinking about the world.<sup>57</sup> As the research on the ISIS Files reveals, ISIS aimed to reinforce protracted and violent conflict through even its education-related narratives. This meant that children (as well as adults) were subjected to the actual physical threat of violence in the conflict zones, but also the emotional and psychological threat that the conflict would continue until the enemy was eradicated. In the rehabilitation context, this means that special attention should be paid to both physical and psychological/emotional triggers that could recreate this state of mind that catalyzes the ‘flight or fight’ response and can lead to aggressive behaviors or emotional distress.

*Include an element of spiritual and religious rehabilitation.*

Another aspect of rehabilitation and reintegration could be, where relevant, to incorporate religious and spiritual rehabilitation. Because Islam is indeed central to the identity of many of the children exposed to ISIS ideology, it is important to not dismantle this identity. In addition, religion may be an important factor in aiding the rehabilitation and reintegration process.

The aim of this approach may be to challenge religious justifications for violence that are based on interpretations of religious texts or documents. Religious counseling may also complement psychological or social counseling providing a new direction to the children in their spiritual journey. The involvement of religious scholars, leaders and educators to whether through classroom learning and curriculum development that need to be tailored to resonate with different age groups or one-to-one can be useful in clarifying such justifications promoted by ISIS or other religious-based violent extremist groups.<sup>58</sup> This could be also conducted

in collaboration with, for example, ministries of religious affairs or Muslim community leaders.

In the beginning, there is a need to identify these religious and ideological violent extremist narratives and concepts the children were exposed to, bearing in mind that they may have never been exposed to alternative interpretations of Islam other than those propagated by ISIS. For example, to debunk the propaganda associating the concept of ‘jihad’ with violence, a counter-argument would be promoting the positive connotations such as: Jihad is “one’s struggle with the self” and Greater Jihad “striving for excellence” and amongst its goals are jihad for goodness (*al khair*). Another example, promoting a culture of a multi-racial, multi-religious society as there is not, nor should there be, a concept of ‘us versus them’ or a mentality of ‘*al-wala’ wal bara’*’ (loyalty to God and dissociation from polytheists) in either Islam or in humanity. Furthermore, a concept such as performing *hijra* (migration) relates to the spirit of continuous life-long progress, opportunity, and change and to how it is even obligatory for a Muslims to remain in their Western countries when they can enhance the progress of the Muslim community in these countries rather than migrating to the ‘caliphate.’ In this respect, interpretations that undermine the polarizing and dehumanizing rhetoric of the ISIS narrative, including actions that can contribute to the greater good of society and the Muslim community, may be provided as part of the religious and spiritual rehabilitation.

## **For Families**

*Ensure that the rehabilitation and reintegration of the entire family is conducted simultaneously.*

Family bonds can be particularly strong, especially the relationships between children and their parents and siblings and can be powerful instruments to support psychological and social rehabilitation and reintegration. It is therefore highly important that parental figures and family members are involved in the process of rehabilitation and reintegration of children previously affiliated with ISIS. Because the program will not be indefinite, it is important that there is an appropriate

social environment around the child that can support his/her long-term stability, reinforce positive behavior, provide structured and appropriate consequences to negative behavior, celebrate successes, and address his/her needs.

There are, of course, some appropriate considerations for children whose parents may be charged with or incarcerated for terrorist crimes. This includes gender considerations; there are many cases in which mothers and their children are seeking to return to their home countries or communities, and the mother is known to have been affiliated with ISIS and will likely face charges. For example, a 26-year-old mother was arrested in Turkey for trying to leave Syria, who held New Zealand and Australian citizenship.<sup>59</sup> However, her Australian citizenship had been revoked, and there are significant questions around whom will support the trial and prosecution of the mother, as well as whom will handle the cases of her children without forcibly separating the children from the mother. In this case, transnational cooperation and protection of the children's rights will be two of the most critical considerations for their rehabilitation and reintegration process.

In the case where family members may have been involved in violent extremism, rehabilitation programs may need to consider how the rehabilitation and reintegration processes work both for individuals and for a family unit through conducting regular meetings and provide appropriate psychological and social services to ensure the ideologies and operations of terrorist groups do not continue underground.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, to ensure a successful reintegration, in case of the whole family who join the violent extremist group, families may need to be relocated to a different community upon release.

In the case where family members have not been involved in violent extremism, but have been exposed to ISIS or other violent extremist groups' propaganda and/or adhere to their values, there is also a need to conduct an assessment for them and provide appropriate psychological and social services, if needed, to decide whether or not to involve them in the plan for rehabilitation and reintegration, including providing skills and tools for handling challenging situations with the child.

In some cases, rehabilitation and reintegration involving family members may need to address the loss of parents and/or siblings in Iraq or Syria. For example, both the United Kingdom and Germany have repatriated orphaned children (minors), providing them with social support and services upon return.<sup>61</sup> It is important that the loss of family is factored into the psychological support given to the child. In some circumstances, there may be an additional adjustment for the child to acclimate to a foster home, or reintegrate in a residence with a family member such as a grandparent that would care for the child moving forward. Extra effort and care may be required for children who lost their family members or friends due to Coalition strikes on ISIS-held territories. Additional importance should be given to establishing and building trust as in the perception of these children anyone outside ISIS can be viewed as an enemy, and the reason for their loss.

*Provide resources, training and support to family members unaffiliated with ISIS.*

In some circumstances, such as when children are repatriated to home countries and custody is given to close family members, the families of children undergoing rehabilitation and reintegration have not been exposed to the ideology of ISIS. However, in the same way as teachers, family members need resources, training and support to aid the child to transition from their previous affiliation to their new life. For example, the family should be provided information about the child's therapy plan, and may receive training on Emotional Security Theory so that they are better able to intervene in the case of an actual or perceived threat to the child that may trigger an emotional response.

Moreover, family members may also need specialized counseling and social services to manage the behavior and emotional trauma of the child. For instance, the child may become aggressive at home, or open up about the violence that they witnessed in Iraq or Syria. In both of these cases, appropriate counseling may be necessary for the family members to guide the child towards a better path of rehabilitation and reintegration to their community and school.

## **For Social Media Companies**

*Leverage the knowledge of ‘in group’ and ‘out group’ constructs for natural language processing (NLP) and artificial intelligence (AI) responses to online terrorist content.*

The ISIS Files documents overall, and particularly the textbooks, provide a potential source of data that can be leveraged for identifying ‘in group’ and ‘out group’ constructs for natural language processing (NLP). The documents can be helpful in identifying and training for linguistic patterns and grammatical structures (in Arabic) that use the ‘us versus them’ language constructs in association with violent calls to action. ‘Othering’ language embedding have been used to detect cyber hate speech, focusing specifically on grammatical structures using second and third person plural (us/we and them/they) and associating these constructs with keywords and other forms of language detection.<sup>62</sup> A similar strategy could be useful in detecting terrorist content that follows similar patterns to the type of ideology that is contained in the ISIS Files. Moreover, because the textbooks contain text that is affiliated with ISIS’s narrative as well as other types of text on a variety of subjects—patterns that are likely to exist in the online environment—the texts themselves may be ideal to be utilized in supervised machine learning to detect future threats.

At the same time, since the ISIS narrative in the education-related documents relies heavily on the transference of Islamic symbols and themes to the ISIS narrative, it is important that the machine learning does not contain an inherent bias or incorrectly identify Islamic content as terrorist content. The ISIS Files documents may present an opportunity for distinguishing between the Islamic references and the parts of the narrative that can lead to violence: the use of polarizing language combined with a call to action.



*Work with practitioners and content creators to create a safe online environment that reduces polarization and builds resilience amongst youth.*

Since social media is a strong influencer on the cognitive and behavioral development of young people, practitioners that are working with youth affiliated with ISIS should connect with social media companies to help facilitate a supportive online environment for prevention or for rehabilitation and reintegration. For example, parents/guardians and teachers that are handling cases of ISIS-affiliated children may benefit from training from social media companies about how to find and evaluate information found on social media platforms, how to enhance safety features for children, and how to amplify messages that reduce polarization.

Moreover, social media companies can work with popular content creators that are in the general networks and interest groups of ISIS-affiliated children and young adults in order to promote positive and non-polarizing content in the online space. For example, social media companies may run workshops with social influencers to train them on how to better amplify messages that undercut the ‘us versus them’ construct, promote positive interactions between different identity groups, and highlight stories of individuals that have overcome trauma or conflict. In this way, the online environment surrounding children affiliated with ISIS can become a source of resilience, rather than a potential to reinforce the polarizing narrative of ISIS.

---

<sup>1</sup> In multiple trips to Iraq beginning in 2006, The New York Times correspondent Rukmini Callimachi collected thousands of files that were abandoned by ISIS in 11 cities as their strongholds were overtaken by the military campaign, with permission from local military units. The documents, which came to be known as “The ISIS Files,” constitute the largest collection of original files from ISIS that is held by any non-governmental entity. In September 2018, The New York Times announced a partnership with the George Washington University (GW) to preserve, digitize, translate, and provide analysis of The ISIS Files documents and publish them on an open, searchable website. Immediately after digitization of the files, the original copies of the documents were hand-delivered by The New York Times to the Embassy of the Republic of Iraq in Washington, D.C. The ISIS Files project only holds scanned copies of the documents and does not hold any original documents. Translation, redaction, and analysis were undertaken by GW with the advice and partnership of The Times. All document redaction was done in line with an ethical framework developed and implemented by GW. The Times holds no responsibility for the redaction of documents.

<sup>2</sup> Sara Zeiger, Farangiz Atamuradova, Lilah ElSayed and Muna Chung, “Planting the Seeds of the Poisonous Tree: Establishing a System of Meaning through ISIS Education, *George Washington University and Hedayah*, (February 2021), <https://isisfiles.gwu.edu/report/j3860694x>.

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this research, 29 textbooks and 40 additional background documents related to the educational system were included in the analysis. The textbooks included 16 from primary grades, 10 from secondary grades, and 3 from unknown grades; 27 in Arabic, 2 in English. The background documents include homework assignments and notes from coursework, handouts, letters and decrees from the Ministry of Education of ISIS, exam rules and test scores.

<sup>4</sup> Haroro J. Ingram, “Deciphering the siren call of militant Islamist propaganda: Meaning, credibility & behavioural change”, *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague* 7, no. 9 (September 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Eric Oehlerich, Mick Mulroy, and Liam McHugh, “Jannah or Jahannam: Options for dealing with ISIS detainees,” *Middle East Institute*, (October 2020), <https://www.mei.edu/publications/jannah-or-jahannam-options-dealing-isis-detainees>.

<sup>6</sup> “Iraq Attack: Twin suicide bombings in Baghdad kill 32,” *BBC*, January 21, 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55746676>

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF Iraq, “UNICEF helps 682,000 children access education in Iraq in 2016,” *Medium*, January 29, 2017, <https://medium.com/stories-from-unicef-in-iraq-english/unicef-helps-682-000-children-access-education-in-iraq-in-2016-818e6b70b87>.

<sup>8</sup> Bassem, Wassim, “Iraqi students forced to study without textbooks,” *Al-Monitor*, 17 November 2016, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/11/schools-iraq-textbooks-education.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council, “Iraq: Mosul still a pile of rubble one year on,” *ReliefWeb*, (2018), <https://reliefweb.int/report/iraq/iraq-mosul-still-pile-rubble-one-year>.

<sup>10</sup> UNAMI & OHCHR, “The right to education in Iraq: The legacy of ISIL territorial control on access to education,” (2020), <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/2020-02IraqRightEducationreport.pdf>.

---

<sup>11</sup> Norwegian Refugee Council, “Barriers from birth: Undocumented adolescent in Iraq sentenced to a life on the margins,” NRC, (2019), <https://www.nrc.no/resources/reports/barriers-from-birth/>

<sup>12</sup> United Nations, *The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*, (2010), [http://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC\\_united\\_nations\\_convention\\_on\\_the\\_rights\\_of\\_the\\_child.pdf](http://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> “The Issue of Depicting the Prophet Muhammad,” *BBC*, January 14, 2015, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30813742>.

<sup>14</sup> “France Teacher Attack: Seven killed over Samuel Paty’s killing,” *BBC*, October 22, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-54632353>.

<sup>15</sup> “Vienna: Police investigate links to terror gun attack,” *DW*, November 3, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/vienna-police-investigate-terror-links-to-gun-attack/a-55481276>.

<sup>16</sup> “Kujtim Fejzulaj,” Counter Extremism Project, <https://www.counterextremism.com/extremists/kujtim-fejzulaj>.

<sup>17</sup> RAN Centre of Excellence, “Child Returnees from Conflict Zones,” *Radicalisation Awareness Network Issue Paper* (November 2016), [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-papers/docs/issue\\_paper\\_child\\_returnees\\_from\\_conflict\\_zones\\_112016\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_child_returnees_from_conflict_zones_112016_en.pdf), 2.

<sup>18</sup> For example, the assessments could include a modified version of the Post-traumatic Stress Symptoms in Children (PTSS-C) scale or the Impact of Event scale.

<sup>19</sup> J.M. Cheek & S.R. Briggs, 2013, “Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV),” Measurement Instrument Database for the Social Science, retrieved from <https://www.midss.org/sites/default/files/aiq.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> The Implicit Association Test (IAT) has been adapted for children using photos instead of words. This has been used to test attitudes towards a variety of subjects, such as race or smoking. See Judy A. Andrews, Sarah E. Hampson, Anthony G. Greenwald, Judith Gordon and Chris Widdop, “Using the Implicit Association Test to Assess Children’s Implicit Attitudes toward Smoking,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* vol 40, issue 9 (September 2010), 2387-2406, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3090631/>; Williams, Amanda, and Jennifer R Steele. “The Reliability of Child-Friendly Race-Attitude Implicit Association Tests.” *Frontiers in psychology* vol. 7 1576, 24 Oct. 2016, doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01576.

<sup>21</sup> “Abu Dhabi Memorandum on Good Practices for Education and Countering Violent Extremism,” Global Counter Terrorism Forum, 2019, [https://www.thegctf.org/documents/10162/159880/14Sept19\\_GCTF+Abu+Dhabi+Memorandum.pdf](https://www.thegctf.org/documents/10162/159880/14Sept19_GCTF+Abu+Dhabi+Memorandum.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> Dana Hadra, “A how-to on countering violent extremism,” *Brookings*, March 21, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/markaz/2016/03/21/a-how-to-on-countering-violent-extremism/>

<sup>23</sup> International Organization for Migration and Optimum Analysis, “Community Perceptions Survey on the Return and Reintegration of Persons with Perceived Affiliation in Iraq,” *International Organization for Migration*, 2021, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

---

<sup>26</sup> Stevan Weine, Zachary Brahmabatt, Emma Cardeli, and Heidi Ellis, “Rapid review to inform the rehabilitation and reintegration of child returnees from the Islamic State,” *Annals of Global Health*, 2020, vol. 86, no. 64, <https://doi.org/10.5334/aogh.2835>.

<sup>27</sup> Benotman, and Malik, “The Children of Islamic State,” *Quilliam*, (2016), <https://www.quilliaminternational.com/shop/e-publications/the-children-of-islamic-state/>.

<sup>28</sup> Mary M. Wellman, “Child sexual abuse and gender differences: attitudes and prevalence,” *Child Abuse & Neglect* 17, issue 4 (July/August 1993):539-47, doi: 10.1016/0145-2134(93)90028-4.

<sup>29</sup> Amnesty International, “The Condemned: Women and Children Isolated, Trapped and Exploited in Iraq,” *Amnesty International*, 2018, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/MDE1481962018ENGLISH.PDF>.

<sup>30</sup> Bette L. Bottoms, Liana C. Peter-Hagene, Margaret C. Stevenson, Tisha R.A. Wiley, Tracey Schneider Mitchell, & Gail S. Goodman, “Explaining gender differences in jurors' reactions to child sexual assault cases,” *Behavioral Science Law* 32, no. 6 (November/December 2014): 789-812, doi: 10.1002/bsl.2147.

<sup>31</sup> “Textbook: Creed of the Muslim,” *The ISIS Files* 19\_001084, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> H. Rudolph Schaffer, *Key Concepts in Developmental Psychology*, (London: SAGE Publications, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> Henri Tajfel and John Turner, “An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict,” in *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. Stephen Worchel and William Austin (Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979); Yan Chen and Sherry Xin Li, “Group Identity and Social Preferences,” *The American Economic Review* 99, no. 1 (March 2009), doi: 10.1257/aer.99.1.431.

<sup>34</sup> See <https://generation.global/>.

<sup>35</sup> Erebus International, “Report to the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training: Encouraging Tolerance and Social Cohesion through School Education,” Erebus International, (July 2006) 44, [http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/Encouraging\\_Tolerance\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/_resources/Encouraging_Tolerance_Final_Report.pdf), p. 108.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Thomas, “Youth, terrorism and education: Britain’s Prevent programme,” *International Journal of Life-long Education special issue: ‘Youth, Social Crisis and Learning’* 35, no. 2 (2016): 171-187, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315668840\\_Youth\\_terrorism\\_and\\_education\\_Britain%27s\\_Prevent\\_programme](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315668840_Youth_terrorism_and_education_Britain%27s_Prevent_programme), pp. 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> Lynn Davies, *Educating against extremism*, (UK: Trentham Books, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> “Resilience guide for parents and teachers,” *American Psychological Association*, (August 2020), <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience-guide-parents>; “Building resilience in the classroom,” *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, (April 2018), <https://institute.global/advisory/building-resilience-classroom>.

<sup>39</sup> Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Ivo Veenkamp, Wedad Alhassen, Rafia Barakat, and Sara Zeiger, “The role of education in countering violent extremism,” *Hedayah and Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation*, (December 2013), [https://www.hedayahcenter.org/resources/reports\\_and\\_publications/the-role-of-education-in-cve/](https://www.hedayahcenter.org/resources/reports_and_publications/the-role-of-education-in-cve/).

---

<sup>40</sup>Leyre Zarobe and Hilary Bungay, “The role of arts activities in developing resilience and mental wellbeing in children and young people a rapid review of the literature,” *Perspectives in Public Health* 137, no. 6 (November 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757913917712283>.

<sup>41</sup> “Preventing violent extremism through sport: Technical Guide,” *United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime*, 2020, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/dohadeclaration/Sports/PVE/Guide\\_PVE\\_Ebook.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/dohadeclaration/Sports/PVE/Guide_PVE_Ebook.pdf), p. 57.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> <https://generation.global/>.

<sup>44</sup> Ian Jamison, “Essentials of dialogue,” Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, (March 2017), <https://institute.global/advisory/essentials-dialogue>.

<sup>45</sup> Save the Children, “An Unbearable Reality: The impact of war and displacement on children’s mental health in Iraq,” Save the Children, (June 2017), [https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/12182/pdf/iraq\\_an\\_unbearable\\_reality\\_june\\_2017\\_1.pdf](https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/12182/pdf/iraq_an_unbearable_reality_june_2017_1.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> UNAMI & OHCHR, “The right to education in Iraq: The legacy of ISIL territorial control on access to education,” 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Countries/IQ/2020-02IraqRightEducationreport.pdf>.

<sup>47</sup> Heidi Ellis and Mia Bloom, “Best Practices for Supporting the Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Children from Formerly-Controlled ISIS Territories,” *Minerva*, (June 2020), <https://minerva.defense.gov/Portals/47/documents/Best%20Practices%20for%20supporting%20the%20Reintegration%20and%20Rehabilitation%20Pamphlet.pdf?ver=2020-07-15-092341-047>.

<sup>48</sup> Al-Menasa, “Hal Yan’jah al-Waqf al-Sunni fi Tah’rir al-Manabir min al-Tadh’aruf,” [Will the Sunni Endowment Succeed in Purging Miniates of Extremism], (July 3, 2018), <https://www.al-menasa.net/2018/07/03/-تحرير-الوقف-السني-في-تحرير-المنابر-من/>.

<sup>49</sup> Da’irat al-Waqf al-Sunni, [The Sunni Endowment], Qism al-Thanaawiat, [Department of Secondary Education] accessed February 9, 2021, [https://altaleemaldeeney.com/?page\\_id=1322](https://altaleemaldeeney.com/?page_id=1322).

<sup>50</sup> See <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>.

<sup>51</sup> United Nations, “Key Principles for the Protection, Repatriation, Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Women and Children with Links to United Nations Listed Terrorist Groups,” *United Nations*, (2019), [https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/key\\_principles-april\\_2019.pdf](https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism/files/key_principles-april_2019.pdf).

<sup>52</sup> Ashish Kumar Sen, “Driven from Their Homes By ISIS, Minorities Face a Long Road Back in Iraq,” *USIP*, (July 1, 2020), <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/07/driven-their-homes-isis-minorities-face-long-road-back-iraq>.

<sup>53</sup> Dave van Zoonen, and Khogir Wirya, “Turkmen in Tal Afar Perceptions of Reconciliation and Conflict MERI Policy Report,” *Middle East Research Institute*, (July 2017), <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Turkmen-in-Tal-Afar-Perceptions-of-Reconciliation-and-Conflict-Report.pdf>, p. 15-16.

---

<sup>54</sup> Modelling Best Practice: Pakistan’s De-Radicalisation Programme, *Safe Together*, (November 2017), <http://www.safetogether.org/2017/11/modelling-best-practice-pakistans-de-radicalisation-programme/>.

<sup>55</sup> Claudia Catani, “Mental Health of Children Living in War Zones: A Risk and Protection Perspective,” *World Psychology* 17, issue 1, (February 2018): 104-105, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20496>.

<sup>56</sup> Anne Speckhard and Molly Ellenberg, “Can Case of Samantha Elhassani be a Positive Example for Repatriation of Other ISIS Wives?” November 16, 2020, *Homeland Security Today*, <https://www.hstoday.us/subject-matter-areas/counterterrorism/can-case-of-samantha-elhassani-be-a-positive-example-for-repatriation-of-other-isis-wives/>.

<sup>57</sup> Ellis and Bloom.

<sup>58</sup> Feriha Peracha, Rafia Raees Khan and Sara Savage, “Sabaoon: Educational Methods Successfully Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism,” in *Expanding Research on Countering Violent Extremism*, ed. Sara Zeiger, Hedayah and Edith Cowan University, (2016): 85.

<sup>59</sup> “With Their Mother’s Australian Citizenship Cancelled over Alleged ISIS Links, How Will New Zealand Deal with Her Children?” *The Conversation*, February 17, 2021, <https://theconversation.com/with-their-mothers-australian-citizenship-cancelled-over-alleged-isis-links-how-will-nz-deal-with-her-children-155385>.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Gyte, Sara Zeiger and Thomson Hunter, “Blueprint of a Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center: Guiding Principles for Rehabilitating and Reintegrating Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters and their Family Members,” *Hedayah*, January 2021, [https://www.hedayahcenter.org/resources/reports\\_and\\_publications/rftfrehabblueprint/](https://www.hedayahcenter.org/resources/reports_and_publications/rftfrehabblueprint/).

<sup>61</sup> “First ISIS Orphans Return to the UK as Germany Announces Similar Repatriation,” *The National*, November 27, 2019, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/europe/first-isis-orphans-returned-to-the-uk-as-germany-announces-similar-repatriation-1.941311>.

<sup>62</sup> Wafa Alorainy, Pete Burnap, Han Liu and Matthew L. Williams, “‘The Enemy Among Us’: Detecting Cyber Hate Speech with Threats-based Othering Language Embeddings,” *ACM Transactions on the Web* 13, no. 3 (July 2019), <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3324997>.