Considerations for risk assessment and management with women and children returning from Iraq and Syria

What is a Risk Assessment?
A systematic analysis to determine the level of potential threat or harm to society, others, or the self and mitigation strategies required to reduce this potential threat or harm. Risk assessments have historically focused on those who are already engaged with terrorism to inform sentencing, rehabilitation, and reintegration. However, risk assessments for those with potential for recidivism or potential for radicalizing others could be used to prevent violent radicalization.

A complex interplay of multiple personal and socio-ecological push factors, pull factors, and vulnerabilities define risk. Risk assessment and management of women and children returning from Iraq and Syria must consider the diversity of profiles and experiences present.

The children who grew up in ISIS territory

- **Up to 3 years**: Born during the military pushback of ISIS
  - Born to life-threatening conditions

- **Between 4 and 6**: Born during the peak of territorial expansion between 2013 and 2016
  - Only ever experienced war and displacement

- **Between 7 and 13**: Taken to ISIS territories between 2014 and 2018
  - Suddenly taken away from other family members
  - Exposed to the ideology and violence of ISIS more strongly than younger children
  - Came into contact with weapons at a young age
  - Lives have long been influenced by conflict, war, and migration

Differences by age
How can “Trauma-Informed” care help with risk assessment and management approaches?

A “Trauma-Informed” lens asks what has happened or is happening to an individual that might be contributing to their behavior. It acknowledges that behaviors do not always accurately communicate feelings, intentions, and threats, and seeks to understand the unmet needs that might underlie behaviors.

Trauma-Informed care posits that protective factors can reduce adverse impacts of trauma, building resilience can help buffer adverse effects of trauma, considering context and unmet needs in interventions will effectively reduce unwanted behaviors, and comprehensively addressing hurt early on helps to reduce the likelihood of an individual hurting others. Placing emphasis on developing an understanding of meaning and context in relation to an individual’s risk during case formulation, a critical aspect of risk assessment that “bridges” assessment and management, facilitates the process of hypothesis testing, reflection, and ongoing assessment/revision.

Taking a comprehensive, multi-dimensional, balanced approach to understanding risks, needs, and resilience factors across the social ecology in addition to identifying barriers to engagement in interventions is a pragmatic framework for assessment: