



## BASELINE STUDY

# With Participatory Democracy for a Kosovo without Radicalization

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The baseline study is part of the project "With Participatory Democracy for a Kosovo Without Radicalization," a project led by Advocacy Training and Resource Center (ATRC) and implemented in partnership with Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED), Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), Security Policy Research Center (SPRC), Kosovo Center for Business Support (KCBS) and Democracy Plus (D+). The project is funded by the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF).



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## **Executive Summary**

This study has sought to understand the state of play on radicalization and violent extremism in Kosovo while attributing particular weight to identifying the needs and opportunities for the reintegration of returning FTFs and their families. Reintegration is one of the pillars of Kosovo's National CVE Strategy (2015-2020) along early identification, prevention and intervention, yet so far most of the institutional work has been devoted to the latter three. The importance on the process of reintegration has, however increased as over 100 individuals of about 400 that traveled to the Middle East between 2012-2016 have already returned, and the first FTFs that have completed their sentence are already out of prison. Moreover, an increasing number, including women and children, are expected to return in the near future.

Using surveys with 659 respondents across five regions of Kosovo, interviews with families of FTFs and focus group discussions with Municipal Community Safety Councils (MCSCs), the study finds that poor economic conditions are more important than it has often been suggested in explaining individual motivations to join the conflict in the Middle East among Kosovar nationals. This coupled with poor quality of education; especially lack of critical thinking skills, were most frequently cited across respondents as main vulnerability factors aiding radicalization and violent extremism. Our findings about the means however, largely confirm what others have found; that is, radicalization mainly spread through radical Imams and foreign NGOs that targeted specific groups among the population such as the poor, those with low levels of education, but most importantly the impressionable. .

Media were largely seen with a critical eye as respondents believed the ease with which pretty much anyone could access information on the Middle East and see images of people being slaughtered incited individuals to travel to the Middle East. Families of FTFs also claimed media, internet and social networks to have had an impact in driving their family member to travel to the

conflict areas. In fact, while media remain an essential tool in keeping the public opinion informed, at the same time they seem to devote much more focus on 'the violent and the sensational' as they struggle for survival amid other forms of communication (UNESCO 2017, p.11,12).\_This feeling of discontent with the media among our respondents along with a general view that there is lack of investigative journalism in Kosovo perhaps explains why respondents felt that the media can only play a limited role in preventing others from joining and help those that have already done so reintegrate upon their return.

The report reveals many barriers to reintegration at the community level. By way of example, there is very little knowledge at the local level about the profile of individuals who have been involved in the conflict. Members of MCSCs, a local security forum made up of police commanders, religious clerics, media, NGOs, etc., existent in each municipality of Kosovo, were generally surprised of the number of individuals from their municipality that joined the war as reported by the most recent Kosovo Police data. This suggests the process of reintegration of returning FTFs and their families may be more problematic than thought. Likewise, the reluctance of state institutions to share the credentials of families of FTFs not only with researchers but also other parties, perhaps because of safety and security issues or for other reasons, further hinders the reintegration process.

Moreover, the public seems equally divided between those that welcome the reintegration of FTFs and would favour an approach along the Aarhus Model as opposed to incarceration, and those who are fearful and hence against their reintegration. Apart from a social stigma and poor media image of FTFs and returnees, reintegration of the latter, in terms of benefits that may accrue to them, may alienate others who have not traveled. Finally, municipalities are very poorly equipped for reintegrating FTFs and their families. In fact, funding is seen as very problematic generally considering that the central Government has not allocated money for the implementation of its CVE strategy and the

municipalities, as a result, have no budget. Some of them, including Prishtina - the capital, reportedly have not undertaken any single activity on CVE.

Our study shows mixed evidence in terms of how important trainings and lectures on countering radicalization and violent extremism are in helping prevent the phenomena among youth. Our FGD respondents were less supportive of such activities compared to our youth respondents who viewed them as quite necessary. Among the former, participants reasoned their position on the fact that the audience that attends these events is largely the same – educated youngsters who are also actively involved in discourse on social and political issues. Rather, they emphasized the need for more out-of-school - sports and cultural activities as well as increased job opportunities as means to prevent radicalization among youth. Whereas, local authorities highlighted very specific issues, such as psychologists, rehab programs, sports facilities, etc. that they need support, expertise and funding on. On the whole, the study shows that there is large room for interventions but they must be tailored to the local needs and capacities as given by our respondents.

## **Acronyms**

CVE – Countering Violent Extremism

FGDs – Focus Group Discussions

KP – Kosovo Police

FTFs – Foreign Terrorist Fighters

ICITAP – International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program

IJJ – International Institute of Justice and Rule of Law

IOM – International Organization for Migration

MCSCs – Municipal Community Safety Councils

MoIA – Ministry of Internal Affairs

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

USAID – United States Agency for International Development

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## 1 Purpose, coverage and scope

The purpose of the baseline study has been to provide an understanding of the current situation on radicalization and violent extremism in Kosovo based on which project interventions by the consortium can be made and evaluated later in the process. In particular, this study has sought to provide answers to three main questions. *Firstly, why do individuals become radicalized?* In other words, what are the main drivers behind individual motivations to radicalize and travel to the Middle East? *Secondly, how are individuals radicalized and recruited and what role do Imams, peer groups, educational institutions, media and other actors play on the process?* *Thirdly, and most importantly, which are the vulnerable groups and their needs, as well as what institutional capacities are in place to prevent the phenomena and help the reintegration of returnees and their families?*

The first and second questions have previously been explored within the Kosovo context. A number of existing studies suggest a mix of ideological, psychological, economic, social and cultural factors that explain individual motivations to radicalize and travel to Syria and Iraq (UNDP 2017a, IRI 2017, Shtuni 2016). These factors are normally categorized dichotomously into 'push factors'; the conditions that aid individual tendencies to radicalize - such as social marginalization, poor governance, human rights violations, and widespread corruption, as well as 'pull factors'; those that directly affect their incentives to travel – such as material rewards, the sense of belonging, the feeling of importance or that of making a contribution (USAID 2011, p.3,4).

Others have preferred to use a trichotomous measure by grouping the drivers of violent extremism into structural motivators; such as corruption, unemployment, inequality, discrimination, etc., individual incentives which include alienation, adventure, material rewards, etc., as well as enabling factors or intermediary ones; such as the presence of radical imams, access to online radical material, and so on (Khalil and Zeuthen 2016, p.9). While there may be good reasons to use the latter categorization, we believe the first and

second components of this categorization tap into the drivers of violent extremism whereas the last one; namely enabling factors, are the means through which individuals become radicalized and/or driven into violent extremism. In this study, both of these questions are addressed, hence we do not find it problematic that the binary measure is used.

Although establishing a causal relationship may be difficult under circumstances in which both poor and well-off individuals have traveled, studies suggest that 'socio-economic challenges – understood as lack of opportunity and a low standard of education' may have aided the propensity of Kosovars to join foreign conflicts (UNDP 2017a, p.24). Unemployment rate at the national level is about 30% percent whereas, among youth aged 15-24 it is about 53% (European Commission Report on Kosovo, 2018 p.83). Whereas, the National Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Strategy attributes direct role to such reasons arguing that 'the main driving factors are the essential and structural factors such as the economic and social challenges/weaknesses and inadequate institutional capacity and their integrity' (2015, p.13).

Feelings of widespread corruption (EC 2018, p.4), may have also had an impact on individuals' propensity to travel. A USAID risk assessment on violent extremism in Kosovo sees perceptions of corruption to be closely related to expectations people held that independence would bring about more opportunities for people (2015, p.5). It is observed that corruption on a large scale will often lead 'to the root conditions that too often breed or give sanctuary to violent extremism: anger, moral outrage, and dissatisfaction for a system or society that allows some to thrive through dishonesty, at the expense of the rest' (VOA 2015). When this is the case, it makes it easier for ISIS to appeal to and garner support among such groups.

Low levels of education have also been linked one's propensity to radicalize, although evidence is mixed. A report by USAID (2011) writes 'several interviewees viewed the current education as weak and perhaps weakening'. Moreover, although difficult to measure, the quality of education that lacks



critical thinking skills and 'favors simple and uncritical acceptance of 'facts' when presented by a perceived authority would seem to make individuals vulnerable to falling prey to slick propaganda of a black and white worldview of groups like ISIL' (p.4). Yet, a report by UNDP that interviewed returning FTFs in Kosovo concluded that 'the level of education of interviewees did not appear to have a strong impact on the radicalization process' although, 'relatively poor critical thinking skills were observable' (2017a, p. 28). This could imply that attempts to reintegrate returnees should also focus on fostering critical thinking skills among them. As Krueger and Malečková point out, 'if the international community attempts to use education as part of a strategy to reduce terrorism, it should not limit itself to increasing years of schooling, but must also consider the content of education' (2003, p.142).

In fact, the role of education is widely acknowledged by scholars in countering violent extremism, though many have warned that it may be 'a double-edged sword' (Mercy Corps 2016, p.3). More specifically, if it is targeted separately from other efforts to build resilience among the community, it may even increase youth support for violence because it may 'raise expectations, which, if unmet, can turn into frustration and anger' (ibid). Hence, in order to look effectively into the root causes of violent extremism and be able to address those shortcomings accordingly, 'education initiatives must look within and beyond the classroom and into the broader mechanisms of governance, inclusion and representation' (INEE 2017, p.4).

Another factor which is often looked at is social identity defined in the sense of group membership based on religious affiliation, which for some offers a worldview 'unmatched by identification with other groups' (Ysseldyk et al 2010, p.67). Some Kosovars, the majority of them belonging to the Muslim faith, may have identified closely with fellow Muslims in the Middle East (defined as their 'in-group'). Hence, when 'their' religious community was threatened, they were prepared to step up and join the latter in protecting that community (thus attacking the 'out-group') (see Berger 2018). A study by Shtuni highlights cases of FTFs who had claimed that their motivations to travel were shaped by the

need to defend civilians and fulfill a religious obligation. Moreover, the latter was often coupled with memories of 'violence, rape, humiliation and massive expulsion' from the 1999 war, and as such these youngsters were willing to help Sunnis in the Middle East against those threatening their group identity (2016, p.8,10).

When one looks at how individuals in Kosovo were radicalized, there is little disagreement that radical Imams from Kosovo and Macedonia; mainly outside the authority of the Islamic Council of Kosovo (BIK), came to Kosovo after having studied in the Middle East and helped spread radical Islam; often rationalizing travel to the Middle East and the use of violence, marking this way a major shift from the traditional Islam which has been practiced for ages in Kosovo (Kursani 2015, RCC 2016, UNDP 2017b). On the other hand, local 'humanitarian' Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), funded by money coming in from the Middle East, which operated uncontrolled until about 2015 when the state began closing them down also bear the burden (Gazeta Express 2015). Some of these organizations would continue to operate under a different name – making it difficult for state authorities to track even after they were shut down by the government in 2016.

A major role is also attributed to internet (Qirezi 2017, UNDP 2017a, UNDP 2017b) considering that internet penetration in Kosovo is as high as 73% among the general population and 55% among youth of ages 10-29 (STIKK 2013, p.18). In particular, videos of ISIS recruiters appealing to supporters elsewhere which were shown on YouTube, and could easily be accessed by individuals of all ages, portraying, among other things, crimes against children, could easily appeal to the people in Kosovo who felt sympathetic about their own griefs, or those of their relatives, during the 1999 war. Moreover, social media, such as Facebook and Twitter were used to connect with those recruiters or influence others in doing so (UNDP 2017b, p.17). A report by the UNDP measuring perceptions of radicalization at the community level reports educational institutions; especially through peer groups and lack of teacher awareness,

and media as equally important factors in explaining how individuals radicalized (2017b, p.43,52,53).

Yet, a few gaps can be identified among this research. Firstly, most of these studies use single methods of data collection; normally qualitative - interviews with returning fighters and their families, or focus groups with relevant stakeholders (IRI 2017). Secondly, the few studies that use mixed methods of data collection (UNDP 2017b), they only explore the underlying factors without addressing the individuals' needs and institutional capacities. Hence, they run short of explaining the interplay between the underlying causes and the kind of interventions needed to help prevent radicalization and reintegrate those returning from the conflict areas as well as their families.

The last question, therefore, is the most important for the baseline study as it seeks to understand the risks surrounding particular groups and their needs. Likewise, it aims to assess the institutional capacities for reintegration of returnees and gaps thereof, in order to be able to develop and make the necessary interventions by the consortium. Of particular importance will be to understand opportunities for social and economic integration of returnees, prisoners and their families as well as steps that can be taken to enhance the role of youth in preventing radicalization and violent extremism. Figure 1 shows the linkage between all three research questions, which is to aid our understanding of the policy areas that need intervention, the kind of groups the program should work with and the nature of activities to undertake. Therefore, this should provide a blueprint for the organizations involved.

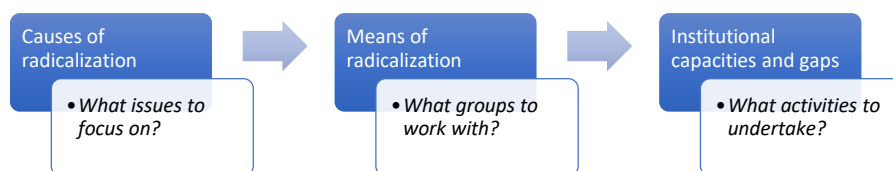


Figure 1. Relationship between three research questions and anticipated project outcomes

## 1.1 FIGURES

Before delving any deeper on the three research questions, it is important to give an overview of the numbers. According to Kosovo Police data – its Counterterrorism Department - and as presented in Table 1, as of July 2018, 358 individuals have traveled to the Middle East between 2012 and now which includes 252 men (70%), 49 women (14%) and 57 children (16%). An additional 55 children have been born in the conflict areas out of at least one Kosovan parent or of Kosovan origin, increasing the number to 413. Of the total, 128 (119 men and 6 women) have returned to Kosovo, 75 (all men) have been killed, 3 (one man, one woman and a child) are reported to have died from natural causes, and 207 (57 men, 42 women and 108 children including the ones born there) still remain in the conflict areas.

While research shows that women may have taken different roles upon arrival in the Middle East, and both single and married women have traveled (Mietz 2016, p.5), Kosovo women that joined foreign wars are, in principle, not considered combatants, unlike all men that did so. Hence, although the number of travelers is 413, the number of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs), though often misreported, is 252. When the latter number is put within a larger context, Kosovo has about 148 FTFs per million population (1.7 million inhabitants), but at the same time the population is predominantly Muslim. Therefore, while the number of FTFs per million population may be regarded as high, this number is relatively low when compared to the number of FTFs among the Muslim populations of other, including Western, countries.

	Middle East	Returned	Killed	Died of natural causes	Total
Men (FTFs)	57	119	75	1	252
Women	42	6	0	1	49
Children traveled	54	3	0	0	57

Children born there	54	0	0	1	55
Total	207	128	75	3	413

Table 1. Individuals that traveled to or were born in the Middle East  
(Source: Kosovo Police – Counterterrorism Department, 2018)

From the 301 men and women that traveled, 65% (168 men and 29 women) of them have criminal backgrounds having been engaged in one or more criminal activities prior to traveling. This is not contrary to what has been found to be the case with those recruited elsewhere because of how these criminals feel about joining ISIS. As noted, the 'high-risk, high-intensity Islamist activism' is well suited for the needs of 'criminals and ex-cons providing them with a supportive community of fellow outsiders, a schedule of work, a positive identity, and the promise of cleansing away past sins' (The Atlantic 2016). In fact, Basra and Neumann also emphasize what he calls 'the redemption narrative', whereby individuals join 'to break with their criminal past, and make up for their 'sins' hence, providing them the rationale for turning to religion and joining jihadist groups (2016, p.28).

The fact that FTFs have prior criminal convictions may pose hurdles for prevention, but especially the reintegration aspect of CVE. To be able to understand the reasons behind their motivation to travel to the Middle East, one would have to understand the reasons for their indulgence in criminal activities prior. Moreover, according to the Malta Principles for Reintegrating Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters, in order for the community to be able to reintegrate the returning FTFs with previous criminal records, a reintegration project should be tailored at the individual accordingly (Hedayah and IIJ).

Only 10% of the FTFs (29 men and 0 women) in Kosovo are reported by the Kosovo Police to have higher education. These figures are somewhat comparable to the national rate of 7% of the population that have attained tertiary education (Rexhaj 2016, p. 29). In fact, these data are also comparable to those found elsewhere. A UN report with a sample size of 43 FTFs reports only

16% with a bachelor's degree, while 73% with no further education beyond high school (Office of Counterterrorism 2017, p.28). On the whole, then, FTFs do not appear to be more educated than average citizens. Neither do they seem to have 'more advanced skills that might help them to make better-informed decisions' (ibid).

When the numbers are broken down by regions, the largest number of FTFs; namely 58 come from Prishtina, 47 from Ferizaj, 41 from each Mitrovica and Gjilan, 32 from Prizren, 22 from Peja and 11 from Gjakova. The following Table summarizes these figures however, Peja and Gjakova are outside the scope of this research and therefore little attention will be devoted to those two regions. In terms of the 128 that returned. Of those that returned about 40 are still serving prison time while 7 have been released after completing their sentences. Our attempts to further classify the number of returnees based on municipality were null despite our request addressed to the Correctional Services. Reportedly, the movement of returnees often changes making it impossible to track their whereabouts.

	Prishtina	Ferizaj	Mitrovica	Gjilan	Prizren	Peja	Gjakova	Total
Men (FTFs)	58	47	41	41	32	22	11	252
Women	19	5	4	9	8	4	0	49
Children traveled	23	8	7	7	5	7	0	57
Children born there	17	11	9	7	4	3	4	55
Total	117	71	61	64	49	36	15	413

Table 2. Number of individuals that traveled to the Middle East by region  
(Source: Kosovo Police – Counterterrorism Department, 2018)

## 1.2 INSTITUTIONAL MEASURES

Kosovo is considered to have 'a comprehensive legal framework that covers all criminal aspects related to terrorism' (U.S. Department of State 2016). In April 2015, Kosovo Assembly adopted Law No. 05/L-002 that prohibits its citizens from joining conflicts in any foreign territories and condemns other activities related to terrorism such as organizing, financing, recruiting, leading or training persons or groups with the purpose of joining wars in foreign countries. The punishment foreseen in the law is between 5 and 15 years in prison. The 2010 Law No. 03/L-196 on the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing was also amended in 2013 through Law No. 04/L-178 7 in order to combat money laundering and terrorist financing.

In September of 2015, the Government adopted the National Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Strategy (2015-2020) and Action Plan (AP) which outlines specific activities for governmental and non-governmental institutions, including media and religious communities. The local governments were not part of the working group that drafted the national strategy and action plan. They were rather represented by their parent institution – the Ministry of Local Government Administration. Yet, the AP foresees quite a large number of activities which the municipalities should undertake. An example, has been the Referral Mechanism in the Municipality of Gjilan, established locally but with the support of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA), ICITAP and UNDP in 2017. The initiative, which mirrors the Prevent programme in the UK, is comprised of local religious leaders, psychologists, community police officers, and other relevant actors, whose task is to deal with radicalized individuals who may be referred by different institutions and/or individuals.

Apart from leaving municipalities outside the table, a problematic issue with the National Strategy is that the Government has not put any funding aside for the implementation of the Strategy, which it normally does for the strategies it adopts. Therefore, most of the activities undertaken by state institutions have

either been free of cost, or funded by international organizations such as ICITAP, IJJ, IOM, Hedayah, OSCE, UNDP, USAID, or foreign Embassies including the US Embassy, British Embassy, and Italian Embassy. Moreover, albeit until this year, much more focus was devoted to the first three pillars (early identification, prevention and intervention) as opposed to reintegration. But, the need to devote much emphasis on the latter has increased considering that the first inmates have already been released and also that the number of returnees; especially women and children, will potentially increase.

The Government has appointed a US expert, seconded by ICITAP, to work with radicalization in prisons and rehabilitation programs in 2016. Starting from March 2018, training programs have been rolled out for prison staff mainly, that include vocational training, religious counseling, communication skills etc. Inmates will also benefit from the program if they agree to take part as the entire program is voluntary. It was mentioned during our interview with the ICITAP officer that the risk assessment of prison inmates has not been finalized yet which would help categorize them and offer the adequate support accordingly. ICITAP is also planning to buy equipment for the Correctional Services which would be used by inmates when providing them with vocational training [Interview with ICITAP, 14 Aug 2018].

In terms of reintegration outside prisons, this year the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA) established a Division on Reintegration of FTFs and their families within its Reintegration Department which will have a chair, and three officers. The division aims to work with FTFs, their families, returnees and the communities in both prevention and reintegration and will also have an oversight role of local institutions working on reintegration. During our interview with an MoIA official working on the matter, it was not mentioned that they have a budget but that so far the US Embassy and ICITAP have assisted them with expertise whereas IOM has provided emergency funding (mainly food and hygienic packages) to all categories [Interview with MoIA officer, 23 Aug 2018]. In each municipality, there are local offices for returns and communities which will be involved in the reintegration process, but these offices will not specifically be



dealing with FTFs and their families only. As mentioned, they primarily deal with returned illegal migrants. All in all, very few reintegration efforts have been put in place although the main focus has now turned to it.

## **2 Methodology**

This study first conducted a desk review of the existing literature and the legislation in place, and then used both qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection. When combined, qualitative research along with quantitative ones can give us a richer understanding of radicalization and violent extremism. As viewed, interviews normally help us explore specific mechanisms that connect drivers of violent extremism with outcomes, whereas surveys are useful in testing these links in a more systematic way (Nanes and Lau 2018). More specifically, quantitative methods (surveys) have been used to gather information on Population Group 2: General Youth Population of ages 15-30, whereas qualitative methods (interviews and focus groups) have been used to collect data on Population Group 1: Returnees, Prisoners and their Families. Although different methods have been used to collect data on separate population groups, the findings from both surveys and interviews have been triangulated and are largely consistent. The following section explains each of these methods separately.

### **2.1 SURVEYS**

Based on the five clusters as identified in Terms of Reference, namely Prishtina, Prizren, Gjilan, Ferizaj and Mitrovica; we used data from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS) to identify the size and the distribution of population of Kosovo<sup>1</sup>. KAS provides lower, middle and upper variants of population forecasts for individual age groups, including totals and gender split. In order to avoid any

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<sup>1</sup> Estimated Kosovo population in 2017 was 1.8million.

over or under estimation population size, the middle variant was used – allowing to estimate a size of approximately 496,623 falling in the category of 15 – 30 year old group, within the five clusters.

The sample size (n) was estimated using the following formula

$$n = \frac{p(1-p)}{\frac{e^2}{z^2} + \frac{p(1-p)}{N}}$$

where  $p = 0.5$  was used to give the most conservative estimate (i.e. largest possible value of  $n$ ),  $e = 5\%$  ( or 0.05 as a decimal) is the margin of error,  $z = 2.58$  is the normalized value for a 99% confidence, and  $N = 496,623$  is the population size. This resulted in a sample size of  $n = 645$ .

Lack of a complete list of individuals across the country led us to identify different parts/areas within each municipality. This led to convenience sampling being used within each municipality. Five students were selected to gather the data in the field. To further enhance the sampling methodology, students were purposely selected from the five regions – thus, the student resident of Ferizaj collected the data from that region, the one from Gjilan did so for the Gjilani region and so on. Students were given clear guidance from the research authors and had to report regularly about data collection and the problems encountered.

In general, few problems were reported. The main problem related to subjects being hesitant to answer the questions given the nature of the topic at hand. For instance, a number that agreed to take part at first, withdrew once the researcher informed them about the topic. Moreover, in the municipality of Mamusha, the region of Prizren, initial sampling methodology required three people to be part of this survey, but there no participants were willing to be interviewed. Nevertheless, this was considered as statistically insignificant to the overall picture. In other cases, some respondents that participated did not provide their contact number which would be used to validate answers. Despite, their responses were still taken into account. The other problem

concerned respondents not answering all questions; with a response range between 83% (question 6, n=546) and over 99% (question 8, n=656).

Tables 3 and 4 provide the number of respondents by region/municipality, and gender. In total, 659 of them took part in this survey, although, as indicated, not all answered all questions.

Region	Male	Percent	Female	Percent	Total	Percent
Prishtina	113	17.1%	92	14.0%	205	31.1%
Prizren	99	15.0%	79	12.0%	178	27.0%
Gjilan	46	7.0%	45	6.8%	91	13.8%
Ferizaj	56	8.5%	56	8.5%	112	17.0%
Mitrovica	40	6.1%	33	5.0%	73	11.1%
Total	354	53.7%	305	46.3%	659	100%

Table 3. Survey respondents by region and gender

Region	Municipality	Male		Female		Total	
Prishtina	Prishtina	39	5.9%	52	7.9%	91	13.8%
	Fushe Kosova	7	1.1%	10	1.5%	17	2.6%
	Gllgovc	20	3.0%	7	1.1%	27	4.1%
	Lipjan	14	2.1%	11	1.7%	25	3.8%
	Obiliq	6	0.9%	2	0.3%	8	1.2%
	Podujeva	27	4.1%	10	1.5%	37	5.6%
Prizren	Prizren	53	8.0%	46	7.0%	99	15.0%
	Malisheva	18	2.7%	11	1.7%	29	4.4%
	Suhareka	19	2.9%	13	2.0%	32	4.9%
	Dragash	9	1.4%	9	1.4%	18	2.7%
Gjilan	Gjilan	24	3.6%	23	3.5%	47	7.1%
	Kamenica	9	1.4%	10	1.5%	19	2.9%
	Viti	13	2.0%	12	1.8%	25	3.8%
Ferizaj	Ferizaj	33	5.0%	34	5.2%	67	10.2%
	Hani i Elezit	3	0.5%	3	0.5%	6	0.9%
	Kaçanik	11	1.7%	11	1.7%	22	3.3%
	Shtime	9	1.4%	8	1.2%	17	2.6%
Mitrovica	Mitrovica	15	2.3%	12	1.8%	27	4.1%
	Skenderaj	11	1.7%	9	1.4%	20	3.1%
	Vushtri	14	2.1%	12	1.8%	26	3.9%
Total		354	53.7%	305	46.3%	659	100.0%

Table 4. Survey respondents by municipality and gender

## 2.2 INTERVIEWS

In comparison to surveys, interviews are better suited to gather insight from sensitive categories, such as returning foreign fighters, and allow them the freedom to provide information which may be very relevant but not necessarily anticipated by the research team. Our goal had been to conduct 30 interviews; 10 with prisoners, 10 with returnees (out of prison) and 10 with their families. We have only conducted four interviews with families of FTFs – in two cases we interviewed fathers of FTFs, one of whom still remains in the conflict areas, and in two other cases we interviewed wives of FTFs who have reportedly been killed. The interviews were conducted in cafes and private homes. While this may not give us enough variation to draw any conclusive insight from it, we will nevertheless report the findings within our findings from the focus group discussions.

Attempts from our side to schedule more interviews were unsuccessful despite our intense efforts to do so both formally and informally. Formally, we reached out to a number of stakeholders such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Kosovo Police, the Correctional Services, journalists, international organizations, and local non-governmental organizations; including INSID (that has been formed out of returning FTFs). Informally, we reached out to police station commanders, other members of MCSCs, our own family members and relatives, and many more. We were often told that FTFs and their families are wary of being interviewed from many journalists and researchers but the ones we interviewed were happy that, as they put it, 'someone seems to care about them'. As per the FTFs in prison, the response of the Correctional Services was that interviewing them is not allowed for security reasons and due to the fact that inmates are currently undergoing reintegration.

The interviews we conducted with families of FTFs have been semi-structured to allow respondents the freedom to express their views in their own terms, yet carefully guided by the interviewer. There were 20 questions in total which took approximately between 1-1.5 hours of the informants' time. The close-ended questions were normally concerned with demographic information and information about activities of interest, whereas the open-ended questions sought to understand the reasons behind their radicalization, the ways through which they radicalized, their feelings about institutional support or lack of thereof, as well as their expectations and thoughts about their potential roles in the society (See Annex).

When the questionnaire was designed, our purpose was to ask questions without using the term radicalization or violent extremism. Attempts were made to adopt some questions which have been used previously, even in other contexts (e.g. RCC 2016), but were tailored to the Kosovo context. The questionnaires were then discussed thoroughly with the consortium and based on the feedback we received, changes were made accordingly. In general, one questionnaire was used for all three categories (families of FTFs, MCSC and youth aged 15-30) but some questions were replaced with other in cases where they seemed more appropriate. All questionnaires are given in the Annex.

#### 2.2.1 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Aware of the ethical issues that may arise because of the sensitivity surrounding the phenomena of radicalization and violent extremism, we took a couple of measures to address these challenges. Firstly, because informants may have felt that information was being sought which may in turn be used against them, at the outset we explained the purpose of the project and why they were being interviewed. At the same time, we ensured them that their responses will remain strictly anonymous. Secondly, we needed to obtain some form of consent that their insight can be used for our research purposes, so we obtained formal request from each interviewee (in the case of families of FTFs)

that their answers can be used for the research purposes. Thirdly, interviewees were advised to refrain from providing information outside the scope of this research that may have potentially raised other ethical issues.

### 2.3 FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS (FGDs)

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) gave us the opportunity to reach out to a number of municipal officials and community members who could pinpoint to the institutional gaps and opportunities to intervene. When conducting FGDs with Municipal Community Safety Councils (MCSCs), we chose two municipalities from each region according to the highest number of individuals that traveled to the Middle East, as reported in the Kosovo Police data. This came down to Prishtina and Lipjan, Mitrovica and Skenderaj, Gjilan and Viti, Ferizaj and Kaçanik, as well as Prizren and Dragash. MCSCs of Fushë Kosovë and Vushtri were also approached, but in the case of the former the coordinator declined to convene the council and in the case of the latter the forum could not be gathered in the absence of a green light from the Mayor; as chair of this forum, which despite our attempts we did not obtain. In any case Vushtri was substituted with Skenderaj which had the same number of individuals that traveled to the Middle East.

Scheduling FGDs with MCSCs was not easy because by law they are only required to have six meetings per year, which they normally plan and schedule ahead of time. When they meet, they also get paid for attending. Moreover, some members of MCSCs were on holiday at the time we reached out to the coordinators. Despite, the majority of coordinators we contacted were very helpful and agreed to gather their MCSCs in a really short period of time. Within a period of three weeks we managed to speak to 10 MCSCs which included over 150 participants including deputy mayors, police commanders, Imams, priests, municipal directors of education, civil society representatives, etc. The discussions took place in local municipal premises and, on average, they

lasted about one hour, with the longest lasting 2.5 hours and the shortest 30 minutes.

Generally, all FGDs went smooth apart from the one in Kacanik where there was a feeling of discontent and hesitation to talk on reasons that in the past these forums have brought no concrete projects for them. Some of the participants decided to leave the meeting, but the majority of them agreed to stay for half an hour. Not all questions could be asked during this time so we decided to leave some of them out depending on the conversation. In the case of Skenderaj, there was also hesitation to partake as participants considered the meeting irrelevant. We spent 30 min of the time to convince the few members why we were undertaking the project and only 30 min discussing some of the questions. Albeit their answers should be treated with caution as they were given in circumstances of great doubt about the relevance of the project.

### **3. Analysis of the findings**

#### **3.1 SURVEY FINDINGS**

In terms of the first research question, our survey results suggest poor economic conditions largely influence individuals' incentives to radicalize.. On the whole, as reported in Figure 1, 37% of respondents believe that the most important factor leading young people to radicalize is low levels of education , followed by 23% that ranked economic and employment conditions as the most important factor Interestingly, there was a statistical significance in the distribution of responses between males and females; with females placing more emphasis on the way the treatment of Muslims from the West and their allies is perceived and a low number of opportunities for contribution to society, whereas less emphasis than men on the lack of economic/employment conditions as causes of radicalization

This finding is also supported when we asked respondents which categories among youth they think are most at risk of radicalization. About 35% of them claimed the unemployed were, followed by 22% who believed those with family problems are at risk, as reported in Figure 2. When we asked them whether the driving factors were the same for women and men, a 47% believed that they were, whereas 30.6% claimed they were different. But, even in this case they did not report ways in which men and women may have been affected differently. There was notable difference however, in the responses between males and females, as females considered those with lack of cultural and sport activities to be at a higher risk of radicalization.

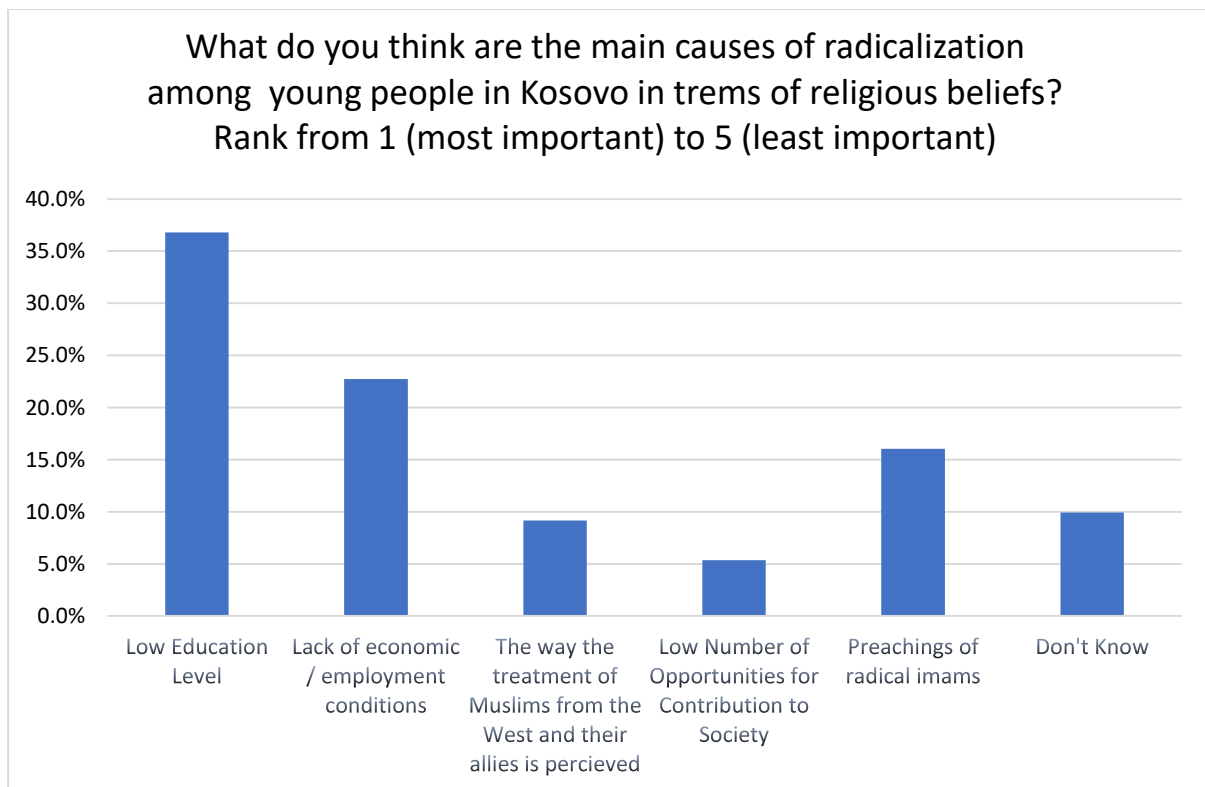


Figure 1. Causes of radicalization among young people as seen by our respondents



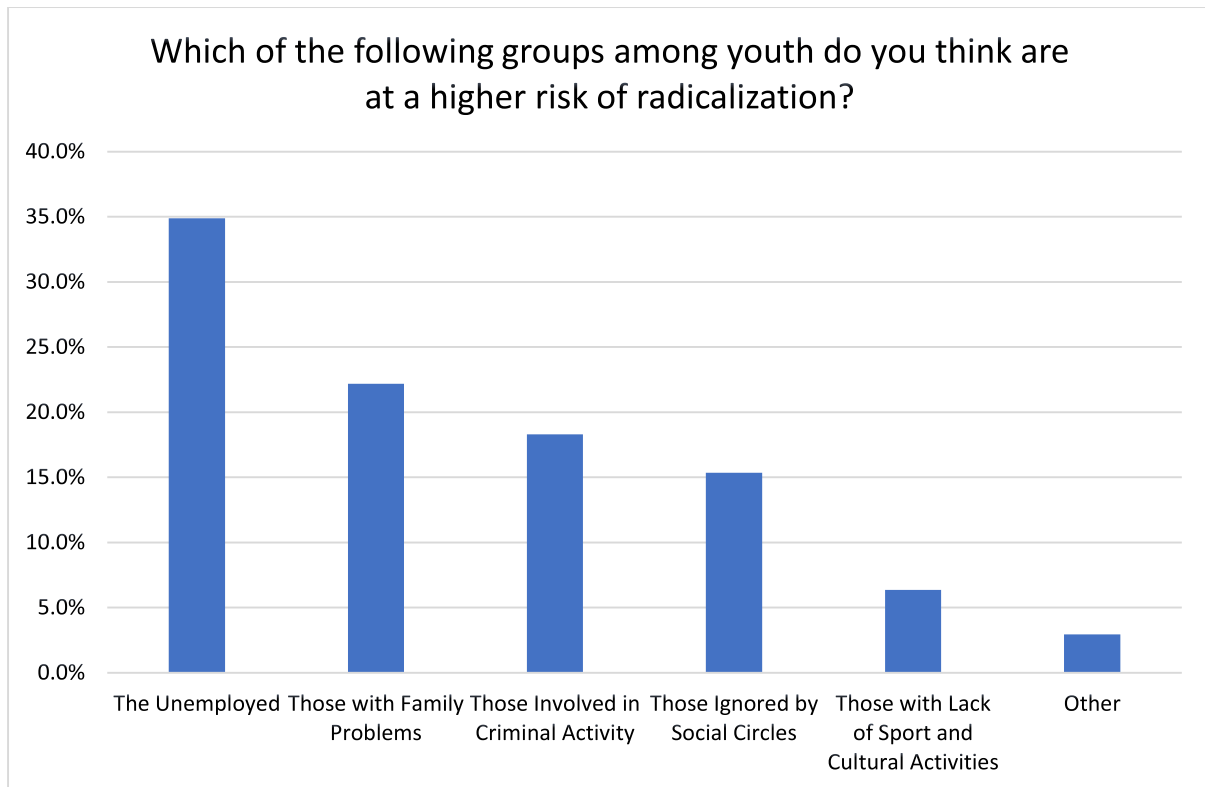


Figure 2. Groups that reportedly are at a higher risk of radicalization

In our follow-up question 'Do you ever discuss about radicalization as a troublesome phenomenon whether in the family, society or at school' 57.3% of the respondents claimed they do discuss it sometimes, while 13.8% said they discuss it all the time, whereas 28.9% claimed that they do not. From those who claimed they discuss the matter further, they mentioned the family (45.8%), as well as social media (30.1%) as primary arenas of discussing the phenomena. A very small number of them (4.7%) claimed they discuss the issue at school. While turning to their own families may be the most natural thing to do, turning to social media can be risky in itself especially if internet is perceived to have played an important role in the radicalization process. In fact, when we asked respondents to tell us what they thought about how youth may have been radicalized - our second research question, as Figure 3 reports, 38.5% said they were radicalized through radical Imams, followed by 18% who said they mainly radicalized through internet and social media, and 6.6% who claimed they were radicalized in schools/through teachers. There are also some notable

differences between males and females, as the latter places more importance over radicalization through schools/teachers and less importance on self-radicalization.

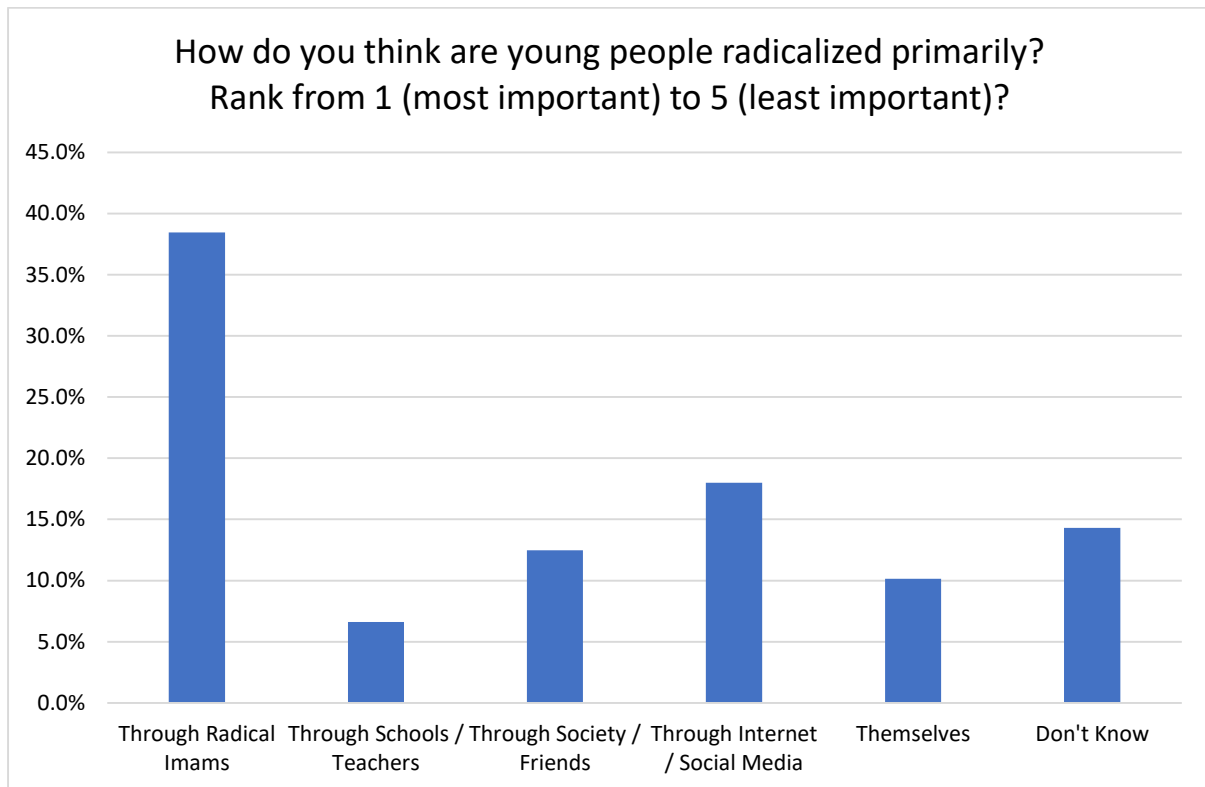


Figure 3. Perceptions on how people are radicalized

Much of the focus in our survey design was put in gathering insight on the third research question, that is, institutional capacities and gaps in reintegrating FTFs and their families. When we asked respondents to tell us their views about returned FTFs from Syria, as given in Figure 4, they seemed equally divided between those who said they need to be reintegrated (48.0%) into our society and those who claimed they pose a risk for the society and hence should be monitored by state institutions (34.0%), with the rest saying they did not know. Moreover, the distribution of responses between males and females was the same.

In fact, 43.1% of the respondents said that they would greet a returnee but would not socialize with them; while 26.2% said that they would avoid contact, but 26.5% claimed that they would socialize with them, and only 4.2% saying 'other'. Similarly, there was no difference in responses between males and females. This may suggest that the community is perhaps not entirely at ease with returning FTFs perhaps because of fear of the potential risk their return may carry for the community. Or, respondents may lack an understanding of the profile of FTFs – so information on this, we believe, may help the reintegration in itself. As we will see later within findings from the Focus Group Discussions, participants stressed the importance of knowing the profile of returning FTFs and even categorizing them as some may pose a greater risk to the community than others. Only once they know who has or will return, will they know the appropriate measures to take for their reintegration.

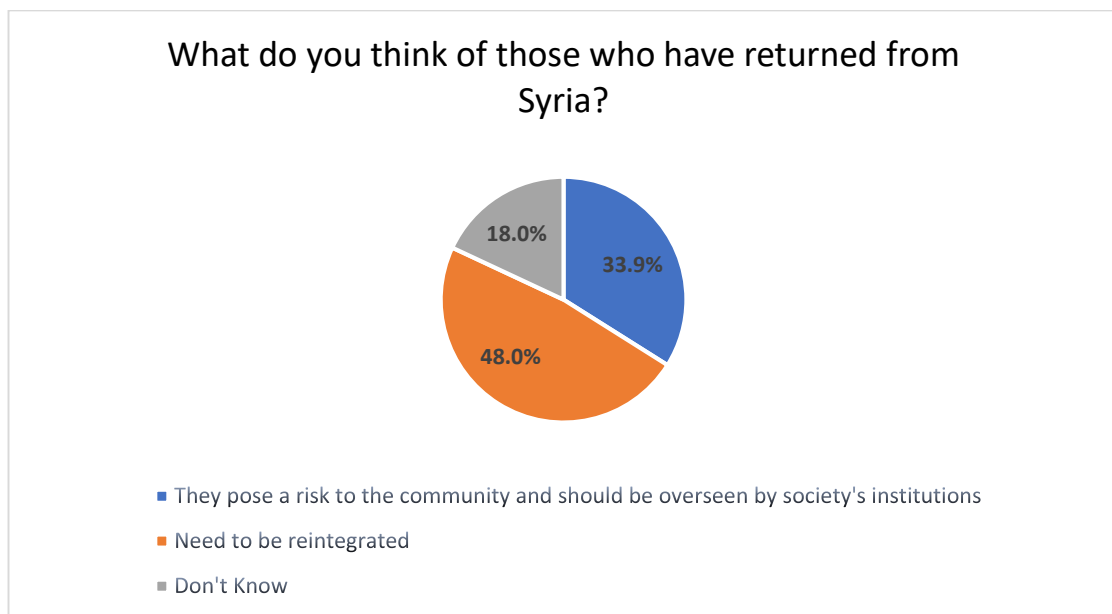


Figure 4. Respondents' views on reintegration of returnees

We also wanted to know what young people think in terms of the activities necessary to prevent radicalization of peers in the future. As Figure 5 in the following shows, 41.4% of the respondents consider lectures/trainings about the

danger of radicalization are more than necessary to prevent young people from radicalizing, a finding quite different from that of our FGD participants as will be shown later . Similarly, considering that round-tables and workshops are one of the most frequent activities that NGOs have organized on the topic, we asked our respondents to tell us their views on round-tables and workshops to be organized in the future. As Figure 6 shows, their responses were heavily tilted on the positive end of the scale, with 42.7% answering 'Yes, a lot' and 45.2% answering 'somewhat'. This may suggest that youngsters are weary of discussions and they want concrete activities that seek to disengage youngsters from negative phenomena; with 42.7% claiming that facilities for cultural and sporting activities being average, 40.1% saying that these facilities are poor, whilst 12.0% responding as 'good', and 5.2% saying 'non-existent'.

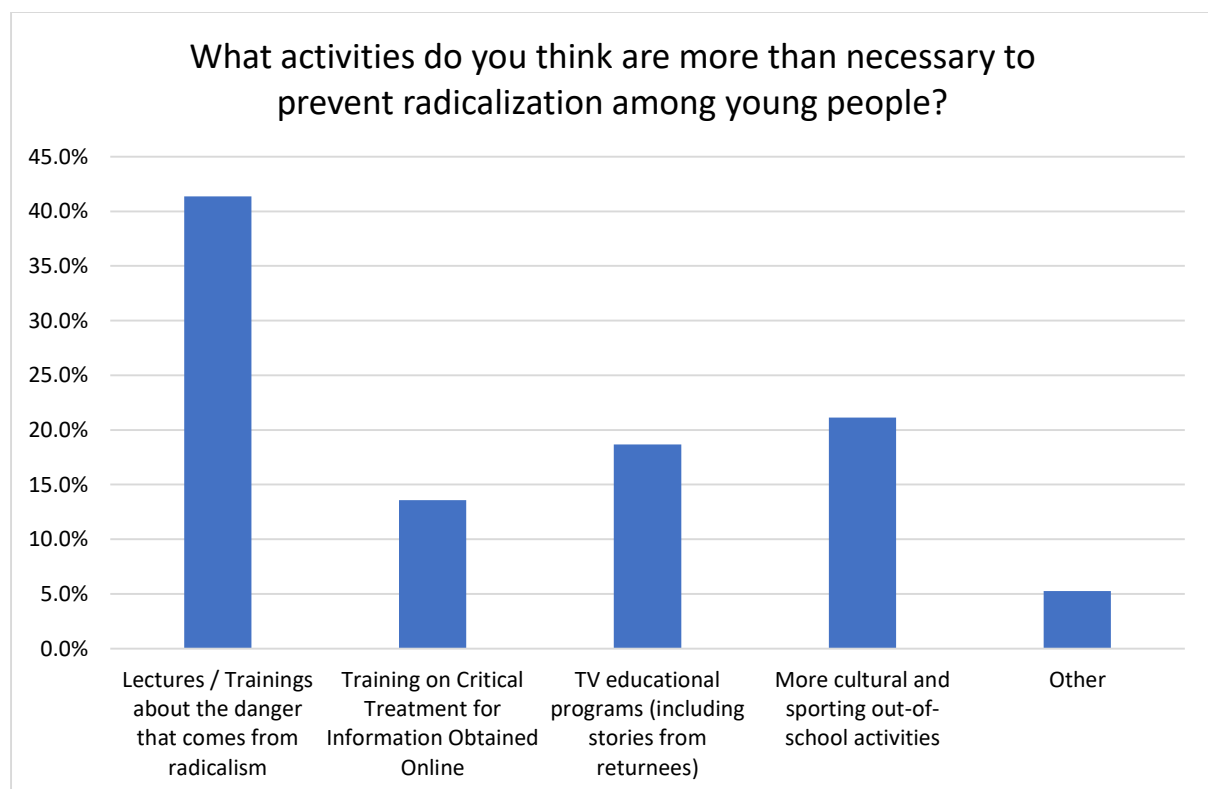


Figure 5 - Respondents' views on the nature of activities that are necessary to prevent radicalization among youth

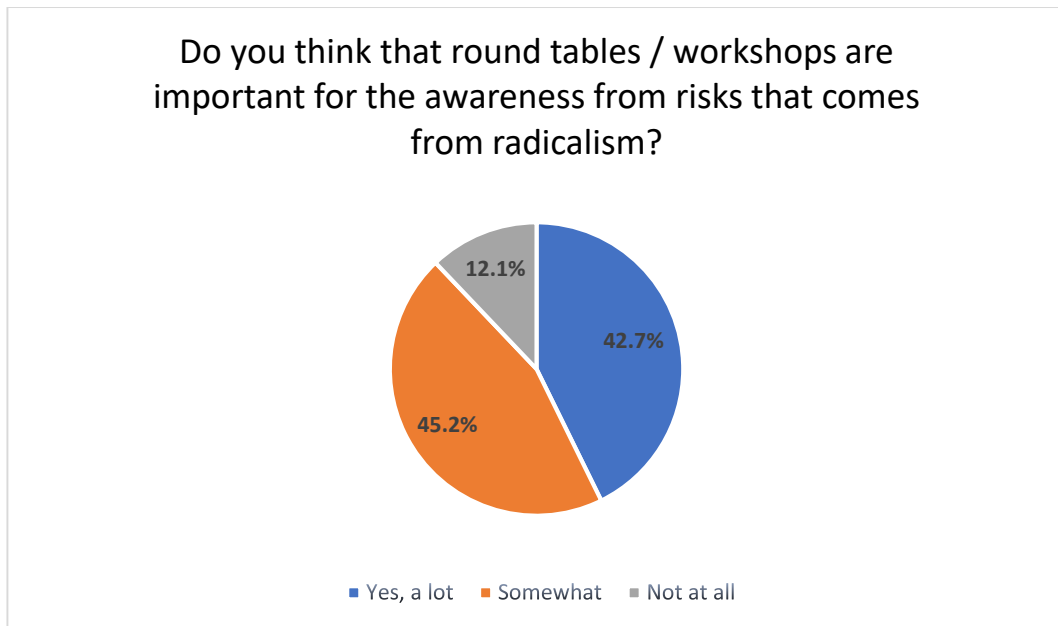


Figure 6. Respondents' views on the importance of round-tables and workshops in raising awareness

Our findings also observed very little knowledge on the part of respondents on local institutions, organizations and activities on countering radicalization and violent extremism. Only 18% reported that they are aware of the existence of the Municipal Community Safety Council (MCSC) in their municipality, which resonated with 92.5% of respondents who are not aware of any local NGO that works on preventing radicalization among youth. Moreover, 81.3% of the respondents said they never attended any round-table, conference or workshop where radicalization as a process was discussed, as given in Figure 7. This corresponds to the views some members of MCSCs held during the FGDs; that more or less the same audience, though not necessarily the ones at risk, regularly attend these events.

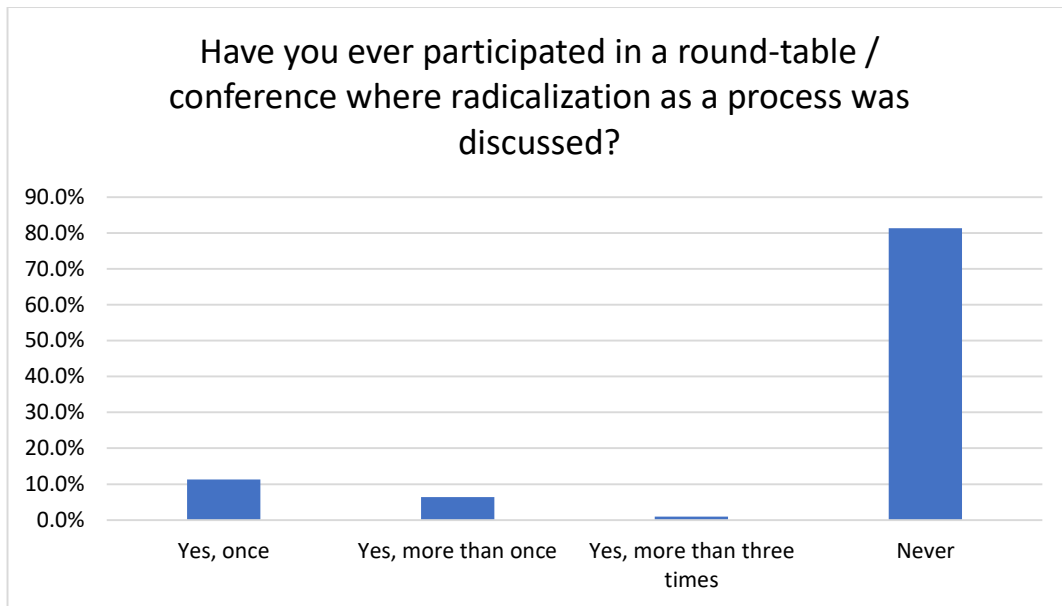


Figure 7. Youth participation in round-tables and conferences on radicalization

### 3.2 FINDINGS FROM FGDs

Conducting FGDs with relevant local stakeholders helped us identify some problematic issues which we would not have been able to capture had we only relied on surveys. Quite importantly, it was largely observed during FGDs with MCSCs that they had very little knowledge about the number of individuals that traveled to the Middle East from their respective municipality. We enquired with the KP whether they inform the MCSCs on the numbers considering that station commanders are also members, but were told that the Counter Terrorism Department within KP sends out the information to regional police commanders who are then supposed to pass on the data to the commanders in each municipality (Informal discussion with KP member, 13 Aug 2018). It is possible that the KP may have used different ways to categorize those that traveled, hence the inconsistency. For instance, MCSC members in Dragash mentioned an individual, originally from Kosovo but, who was raised and recruited in some Western country (MCSC Dragash, 16 Aug 2018). It is also possible that the KP data are not 100 per cent accurate. But, we also

discovered times when an FTF family member claimed to have a grandchild born in Syria, yet no children featured on KP data for that municipality.

We consider that lack of knowledge on individuals that have traveled to the Middle East, and most importantly those that have returned, poses obstacles to reintegration efforts at community level. If MCSCs, as well as the community at large, do not know the profile of returning FTFs or their families, and hence do not recognize their needs, they cannot ensure their sustainable reintegration into the society. We know from the data and previous experience that some individuals have prior criminal records, other may suffer from mental health disorders, some may have regretted and others not – hence, a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach will presumably not work. As one participant in Lipjan asserted ‘we must know the background of returnees to be able to reintegrate them’ (MCSC Lipjan, 10 Aug 2018). The Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) Manual on responses to returnees also suggests ‘it is important to get to know the FTF in your home town by name, as well as their families and former surroundings’ (2017, p.49).

The majority of participants shared the view that radicalization mainly spread through questionable local NGOs, mainly funded by money coming in from the Middle East, as mentioned earlier in the report, which had lured young participants by providing English language courses, sewing classes, and dance lessons, free of charge. In fact, most research would point out to the influence of such organizations in creating an environment conducive to radicalization and violent extremism (UNDP 2017a, p.35). The young participants of these activities, a vulnerability group, would this way be introduced to Wahabi and Salafi literature and brought closer to ‘radical political Islam, which resulted in their radicalization’ (ibid, National CVE Strategy 2015, p.10).

Equally important, it spread through radical Imams, both local and originally from Macedonia, that operated without any control whatsoever from the end of the war until about 2012-2013; when the first arrests of Imams were made, and 2016; when more than a dozen NGOs were shut down by the government.

These Imams who had studied in Egypt and some of the Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia, helped spread extremist ideology through their preachings but also by creating a network 'in the process of indoctrination of their community members and coordination to travel to the theatre of conflict' (UNDP 2017a, p.35,36). Moreover, as Imams preached to adherents, some of them openly called for individuals to travel to the conflict areas. For example, as reported by a UNDP study interviewing returning FTFs, an Imam claimed that Muslims need to fulfill their religious obligation and help those in Syria whereas another one indicated that permission need not be sought from parents to travel to Syria (2017a, p.37).

The participants also shared the view that there was some sort of failure on the part of institutions, including the government, the Kosovo Police, and the Kosovo Islamic Council (BIK) to prevent this from happening from the outset. One participant from the MCSC in Prishtina said *'it is obvious that some purposely allowed radicalization to spread'* (MCSC Prishtina, 15 Aug 2018). Another one in Dragash claimed: *'I have warned the police authorities about the improvised mosque which still continues to operate in our municipality but they said they cannot do anything about it. In turn, I asked what would you do if a parallel police station was set up opposite yours? They said they would shut it down'* (MCSC Dragash, 16 Aug 2018).

Although we asked the MCSC members to explain, in their own views, why individuals may have radicalized and then also explain what motivated them to travel to the Middle East separately, there was little difference in the two in terms of the responses we obtained. In their opinion, poor economic conditions, financial incentives, lack of education, social marginalization, recent war memories and a lack of understanding on what the conflict was about, influenced both. Yet, there were some who mentioned cases of individuals who were either well-off economically or well-educated that also radicalized and traveled to the Middle East. *'No, it's not about economic conditions'* - added an FGD participant in Ferizaj (17 Aug 2018). A UNDP report also asserts that they could not establish a clear link between poverty and



unemployment and radicalization, but that those factors made individuals more vulnerable to being manipulated by extremist groups (2017a, p.28).

Knowing that there are radicalized individuals from both ends of the spectrum, in terms of income and education, the main question then is whether there is anything else that these individuals have in common that can aid our understanding of the dynamics. Our view is that those which radicalized and perhaps traveled were impressionable. As participants observed those that fell prey of such influences were *'those that were more prone to changing their minds'* (FGD with MCSC Prizren, 30 Aug 2018), or *'those that could be easily manipulated'* (FGD with MCSC Viti, 14 Aug 2018). The father of one of the FTFs we interviewed mentioned his son to be very sympathetic to those in need: *'when called, he leaves his job unfinished and his family aside and goes out to help them'* (Interview with FTF family, 23 Aug 2018).

Research shows that, in itself, being empathetic; which is defined as *'the ability to recognise the emotions of others, and to emotionally respond to them'* is good for CVE efforts because *'empathy is traditionally associated with lower propensities towards violence'*. Moreover, intellectual empathy; would suggest that one is able and willing to imaginatively put oneself in someone else's shoes as to genuinely understand them – an important aspect in fostering discussion on socially divisive issues. But, it can be detrimental if there is more empathy shown towards the *'in-group'* – the group normally one identifies with, and less or no empathy shown towards the *'out-group'* – the group that *'threatens'* the existence of the in-group. Hence, in order efforts to effectively tackle radicalization must also appeal to the individual's empathy carefully (Berger 2018, Milnes 2018, Linker 2014).

Empathy is also needed to develop critical thinking skills, or help vulnerable groups think outside the box and analyze critically. Maureen Linker (2014) uses intellectual empathy to teach critical thinking skills to racially and economically divided suburban areas of Chicago. Evidence generally shows that where critical thinking skills have been targeted, as is the case with the

Sabaoon rehabilitation program established in Pakistan to rehabilitate boys prone to violent extremism, it has been a very successful tool for reintegration (Peracha, Khan and Savage 2016, p.84,85).

Besides, the most vulnerable seem to be youngsters between the ages of 15 and 24, those living in poor economic conditions, with family problems, those lacking an understanding of what Islam is really about, and the poorly educated. Another category which was mentioned among the participants are individuals, many in numbers, which use social media frequently. Both parents of the FTFs we interviewed, reported that their sons mainly used internet and social media to get informed about events in the world. As they watched cruel images of children being slaughtered, they felt empathetic, hence they thought it was their duty to go out and help them. As the father of one of the FTFs we interviewed said: *'the [media] portals had a huge impact as well. He [my son] would show me images of killings and I would urge him to stop watching those. I felt horrified. Had I continued to watch I may as well have been inclined to go'* (Interview with FTF Family, 23 Aug 2018). Other researchers have also found cruel images as shown in the (social) media to have played a role. According to a UNDP report, an FTF interviewee said *'YouTube was my go-to place to learn about the war in Syria. I saw a lot of videos about Assad's regime's crimes against innocent people. I watched many videos and began to hate Assad for what he was doing'* (2017a, p.53).

In fact, media were reported to be one of the most influential in terms of how individuals radicalized and even decided to join the wars in the Middle East. Participants during our FGDs in Gjilan, Prishtina, Dragash and Mitrovica all noted *'It was through media how radicalization spread in the first place'* (MCSC Gjilan, 14 Aug, Prishtina 15 Aug, Dragash 20 Aug and Mitrovica 24 Aug 2018). A feeling of discontent was generally shared among participants of all FGDs who were particularly unhappy about the way things are reported in our media. According to them, the media depicted a picture of the conflict which was very different from reality, hence the misunderstanding of those who joined about what the conflict was really about. Another participant pointed

out *'the media showed more of Lavdrim Muhaxheri and his golden dinar than anything else'* (MCSC Mitrovica 24 Aug 2018). That media may have affected the feelings of individuals and hence drawn them to travel is supported by a UNDP report that cites one of the FTFs interviewed saying *'Civil society and media have hurt us the most. Journalists have labelled us with the worst names you can hear. One journalist apparently said that we shouldn't even be left in prisons. But, where so they suggest we go'?* Another one said *'The media are against Islam and they are trying to make people hate Islam'* (2017a, p.29).

The participants were nevertheless divided in terms of whether media can play a positive role to prevent others from joining foreign wars in the future, which also poses hurdles on the reintegration process. In fact, even among those that believed it can, they thought what the media should do is focus more on the positive side of the story. For example, *'instead of showing a man with a long beard being arrested by the police, they should show a long-bearded man looking after a child'* (MCSC Prizren, 30 Aug 2018). Or as other participants put it:

*'Media don't really talk about returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters. I think I may have only seen a story once in Klan Kosova. RTK – our national broadcaster never does'* (MCSC Prishtina, 15 Aug 2018).

*'On TV, we see all kinds of scenes. Media are instilling on us a bad image of these people [FTFs] making us be hostile to them. They don't portray them as people in need and that should be reintegrated'* (MCSC Prizren, 30 Aug 2018).

*'We are aware that in democratic states there is no censorship over media, but we need positive propaganda – the state must use media in a good way through public debates and seek to include in those debates all relevant institutions not just the Kosovo Police'* (MCSC Prizren, 30 Aug 2018).

Equally divided were those who considered that the community is welcoming towards them as opposed to being hostile to them. The former claimed they are being stigmatized and marginalized by the society, and it is often the case that family members do not want to visit them for fear of being captured or labelled by the media (MCSC Gjilan, 14 Aug 2018). This is also found to be the case elsewhere suggesting that, coupled with lack of data and a negative image of FTFs and their families by the media may exacerbate community efforts to reintegrate them.

A returning FTF is cited saying *'I have lost contact with aunts and uncles whom I used to bring together in the past. They distanced me after the media covered my story [facilitation of terrorist activities in Kosovo] continuously for five straight days. They say I brought shame to the family'* (UNDP 2017a, p.58). The others, however considered the community to be generally supportive of them. This feeling was also shared by family of the FTFs we interviewed. Two of them claimed *'they [friends and family] often stop me on the street and ask me about my son and his whereabouts'* [Interview with FTF family, 17 Aug 2018], and *'people pay a lot of respect to us as a family. At the time when my son was in prison, they would approach us and ask how we were coping'* (Interview with FTF family, 23 Aug 2018).

In fact, participants considered reintegration efforts need to devote particular care to families of FTFs and returnees. As they put it, if poor economic conditions aided individual tendencies to travel, those conditions will have probably gotten worse, or remained the same the time they return. Equally important is the role of families in supporting the reintegration process. It is considered that families, as opposed to individuals, do not themselves support extremist ideologies, therefore they can be valuable partners in reintegration efforts (RAN 2017, p.4). But, particularly in the case of Kosovo where family ties are strong.

When asked what the state should do to reintegrate these categories, participants considered there are a couple of measures that the institutions

should take. Very often, it was mentioned that the law on religion needs to be adopted which would regulate the status of religious communities in Kosovo, including that of the Kosovo Islamic Council (BIK). The relevance of this, accordingly, is that the law would define the competencies of BIK and hence grant it the authority to undertake measures if there are any deviations from its line. As it stands for example, many argued, if there are mosques that operate outside the umbrella of BIK, the most BIK can do is to notify the relevant authorities, including the Kosovo Police, and expect that they take any action. In the absence of such laws, many considered the state must follow closely the activities of 'parallel' mosques, shut them down and cut their funding (from foreign sources).

Another important issue which was highlighted was the need to enact rules and regulations that would give the municipalities the necessary legal means to undertake activities that seek to prevent violent extremism or reintegrate returnees and their families. MCSCs reported they have not carried out any single activity on the matter, including some of the largest. Those that have, either undertook costless activities or were supported by international donors. Lack of an explicit budget is also the case with the national CVE Strategy (2015-2020), in which case the Government has not allocated any state funding to the activities foreseen by the Action Plan. Moreover, returnees from the Middle East are not the only category municipalities have to deal with. There are a number of people that emigrated illegally to Schengen countries beginning in 2015, and many have since returned. Their main criticism was that the central government expects that municipalities do their job but at the same time no funding follows. Or, as some put it, the *'Government sends them here without giving us much prior notice, and expects us to accommodate them'* (FGD Ferizaj, 17 Aug 2018).

Whereas these may be considered as short-term measures, on the long-term end MCSCs' members pointed out to the need for government to invest in reducing unemployment. They argued that in the absence of jobs, youngsters have more time to get involved in negative activities regardless of whether it

is violent extremism, drugs, or any other type of criminality. When in economic hardships and in the absence of jobs, some participants noted individuals, and even whole families, are being easily influenced even by Jehovah's Witnesses to convert although they did not account any violent behavior as regards the latter category (MCSC Prizren, 30 Aug 2018). For them, instead of the state playing the role of the savior, foreign organizations including religious missionaries are playing this role as they support people financially. One interesting point that could pose great challenges in terms of employment, raised by a number of participants, was that for many seeking a job they have to give proof that they have not been convicted or under investigation in the last couple of years; without which they are unable, at least for some time – as defined by the courts, to be employed by law.

Many participants expressed dissatisfaction with the state's approach towards returning FTFs. For many, imprisoning them is not a solution. In fact, it can have a detrimental effect. As one participant said *'I've been in prison for some time myself [on different charges] and you could see the impact one individual had on the others e.g. in terms of prayer – everyone followed. There is huge risk for further radicalization in prisons'* (ibid). Similarly, an FTF interviewed by the UNDP in Kosovo, stated *'It is not good for the government to hand you a jail term. This is literally to kill off the life of our children, who will grow up without parents [stigmatized with a few opportunities. This is how the government creates [new internal] enemies'*. Another claimed *'Prison is not a solution. It might only have a positive impact during the first month, after that it just worsens the situation'*. (2017a, p.58).

Instead, a large number of our respondents believed that they should be reintegrated, pretty much like the Aarhus model would suggest. Looking at other research, being close to the family and finding employment upon return was cited as a means to reintegrate (UNDP 2017a, p.60). Nevertheless, some cautioned that if no repercussions follow, such as imprisonment, there may be incentives for others to leave. As one participant said: *'We have to be careful not to treat them more favourably. It is better, for instance, to find a job for a*

*Viti returnee in Prishtina and vice-versa. That way, the community won't be irritated [as they won't be able to see them] (MCSC Viti, 14 Aug 2018).* This suggests that reintegration may be problematic and needs to be done really carefully, perhaps by widening the target group, as to not alienate others who equally live in poor socio-economic conditions, but yet, have not traveled to the Middle East.

On the need to reintegrate returning FTFs and their families, participants, in particular, stressed out the need to have a national rehabilitation program:

*'We need a national program for reintegration of the returns and a rehabilitation program. We have so many boards and agencies which we don't need. What we need is an agency that will deal with reintegration of returning FTFs and also have a budget allocated for this purpose. This program would envisage psychological treatment, social welfare support, etc. and seek to involve Imams, media, and so on'* (MCSC Prizren, 30 Aug 2018).

*'How should we treat them if we have no program on how to treat them in the first place?'* (ibid).

It was apparent that very few activities on CVE have been taken at the local level, perhaps to some extent because of the lack of legal means to do so but more so because of the lack of funding. When asked if MCSCs and the municipal authorities lack any capacities some asked *'what capacities do we not lack in the first place'* meaning they have zero capacities to undertake any activities (MCSC Lipjan, 10 Aug 2018). Moreover, most of these activities were either roundtables usually targeting the same audience, or lectures in high schools. Hence, there was a wide consensus that there is no need for more of these, perhaps with the exception of lectures on what Islam really is. More specifically, they want help in providing psychological support - e.g. in the case of Viti they mentioned they would need 10 psychologists to be funded annually, more cultural activities including e.g. the building of a sports halls in the case of Kaçanik, jobs in the private sector and preparing youngsters for the

labour market, trainings of safe internet usage, assistance in opening up a business, and support in expanding existing ones. Most importantly, MCSC mentioned the need to categorize returnees as some may have regretted others not, some may suffer from PTSD other not and so on.

### **Key findings: similarities and differences across male and female respondents**

In terms of the findings from surveys, it was possible to gather both male and female perspectives on all the questions asked. Below, we summarize some of these findings and highlight the similarities and differences in gender perspectives on different issue areas. Yet, as pertains the findings from the FGDs, male and female perspectives cannot be compared to the same extent because, 1) not all questions asked were the same as those we asked to our youth respondents, 2) not all participants of the FGDs participated in the discussion, 3) not all participants answered all questions. Nevertheless, we do report gender differences and similarities among those that gave their views on the different questions.

#### **RADICALIZATION: vulnerability factors and means**

Among youth respondents, females placed more emphasis on the way the treatment of Muslims from the West and their allies is perceived and a low number of opportunities for contribution to society, whereas they placed less emphasis than men on the lack of economic/employment conditions as causes of radicalization.

There were also some notable differences between males and females, as the latter placed more importance over radicalization through schools/teachers and less importance on self-radicalization.

Among our adult respondents, male and female responses on the vulnerability factors were pretty much the same: poor economic conditions, financial incentives, lack of education, social marginalization, recent war memories and a lack of understanding on what the conflict was about influenced the process accordingly.

They also equally agreed on how people were radicalized with the only difference being that men reported radical imams to a greater extent than women. Whereas, women stressed out more the role of foreign-funded NGOs that provided free language, sewing and dance classes as one of the most important ways through which individuals may have radicalized.



## AT-RISK GROUPS

There were notable differences in the responses between males and females from our youth respondents on the at-risk population, as females considered those with lack of cultural and sport activities to be at a higher risk of radicalization.

Among out adult participants however, no such differences were observed. Male and female participants equally shared the view that those at risk were youngsters between the ages of 15 and 24, those living in poor economic conditions, with family problems, those lacking an understanding of what Islam is really about, and the poorly educated.

## ROLE OF MEDIA

Among our adult respondents, both male and female participants claimed that media contributed to radicalization of youngsters and called for a more positive approach of the media in this regard. Though men participants, in some cases, were more voice-full to blame the media and call for their supervision.

## MUNICIPAL CAPACITIES

Among our adult respondents, generally male participants stressed out the need for formal rules and regulations at the local level that would enable them to undertake CVE activities. All participants however, equally shared the view that there was no budget at the local level to reintegrate returning FTFs.

## REINTEGRATION OF RETURNING FTFs

Men and women among adult participants generally agreed that returnees should be reintegrated, though men were less uniform in their position. Some of the male participants, while no female participants, claimed that they should not be returned and would not be welcomed.

Male participants, unlike female participants, also stressed that sending them to prison may not be the best option.

Male participants also pointed out to the risk of alienating certain categories in the society if help is only provided to returning FTFs and their families.

Among our youth responses, no notable differences were reported on the question. Both male and female respondents were equally divided between those that considered they need to be reintegrated and those that thought they would pose a risk to our society.

#### MEASURES NEEDED BY THE STATE FOR REINTEGRATION

Among the adult respondents, the law on religion was reported by male participants to be important in reintegration of returning FTFs. Whereas, women stressed out more the importance of the state playing the role of the savior instead of NGOs providing such support.

Youth respondents:

What do you think are the main causes of radicalization among young people in Kosovo in terms of religious beliefs? Rank from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important)											
Low Education Level		Lack of economic / employment conditions		The way the treatment of Muslims from the West and their allies is perceived		Low Number of Opportunities for Contribution to Society		Preachings of radical imams		Don't Know	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
37.5%	36.0%	25.3%	19.8%	7.7%	10.9%	3.7%	7.3%	15.1%	17.2%	10.8%	8.9%

Q4. Who do you turn to first, if you have questions about this phenomenon?									
Family		Teacher / Professor		Friends		Internet / Social Media		Other	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
43.9%	48.0%	5.2%	4.1%	16.5%	13.5%	28.3%	32.1%	6.1%	2.4%

Q6. How do you think most young people are radicalized? Sort from 1 (most important) to 5 (least important)?											
Through Radical Imams		Through Schools / Teachers		Through Society / Friends		Through Internet / Social Media		Themselves		Don't Know	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
37.4%	39.7%	5.2%	8.3%	11.8%	13.2%	18.4%	17.5%	11.5%	8.6%	15.8%	12.6%

Which groups of young people are the most at risk of radicalization?											
The Unemployed		Those with Family Problems		Those Involved in Criminal Activity		Those Ignored by Social Circles		Those with Lack of Sport and Cultural Activities		Other	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
36.	33.4	20.	23.7	16.	20.7	14.	16.4	9.0	3.3%	3.5	2.3%

1%	%	8%	%	2%	%	5%	%	%		%	
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### 3.3 IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

The findings from both set of data collection methods suggest that there is a general understanding on the drivers of radicalization. Both our survey respondents and FGD participants shared the view that poor economic conditions along with lack of education, among others, may have had an impact on individuals' propensity to radicalize. Moreover, through the interviews we were able to understand that those who were affected were also those who were impressionable in one way or another; or as participants said 'light-minded' and hence were easily influenced by extremist groups and recruiters. This indicates that both short-term measures and long-term measures such as economic development, increased job opportunities in the private sector for youngsters, and an education curricula that includes fostering critical thinking skills among youngsters are necessary.

Respondents across group categories also agreed that radicalization was mainly spread through radical imams and local NGOs funded from foreign money that operated freely for some time. But, they attributed an equally important role to media, especially in terms of the many terrible images that pretty much anyone could see of the Middle East. If we relate this to our earlier observation, it suggests that the media may have helped light the signals among those that were impressionable or felt empathetic, although others who also potentially saw the images were not as propelled to go. Participants were equally divided among those that believed that media can play a positive role in preventing youngsters from radicalizing and/or traveling in the future and those that were against because of their belief that media incited youngsters to travel. One thing however is clear, that a large number of people

continue to use internet and social media so if anything, these should also be targeted by the consortium. In fact, as are youth respondents said they turn to media (including social) more so than they turn to their school teachers if they have questions about radicalization.

There was no equal agreement on how welcoming they are for the community either. Some expressed their fear if FTFs are to be returned, claimed that their families are stigmatized and marginalized, whereas others strongly believed that they should be reintegrated as they are part of this society. What we consider is important is to work with communities in building a stronger understanding of the returned and their circumstances, working with law enforcement authorities to help categorize the returns and make them known to local authorities, and work with media on the reintegration process itself. As some participants in FGDs noted, media focus more frequently on the negative side of the story than the positive side of it.

In terms of the activities which are needed for their reintegration or prevention of radicalization in the future, there was mixed evidence on whether trainings are needed on CVE with FGD participants claiming they are not but, youngsters seeing much value in them. At the same time, lectures on what Islam is really about especially for those who may think that it is their duty as Muslims to aide their 'brothers' in the Middle East are also needed. Likewise, there is a greater need for concrete activities such as sports activities; or extracurricular activities in general, vocational trainings and so on. There is also a necessity to work with families of FTFs to help them set up businesses or expand their existing ones or work with returns to help them find jobs that seek to disengage them from their past. The fact that they need to provide proof of a clear criminal past is also an impediment to this. Hence, the authorities should come up with ways to remove such obstacles.

## 4. Conclusions

At the outset, we argued that the focus of this report has been to answer three particular research questions: 1) what are the causes of radicalization - so that the consortium is familiar with the issues it needs to focus on, 2) what are the means of radicalization - so that it knows which groups to work with, and 3) what are the institutional capacities and gaps that help/prevent reintegration of FTFs and their families - so that it knows what activities to develop. Based on our findings, and acknowledging that some of these areas are overlapping, the consortium needs to do the following as given in Figure 8. If economic development is a major term which requires governmental initiative, the consortium should focus on economic empowerment of vulnerable groups, returnees as well as families of the returned. Often times, this may only require help in expanding existing businesses as indicated by two of our interviewees. By way of example, the father of one of the FTFs we interviewed mentioned the need to buy new sewing machines as the existing ones have worn out. The entire family lives off the tailoring business (Interview with FTF family, 23 Aug 2018).

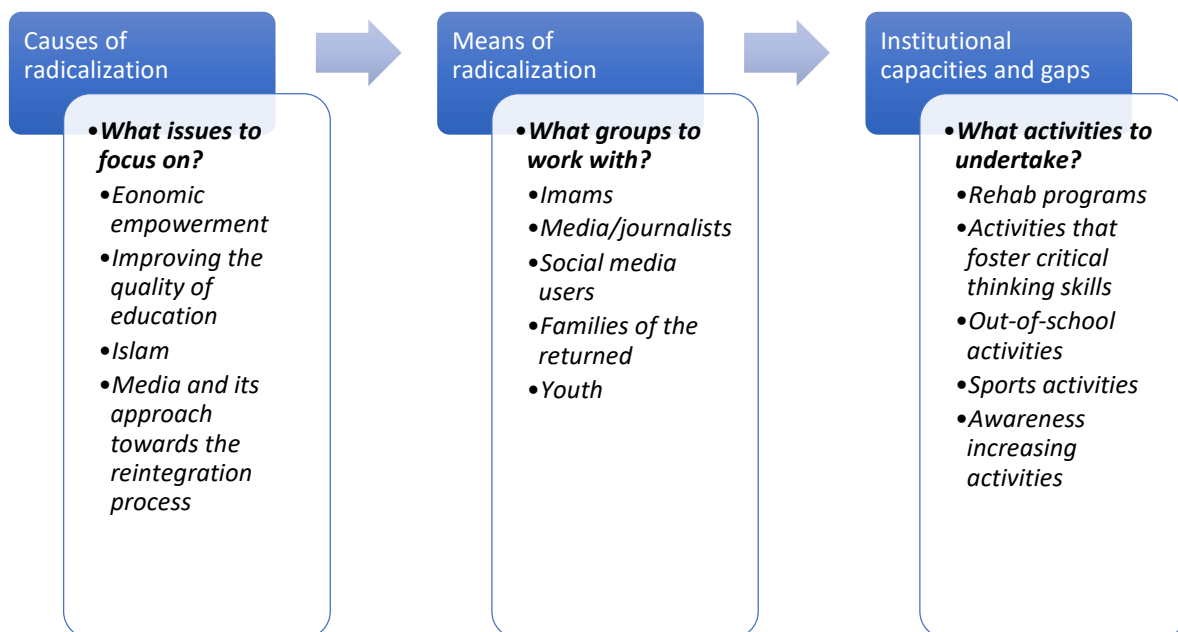


Figure 8. Recommendations for project interventions in accordance with three research questions

Yet, one needs to be careful not to alienate other families that equally live in poor conditions. In 2015, a number of Kosovars left the country to migrate illegally to some of the Schengen countries in search for a better life standard. Some of those have returned willingly and the others by force. Kosovo authorities have had to integrate them into the society upon return, but the greatest fear of authorities was that it would incline other families/individuals to travel because they know they can benefit (e.g. housing, allowance, etc.) upon return. The same dilemma is present here, that if only those that have traveled to the Middle East will benefit from these programs, it may set a bad examples to others who are vulnerably but yet, chose not to travel.

Another issue area is education. Similar to economic development, increasing the quality of education requires efforts beyond the scope of this project. But, the latter can help develop activities that aid the young in improving their critical thinking skills. We indicated earlier that the common denominator among those that radicalized and even joined the conflict in the Middle East may be that they were impressionable – or easily influenced because of their lack of ability to analyze critically. This, however, may be a difficult task to undertake in the absence of an overall increase in the quality of education. Bloom's Taxonomy, for instance; a model which helps classify learning outcomes and objectives, would consider Kosovo's education system as one which puts much more emphasis on memorizing and remembering past facts and information rather than analyzing them. So, while efforts to foster critical thinking skills will help prevent radicalization, at the same time there may be a need to intervene in the overall learning framework in schools to prevent other phenomena from finding ground.

Many of the participants in our FGDs had mentioned the possibility that youth may have radicalized and even traveled to the Middle East because they did not know what Islam is really about. This confusion was aided by the call of

some Imams, especially earlier in the process, to join the wars in the Middle East in the name of jihad. Hence, awareness-raising activities on Islam and its core values may help prevent youngsters from joining in the future. In this regard identifying a number of Imams who hold a balanced approach towards religion and working with them to educate those who actively practice Islam may make a difference. It is not clear who, among Imams, works with inmates however, as mentioned during our FGDs though it is evident that Imams have been engaged to work with this particular category.

Working with media to educate and encourage them to adopt a more positive approach towards reintegration would also make an impact (see Marthoz 2017 guide to journalists). As reported, respondents are currently quite critical of the role media can play in the process of reintegration since many of them believe that media helped spread radicalization. Of particular importance should be to assist the media in promoting success stories of reintegration. Likewise, knowing that Kosovo citizens get most of their information through internet and social media, and that a considerable number of our respondents indicated that they would turn to those in cases they had questions about the phenomena, it suggests the consortium needs to target active social media users. More specifically, they need to be made aware of the propaganda out there and be able to critically assess the information they access online.

The consortium should also help local institutions, e.g. schools, develop out-of-school activities (e.g. clubs) that seek to disengage students from getting involved in dangerous activities. This is also one of the core components of the GCTF, Abu Dhabi Memorandum on Good Practices for Education and Countering Violent Extremism (GCTF, n.d., p.7) which highlights the importance of sports, arts and culture in providing students 'opportunities to work within local groups and teams, and develop constructive goals and skills'. In particular, they seem to be helpful when implemented in conjunction with other CVE efforts (ibid).



Working with both the central and local governments to develop rehab program(s) for returnees and their families is also important as it would mean all institutions implement same tools in practice. Municipalities seem to lack both the capacities and expertise in reintegrating returning FTFs and their families. So, the consortium may consider working with local social workers, teachers, and other relevant community stakeholders in order to provide them with the necessary know-how on rehabilitation and reintegration.

Moreover, the consortium should consider working with communities to foster dialogue on the importance of reintegration so that they are more receptive of returnees. Likewise, working with the media to focus on reintegration projects would also help communities become more receptive of them. As our FGD participants mentioned, a lot of the times this negative feeling of communities in regard to returnees is shaped by media. All in all, there are plenty of opportunities for intervention and they should be made adequately to meet the local needs.

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