

Public Pulse Analysis on **PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN KOSOVO**



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Public Pulse Analysis on PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN KOSOVO

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The views expressed in this document are those of the opinion poll and focus groups respondents and do not necessarily represent the views of either UNDP or USAID.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The increasing influence of violent extremist groups in Kosovo¹ after the 1999 conflict showed its results during 2012 and 2013 when most of the 316 confirmed cases of Kosovo foreign fighters decided to join various armed groups in Syria, including the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and Al Nusra. Although the trend decreased by the end of 2015, the Kosovo foreign fighters' phenomenon shows that Kosovo has not remained immune from the global trend of religious radicalization linked to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Several studies suggest that Kosovo has arguably supplied the highest number of foreign fighters per capita in Europe to this conflict² and the third highest number of foreign fighters per number of population of Islamic denomination.³

In fact, no external conflict has internally affected Kosovo like this one.⁴ Two Kosovans carried out suicide attacks in Iraq, and a few others climbed to the top of ISIS hierarchy, one of which gained notoriety through a gruesome act of decapitation broadcast globally. Other Kosovans have carried out attacks on Western Europe and in the U.S.A.⁵ Having been characterized by religious tolerance, Kosovo was caught off-guard during the extremist groups' increased influence. Subsequently, Kosovo has stepped up its activities to counter violent extremism with more than 100 arrests and investigations launched against approximately 78 persons suspected of being involved in recruitment activities for the ISIS and Al Nusra. It also approved a "Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020," to deal with the long-term problem of violent extremism on the ground, supported by UNDP. With a comprehensive legislative framework in place to counter violent extremism (CVE), in 2016, Kosovo expanded its legislative framework necessary to counter new challenges in relation to CVE.

This study on the Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE)⁶ in Kosovo analyzes the perceptions of Kosovans regarding violent extremism and the resilience of Kosovan society vis-à-vis internal and external pressures conducive to the penetration of extremist religious ideologies and the ways the institutions can increase this resilience. The study begins with a synthesized analysis of the previous studies and polls organized from 2012 to 2015 regarding citizen perceptions on religion, radicalism and violent extremism. This analysis is complemented by the findings from three focus groups organized during January 2017, in Prishtinë/Priština, Gjiilan/Gnjilane and Hani i Elezit/Ellez Han. Participants in the focus groups were selected by the researcher due to their expertise on issues related to security, religion, radicalization, extremism, education and youth. They pertained to organizations such as the Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Kosovo Police, Kosovo Security Force, Kosovo Islamic Community (KIC), Faculty of Islamic Studies (University of Prishtina), educational institutions, Civil Society including think-tanks, municipal authorities, a school Headmaster, as well as youth activists.

Key findings from the data reviewed in the UNDP Public Pulse 8 poll (November 2014), suggest that **Kosovans consider that extreme or radical forms of Islam influence Kosovo and that Kosovo can become a target for terrorist attacks.** Other studies, including the 2012 Pew Research Center Project on Religious Futures and the 2014 Public Pulse, show consistent trend with nearly half of Kosovans being concerned about the influence of extremist religious groups in Kosovo, while two-thirds of respondents consider that ISIS and Al-Nusra pose a danger for Kosovo due to their influence and ability to recruit people in their ranks.

1 For UNDP, references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999)

2 Kursani, Shpend. 2015. "Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo's citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq." At: <http://www.qkss.org/en/Occasional-Papers&year=2015>. See also: Kursani's calculation is based on 232 confirmed cases of foreign fighters, which bring the number of fighter per million inhabitants to 125, ranking Kosovo at the top of the list. It ranks Kosovo 14th in terms of foreign fighters per Muslim inhabitants. However, number of foreign fighters confirmed afterwards officially, confirms calculation done by the UNDP.

3 UNDP. 2015. "Comprehensive Assessment to Counter Violent Radicalisation in Kosovo." Kursani's calculation differs from that of UNDP. Whereas UNDP's assessment is based on approximately 300 foreign fighters, bringing the figure to 180 fighters per 1 million of population of Islamic denomination (Kosovo population is about 93-96% of Islamic denomination) and Kosovo as the third supplier of foreign fighters per number of Muslim inhabitants, it also confirms Kosovo as the highest provider of foreign fighters overall in Europe.

4 An exception to this could arguably be the 2001 conflict in FYRO Macedonia and the subsequent conflict in the Preshevë/Presevo Valley, Serbia. However, in contrast to the conflict in the Middle East, in both regions, the influence is owed to ethnic kinship between Albanians in Kosovo and in these regions, all of which have been parts of former Yugoslavia.

5 A UNDP report has summarized all terrorist attacks carried by Kosovan expatriates in Western Europe and in the U.S.A. See: UNDP. 2015. Supra. 3.

6 The United Nations distinguishes the CVE and the PVE in the following way: whereas the CVE is "security-based counter-terrorism measures to deal with the threats posed by Al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups," the PVE complements the CVE through "systematic preventive steps, to address the factors that make individuals join violent extremist groups." See "FAQ-Geneva Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism-The Way Forward." At: <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/faq-geneva-conference-preventing-violent-extremism>

Focus group results confirm the findings from the aforementioned research that the **influence of extremist groups in Kosovo increased in the last two decades** and that the level of perceived religious radicalism in Kosovo rose. The activities of radical groups and individuals have been taking place both in unofficial and official religious premises. This would not mean that the KIC is responsible in all instances, because in many cases, imams are selected by the local people or private sponsors of mosques and KIC has no influence in appointing imams.⁷ In addition, the activities of these groups have been successfully thwarted by CVE and counter-terrorism actions of the Kosovo Police from 2014 to date.

Due to counter-terrorism activities by **Kosovo police** as well as the justice system, the number of Kosovans that leave Kosovo to join ISIS and other extremist groups has decreased substantially since 2015. Yet, results from the focus groups suggest that the perception of the threat of terrorist attacks is higher than during the previous years. Results from the focus groups also suggest that the **influence of extremist groups is persistent**, and that the decreased number of people who join extremist groups in the Middle East is not an indicator of the decreasing level of threat. In fact, signs of radicalization persist and the likelihood of terrorist attacks may be higher due to direct calls by ISIS to carry out attacks at home while losing ground in Syria and Iraq.

This study has found several **push and pull factors** that enable radicalization. The main push factors identified are disappointment with the performance of Kosovo key executive, legislative and judiciary institutions, **sense of isolation**, as well as identity crisis and extremist indoctrination, unemployment, poverty and other **socio-economic conditions**, specifically weak education system. These are followed by **institutional corruption**, lack of organized activities for youth, and societal stigmatization of conservative believers. Additionally, female-specific factors include the obligation of married women to join their husbands, and indoctrination through informal or religious teachings on the internet and with radicalized kin, largely due to lack of alternative activities within KIC. The main pull factors identified by the focus groups are personal convictions and philosophical commitment, expectation of material and spiritual rewards, influence of some Middle East-educated imams, and Middle East humanitarian organizations active in Kosovo after the 1999 conflict. These are followed by printed literature, the internet, social media, and radicalism as a global phenomenon.

In relation to the discussion of push and pull factors, an important finding about the influence of radical and extremist ideologies is that young men, who do not necessarily come from religious families can be more vulnerable to such influence. The reason for this is that they can be subject to manipulation by recruiters who provide extremist interpretation of religious texts. In contrast, the elderly and those that already have traditional religious education are less prone to indoctrination.

An interesting finding is that **women have a great potential to assist the prevention of violent extremism** because they notice the signs of family members' radicalization in their earliest stages. At the same time, they can be very vulnerable because they are often exposed to alternative sources of religious education, including by the male members of family and internet. In general, women are more moderate than men, but lack of access does not allow them to influence processes, especially within the KIC.

This study continues with an introduction that presents key data on Kosovo, followed by a snapshot of developments on radicalization and violent extremism and some of the key data from the polls dealing with this issue. The third part analyzes quantitative and qualitative data, including UNDP Public Pulse and other surveys, USAID and UNDP assessment reports, international media reporting on radicalization and violent extremism in Kosovo. It continues with a presentation of Kosovo's legislative framework to counter violent extremism and terrorism and concludes with a short presentation of some key reports on the gender perspective on violent extremism. The fourth section presents the results of

⁷ The Imam of the largest mosque in Prishtinë/Pristina, the Mehmet Fatih Mosque, Shefqet Krasniqi, just a couple hundred meters from the KIC offices, has been charged recently, among other, for inciting people to join the conflict in Syria and inciting terrorist actions. According to Kosovo Special Prosecutor, during his service in the mosque and in social media, Krasniqi has actively influenced people to join the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq and to commit terrorist acts. The indictment does not preclude the principle of the presumption of innocence of any person charged for criminal offence until declared guilty by final court decision. See: <http://www.koha.net/arberi/2617/shefqet-krasniqi-akuzohet-se-ka-shtyre-te-rinjte-t-u-bashkohen-organizatave-terroriste-isis-dhe-al-nusra/>

the focus groups' discussions on violent extremism and concludes with a set of recommendations. Key findings from focus groups are summarized in the text boxes throughout the section on focus groups. The fifth and final section of this study presents key information on the methodology used to conduct this study, including the holding of focus groups, analysis and presentation.

Some of the key recommendations resulting from the focus group data analysis are primarily concerned with the ways Kosovo institutions and the society can increase Kosovo's resilience in relation to the influences of radical and extremist ideologies and groups and the ways prevention of violent extremism can happen in the long term. These recommendations are not exhaustive — the situation changes constantly and thus reflect the need for an evolving set of approaches and action.

2. INTRODUCTION

This Public Pulse Analysis document on the topic of Prevention of Violent Extremism, uses the data from previous Public Pulse surveys⁸ which among others also measured the public perceptions on violent extremism among the citizens of Kosovo. Whereas the 2014 poll was conducted when the number of Kosovans joining the ISIS and other radical groups reached its peak with more than 300 recruits, the current study is conducted following an increased and sustained effort to prevent radicalization and violent extremism, evidenced in a sharp drop of recruited Kosovans in Middle Eastern conflict.⁹ It offers an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of violent extremism through qualitative and quantitative research including the review of studies, news articles and legal framework about violent extremism and three focus groups with experts, civil society, KIC and authorities at the central and the municipal levels.

Kosovo has approximately 1.8 million inhabitants.¹⁰ The 2011 Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS) population census, which also includes estimates of the populations in the four majority-Serb municipalities in the north Kosovo, results in an approximate ethnic background division of 91% Albanians, 4% Serbs, and 5% Bosnians, Turks and other communities.¹¹ Studies suggest over 90% of the population of Kosovo belong to the Islamic confession.¹² Kosovo is secular and is neutral in matters of religious belief, with no religious education in schools. Although not banned, it is unusual for public employees to wear religious insignia at their workplace. However, secondary legislation limits wearing religious insignia by students at pre-university level education facilities, sparking controversy in Kosovo's public debate during the last few years. As a result, some municipalities, such as Hani i Elezit/Elez Han, have their own regulations where they do not limit at pre-university education the wearing of headscarf as the main female Muslim religious insignia in Kosovo.¹³ Municipalities have full authority to develop their action plans regarding PVE and some of them have been taking initiatives, although most remain dependent on the initiatives of central institutions. Kosovo's media is free and covers a vibrant and large scene, in comparison to the market, including technological broadcasts. The current law that regulates media allows for unmonitored content of paid TV time by the relevant regulatory body.¹⁴

According to the Kosovo Police, approximately 316 Kosovans have left to join foreign wars in Syria, "most of which were between 2013-2014, while 117 have returned."¹⁵ Although Kosovo is not affected more than other parts of Europe by the conflict in Syria and Iraq, the UNDP 2015 study on counter

8 UNDP (United Nations Development Programme). 2014. "Public Pulse VIII."

9 Data on the number of Kosovo foreign fighters in the conflict in Syria and Iraq are taken from the following study: UNDP. 2015. "Comprehensive Assessment to Counter Violent Radicalisation in Kosovo." Supra. 3

10 Kosovo Agency of Statistics. 2015. "Kosovo population estimate, December 2014." At: http://askdata.rks-gov.net/PXWeb/pxweb/en/askdata/askdata__Population__Population%20Structure/Estimated%20data%20by%20municipality%202012-2014.px/table/tableViewLayout1/?rxid=4e69886e-d7ea-4bf8-bfac-670a91f4531c

11 The Kosovo 2011 Census did not include Kosovo Serb population of these municipalities: North Mitrovica, Zvecan, Zubin Potok and Leposavic/Leposaviq. The 2014 UNDP estimate based on the Kosovo 2011 Census resulted in 91% Albanians, 3.4% Serbs and 5.6% Other ethnicities. Other ethnicities include Ashkali, Egyptian, Roma, Gorani, Croats, Monenegrins.

12 According to a 2012 IDRA survey for Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, over 91% of Kosovo's population are of Muslim faith. For further details, see: IDRA. 2012. "Kosovo Youth Study: Forwards Looking, Grounded in Tradition." Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Kosovo, Prishtina.

13 Interview with municipal authorities of Hani i Elezit/Elez Han.

14 Law No. 04/L-044 on the Independent Media Commission. 2012. At: <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=2809>

15 Qafmolla, Ervin. 2016. "European Commission concerned over Kosovo's lack of deradicalization programs." Prishtina Insight, November 10, 2016. At: <http://prishtinainsight.com/european-commission-concerned-kosovos-lack-deradicalization-programs/>

violent radicalization in Kosovo, suggests Kosovo has provided the third highest number of foreign fighters per 1 million inhabitants of Muslims faith, after Belgium and France,¹⁶ or the highest per capita in Europe.¹⁷ A similar figure on Kosovans who have joined extremist organizations in the Middle East is quoted by the 2016 EU Report on Kosovo.¹⁸

If these figures are placed in the context of Kosovo's evolving demography, the narrative that Kosovo has provided the highest number of foreign fighters per capita becomes quite misleading. Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS) estimate, quoted in the UNDP Kosovo Human Development Report for 2014, suggests that, approximately 450 thousand to 550 thousand Kosovans have emigrated between 1969 and 2011, with a total of over 700 thousand Kosovans living abroad.¹⁹ Whereas previous periods of migration were characterized mainly by economic and political reasons (1970's, 1980's and 1990's), after June 1999, the prevailing motive of migration was family reunification, followed by the migration of undereducated youth and finally temporary migration for skilled work or education.²⁰ An estimated 50,000 Kosovans immigrated illegally into Western Europe in the last quarter of 2014 and the first months of 2015, mainly due to economic reasons.²¹ Kosovo has lost half of its population in the past 40 years due to migrations. Therefore, comparably the number of foreign fighters Kosovo has supplied is miniscule if that is placed in the context of Kosovo's political and socio-economic problems in the past decades.

Since September 2014, an increased mobilization of institutions and security agencies was noted, resulting in the arrest of around 100 persons,²² the initiation of investigations against 78 persons, and the issue of 36 judgments, leaving 33 to still stand trial during 2015-2016.²³ Fourteen Kosovan imams, most of whom are employees of KIC, were part of these processes.²⁴ Apart from these counter-terrorism actions, Kosovo's central institutions adopted the "Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020" in 2015, aimed at dealing with the problem of radicalization and extremism in the long-term.

Surveys conducted between 2012-2015 show that Kosovan society is becoming more religious, departing from the pre-war situation.²⁵ While no polls on religious affiliation of Kosovans were conducted before 1999, 45 years of communist rule and homogenization of Kosovan Albanians around a national cause during the 1990's, highlights the more or less secular nature of Kosovo society, a finding shared by other studies.²⁶ For example, according to the 2012 survey by Institute for Development Research and Alternatives (IDRA), 26% of young people aged between 16-27 in Kosovo practiced religion.²⁷ Other studies suggest that as disillusionment with the general economic and political situation increases and the trust in the public institutions is at its lowest, the level of adherence in and trust placed on religious institutions has been steadily increasing.²⁸ Despite this, by all accounts, the society in Kosovo remains moderately religious with no significant incidents motivated by religion.²⁹

16 UNDP. 2015. "Comprehensive Assessment to Counter Violent Radicalisation in Kosovo." Supra. 3

17 Kursani, Shpend. 2015. Supra. 2

18 European Commission. 2016. "Kosovo* 2016 Report." P. 70. At: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_kosovo.pdf

19 UNDP. 2015. "Kosovo Human Development Report 2014." P. 24. At: <http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/khdr2014english.pdf>

20 Ibid.

21 INDEP (Institute for Development Policy). 2015. "An Overview of Migrations of Kosovars into the EU: Migration and a Multifaceted Phenomenon." At: http://www.qendrore.com/indepi/wp-content/uploads/publications_en/An%20overview%20of%20migrations%20of%20Kosovars%20into%20the%20EU%20Migration%20as%20a%20Multifaceted%20Phenomenon.%20%5bZana%20Dobruna%20Burim%20-0Ejupi%20and%20Learta%20Hollaj%2C2015%2006%2CDemocratic%20Governance%5d.pdf

22 Govori, Skender. 2016. "Kosovo Terror Suspects Given Stiff Sentences." Balkan Insight, July 18, 2016.

23 European Commission. Supra. 17.

24 Gall Carlotta. 2016. "How Kosovo was Turned into Fertile Ground for ISIS." New York Times, May 21, 2016.

25 A surveys conducted by Kosovo Think Tanks show that Muslims have the lowest rate of contact with religious institutions with 4 out of ten Muslims having contact with these institutions, followed by Catholics with more than half being in contact with religious institutions and Orthodox, with 7 out of 10 being in contact with their religious institutions. The same study suggests that the highest rate of trust in religious institutions is among Muslims (59%), followed by Catholics (57%) and Orthodox (46%). See: Kosovar Center for Security Studies. 2016. "Kosovo Security Barometer Special Edition: The citizens' views against violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo." Kosovar Centre for Security Studies. Prishtina/Prishtina.

26 USAID (United States Agency for International Development). 2015. "Kosovo Violent Extremism Risk Assessment: April-May 2015"

27 According to a 2012 survey by IDRA made for Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 26% of young people aged between 16-27 in Kosovo practice religion. For more details see: IDRA, Supra 5.

28 See for example: UNDP Kosovo.2016. "Public Pulse on Corruption"; USAID. 2015. Supra 22;

29 On August 14, 2016, a Kosovo Serb dressed as an Imam, took out the Albanian flag from the minaret of the Velekinca mosque in Gjilan/Gnjilane. He was arrested by Kosovo police. The case ended without charges since the person was found to be mentally ill. See also Supra. 12.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 The Quantitative Data Analysis

Various surveys show the consistent perceptions of Kosovans regarding violent extremism. UNDP Public Pulse 8 poll suggest that 1 out of 3 Kosovans believe that since 2012, more Kosovans have been influenced by extreme or radical forms of Islam, while 4 out of 10 believe that religious radical groups have influence in Kosovo.³⁰ Another survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, suggests that 45% are very concerned and somewhat concerned about extremist religious groups in Kosovo.³¹ The 2015 poll shows that the concern of Kosovans about Kosovo-based extremist organization is lower, as opposed to the concern about the ability of foreign-based extremist organizations to penetrate Kosovo, with 7 out of 10 Kosovans considering ISIS and Al-Nusra dangerous organizations due to their ability to recruit people from Kosovo.³² The recent UNDP study on the perceptions of radicalization at a community level shows that the trend with radicalization in Kosovo has increased, with 63% of respondents believing there is a problem with radicalization in their communities.³³

The 2014 UNDP Public Pulse survey suggests that 1 out of 3 Kosovans believe in the likelihood of Kosovo becoming the target of terrorist attack, while 7 out of 10 Kosovans perceive the returnees from the war in Syria and Iraq are a potential threat, and are the most likely persons to commit terrorist attacks in Kosovo.³⁴ On the other hand, the most striking result of the PEW Research Center poll is the percentage of Kosovans who justify suicide bombings to defend Islam from its enemies: whereas 71% never justify suicide bombings, 2% often justify them, 9% justify them sometimes, and 11% rarely justify suicide bombings.³⁵ Albeit differing in frequency of justification, this data suggest that 2 out of 10 Kosovans have succumbed to extremism, matching the number of those in favor of supporting the rule of Sharia in Kosovo (20%).³⁶

The Kosovo Security Barometer shows that 10% would commit to a religious, rather than to a national cause, while an approximate 46% would commit to both national and religious causes.³⁷ The question of identity was discussed in the focus groups organized for this study. In fact, there are several reasons why religious (sub) identity sometimes is as strong or stronger than ethnic and national identity, especially among Kosovo Albanians. As explained further in the section on focus groups, these reasons include Kosovo being an “unconsolidated nation state” (in the context of its declaration of independence in 2008)³⁸, shifting identities throughout the last century and during the transition period, in which the only identity layer which remained untouched was the religious identity, and the feeling of frustration of expectations from the independence.

Perceptions about the increased likelihood of terrorist attacks in Kosovo are part of the general climate of fear created by frequent terror attacks taking place in Western Europe in the past three years and from the direct threats made by some Kosovo foreign fighters in Syria.³⁹ Globalization of media including TV and news over the internet influences the spread of perceived insecurity among people in various

30 UNDP. 2014. Supra. 7

31 Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project. 2012. Web: http://www.globalreligiousfutures.org/countries/kosovo/#/?affiliations_religion_id=0&affiliations_year=2010®ion_name=All%20Countries&restrictions_year=2013. Accessed on December 11, 2016.

32 Kosovar Center for Security Studies. 2016. “Kosovo Security Barometer. Special Edition: The citizen’s views against violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo.”

33 Anisa Goshi and Dallin van Leuven. 2017. “Kosovo-wide Assessment of Perceptions of Radicalization at the Community Level.” UNDP and Government of Kosovo.

34 Ibid. p. 21 and 23.

35 Pew research Center. Supra. 31

36 Ibid.

37 Commitment to religious cause: 9% in urban areas, 10% in rural areas; commitment to both national and religious cause: 48% in urban areas, 44% in rural areas. Quoted in: Kursani, Shpend. 2015. “Report inquiring into causes and consequences of Kosovo citizen’s involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.” Kosovo Center for Security Studies. Prishtina/Pristina.

38 On 17 February 2008, the Kosovo assembly unanimously declared Kosovo to be independent from Serbia. The legality of the declaration has been disputed. Serbia sought international validation and support for its stance that the declaration was illegal, and in October 2008 requested an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice. The Court determined that the declaration did not violate international law.

39 In June 2015, Ridvan Haqifi, a.k.a. Al Kosovi, appeared in an ISIS propaganda video, in which he threatened Kosovo would be expecting ‘dark days.’ Al Kosovi was reported dead on 8 February, 2017.

countries. Despite increased mobilization to prevent violent extremism, the majority of respondents believe that public institutions' actions to counter violent extremism are unsuccessful (57%), as opposed to a minor 5% who believe public institutions' actions to prevent extremism was successful and a larger portion of 35% who believe that public institutions were somewhat successful in the prevention of extremism. A survey held at the end of 2014⁴⁰ by UNDP Public Pulse shows that every second Kosovo Albanian strongly approved or approved those arrests, whereas every third Kosovo Albanian (27%) disapproved or strongly disapproved them. The approval rate was lower among others within Kosovo⁴¹ with only 36.5% approving arrests.⁴² Thirty-five percent did not answer, whereas the disapproval rate is similar (28.5%) with that of Kosovo Albanians. The rate of approval by Kosovo Serbs was much higher, moving towards 92% rate.⁴³

However, the majority of Kosovans were convinced that returnees from the wars in Syria and Iraq should be rehabilitated, with more than half being pro-rehabilitation.⁴⁴ In contrast, every fifth Kosovan believed they should be arrested outright, and 15% maintained they should not be allowed to return to Kosovo at all. In a UNDP survey held in 2017, 6 out of ten respondents in Kosovo said they would feel at risk and uncomfortable with the return of foreign fighters in their neighborhood.⁴⁵ Only 4.5% said they support rehabilitation, whereas a minor percentage said that returned foreign fighters should be jailed outright. Less than 4% of respondents, mainly in the affected areas of Kosovo (Kaçanik/Kaçanik, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Prishtinë/Priština and Mitrovicë/a), said they would welcome foreign fighters returning to Kosovo. Similar concern about the lack of rehabilitation programs was expressed in the EU 2016 Kosovo Report.⁴⁶ Kosovo central institutions are addressing this. For example, by the end of 2016, the Ministry of Justice of Kosovo and the KIC, have reached an agreement to engage 10 imams to provide services for prisoners as part of the support for rehabilitation and reintegration program for Syria and Iraq war-related offences. The initiative is implemented by Ministry of Justice of Kosovo with the support of international organizations.

Reviewed studies also suggest that public perceptions are influenced by acute developments in Kosovo and in the wider region. During the second half of 2015 political tensions in Kosovo reached their peak due to opposition disrupting the work of the Kosovo Assembly and mobilizing citizens to protest in the streets of Prishtina/Pristina opposing the August 2014 Agreement on the Association of Serb Majority Municipalities, between Kosovo and Serbia, and the Agreement on the Demarcation of the Border with Montenegro. The rate of Kosovans who believe that the main risk for Kosovo comes from violent riots triggered by political and party militants is the highest (60%), followed by those who perceive ethnically motivated violence (36%) and religious extremism (29%) to be the main risks. The latter seems to indicate long-term consistency with earlier UNDP and other polls cited in the beginning of this study. Overall, a worrying trend is that the overwhelming majority of Kosovans expect violence, suggesting that the stability in Kosovo is fragile in almost all aspects.⁴⁷

Several studies as well as the research conducted for this topic suggest that 'irresponsible reporting' by media have exaggerated the problem of violent extremism.⁴⁸ As a USAID report suggests, media in general have "exacerbated the problem" of violent extremism.⁴⁹ According to USAID, "this results in the general population being scared into thinking that the violent extremism threat is greater than it is." Because of unbalanced media and social media coverage, USAID and Kosovo think tanks argue that Kosovans, whose information comes mainly from Albanian language media outlets, tend to misinter-

40 The arrests happened in the summer and fall of 2014.

41 Kosovo-Others is used for non-Serb minorities in Kosovo, including Bosnians, Turks, Ashkanli, Egyptian, Roma, Croats, Montenegrins and other communities.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

44 A rehabilitation program is currently being designed within the framework of "Kosovo Strategy for PVE and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020."

45 Goshi and van Leuven. 2017. P. 49-50. Supra. 33.

46 European Commission. Supra. 17.

47 Only 8% believed there is no threat from political and party violence, 21% were skeptical that there is a threat from ethnic violence, while 36% thought there is no risk from religious violence. See Supra. 12.

48 In this study, the term "media" refers to printed, electronic and internet media.

49 USAID. 2015. Supra 26.

pret religious conservatism with extremist ideology.

Accordingly, the Public Pulse findings also reveal that the majority of Kosovans formed their opinions about the presence of violent extremism in Kosovo through print and electronic media (52%), as well as social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter (10%). In contrast, 38% of this perception comes from conversations with friends and family as well as personal experiences respectively. Only 4% have formed perceptions about violent extremism from personal experiences.⁵⁰ The main finding from focus groups shows that media reporting may have created a distorted picture, which tends to present any form of religious conservatism as religious extremism.

Some of the main issues to be addressed in the prevention of violent extremism are pull and push factors. The studies to date have identified a number of push factors, ranging from economic and social factors (unemployment, weak education system, isolation of young people and lack of possibilities to travel), low institutional capacity and integrity (frustrated expectations, dissatisfaction with economic and political orientation of Kosovo, corruption, etc.), religious solidarization, and alienation due to religious views.⁵¹ Whereas the identified pull factors include; active recruitment networks, mainly consisting of radical leaders educated in some Middle East universities, cross-border influences of radical and extremist imams and individuals between Kosovo and FYR of Macedonia border towns, online radicalism, identity seeking and rewards, as well as the influence by extremist media and extremist content in the social media are the ones already identified.⁵²

3.2 International Media Reporting

Media reports on violent extremism in Kosovo have diverse viewpoints, ranging from those creating a picture that shows Kosovo as a hotbed of extremism, to those that take a more balanced view. For example, a New York Times feature portrays Kosovo as a “front of Islamic extremism and a pipeline for jihadists.”⁵³ In a rather sensational-style reporting, the article argues that the society has been transformed and that Kosovo and “the very nature of its society has been recast” to embrace violent extremism.⁵⁴

On the other hand, The Nation feature refutes the New York Times, arguing that its report presents untrue picture and that it has even presented false facts.⁵⁵ The Nation portrays a more balanced picture, arguing that Kosovo’s religious tradition features moderate Islam, despite virulent activities by several radical imams to inject extremist ideology in the Kosovo society.⁵⁶ Indeed, some international media outlets provide misinformed descriptions of extremism, which are then quoted by other media, contributing to dissemination of false information globally.⁵⁷

50 UNDP. 2014. Supra 8.

51 Office of the Prime Minister. 2015. “Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020.” Prishtina; USAID (United States Agency for International Development). 2015. “Kosovo Violent Extremism Risk Assessment: April-May 2015.” UNDP. 2015. “Comprehensive Assessment to Counter Violent Radicalisation in Kosovo.”

52 Ibid.

53 Gall, Carlotta. 2016. “How Kosovo was Turned into Fertile Ground for ISIS.” The New York Times. May 21, 2016. At https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/22/world/europe/how-the-saudis-turned-kosovo-into-fertile-ground-for-isis.html?_r=0

54 Ibid.

55 Wilson, Lydia. 2016. “Is Kosovo the New European Hotbed of Jihadi Extremism?” The Nation. July 14, 2016. At <https://www.thenation.com/article/is-kosovo-the-new-european-hotbed-of-jihadi-extremism/>

56 Ibid.

57 Two media outlets have mentioned ‘Makovitz Mosque in the outskirts of Pristina,’ an inexistent facility. For more information, see: Al-Arnaout, Mohammad. 2013. “Albanian Islamists Join Syrian War.” Al-Monitor. Quoted by: Bartos, Gordon N. 2014. “Jihad in the Balkans: The Next Generation.” World Affairs. Al-Arnaout has quoted the Tirana-based newspaper, ‘Shekulli’ issue of April 13, 2013.

New Eastern Europe argues that radicalization takes place in a hidden way, deep in the grassroots and that it is difficult to trace.⁵⁸ Identity crisis and disillusionment with the effects of independence are the main cause of radicalization, according to this story.⁵⁹ Reuters reports on the case of a suicide bomber, Blerim Heta, the infamous Lavdrim Muhaxheri's acts of violence in Syria, and the actions taken by Kosovo law enforcement, including the arrest of 14 imams, triggered by the deeds of Kosovan ISIS fighters.⁶⁰

A Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty (RFERL) feature explains radicalization of young men coming from local radical imams and NGOs who use social media to target disgruntled young men,⁶¹ whereas the British newspaper Telegraph (August 2015) refers to Kaçanik/Kaçanik as a "jihadist capital of the Balkans."⁶² The Telegraph explains that some of the reasons why some Kosovans have joined ISIS are rampant poverty, unemployment, external influence and corrupt public institutions.⁶³

Various reports suggest that there is internal conflict within the KIC, whose leadership has consistently downplayed the threat of violent extremism within its ranks. Interviews suggest that KIC ignored appeals by local imams of the activities and threats by extremists. For example, a local Kaçanik/Kaçanik imam reveals that his repeated denouncements of threats by local extremists back in 2006 went in a deaf ear both at KIC, the municipal authorities and Kosovo police.⁶⁴

3.3 Legal Framework

Kosovo has a comprehensive legal framework to counter terrorism, which, according to the US Department of State "is sufficient to prosecute individuals suspected of committing or supporting terrorist activities."⁶⁵ This legislative framework consists of the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code, both of which address the acts comprehensively, as well as create necessary procedure to prosecute terrorism-related crimes. In 2015, Kosovo Assembly also adopted the Law on the Prohibition on Joining Foreign Conflicts, under which members of ISIS and other extremist organizations returning to Kosovo are being prosecuted. By 2015, 130 Kosovo-participants in the Middle East conflict have returned,⁶⁶ whereas by 2016, judgments against 36 defendants were issued, 33 defendants were standing trial, 50 defendants were under investigation and 78 suspects have been investigated.⁶⁷ In addition, 19 men were arrested in November 2016 on suspicion of conspiring to carry out terrorist attacks in Kosovo and in Albania.

In 2016, Kosovo expanded its legislative framework to counter terrorist activities. Thus, in May 2016, Kosovo Assembly adopted the Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and on Countering the Financing of Terrorism, replacing the respective 2013 law.⁶⁸ In November 2016, the Central Bank of Kosovo approved its Regulation on Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism.⁶⁹ From 2013, the public institutions of Kosovo adopted two administrative directives and two adminis-

58 Orzechowska, Ida. 2014. "The Hidden Growth of Islamic Extremism in Kosovo." New Eastern Europe. August 22, 2014. At <http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/interviews/1301-the-hidden-growth-of-islamic-extremism-in-kosovo>

59 Ibid.

60 Bytyqi, Fatos. 2014. "Indebted to America, Kosovo struggles to curb Islamist recruits." Reuters. October 1, 2014. At <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo-islamist-usa-idUSKCN0HQ3LZ20141001>

61 Bezhan, Frud. 2016. "Inside Kosovo's Islamist Cauldron." Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. June, 2016. At <http://www.rferl.org/a/inside-kosovos-islamic-cauldron/27825148.html>

62 Freeman, Colin. 2015. "Inside Kacanik, Kosovo's Jihadist Capital." August 23, 2015. At <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/kosovo/11818659/Inside-Kacanik-Kosovos-jihadist-capital.html>

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 US Department of State. 2016. "Country Reports on Terrorism 2015 – Europe Overview-Kosovo." At: <https://www.state.gov/j/cr/rls/crt/2015/257516.htm>

66 Peci, Edona. 2016. "Can Kosovo Rehabilitate its Homegrown Extremists?" Balkan Insight. At: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/can-kosovo-rehabilitate-its-homegrown-extremists--07-13-2016>

67 European Commission. 2016. "Kosovo* 2016 Report." P. 71. At: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_kosovo.pdf

68 The 2013 Law amended the same law approved in 2010.

69 Central Bank of the Republic of Kosovo. 2016. Regulation on Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism. At: http://bqk-kos.org/repository/docs/korniza_ligjore/english/11-BQK%20-%20ENG%20-%20Rregullorja%20per%20parandalimin%20e%20pastrimit%20te%20parave.pdf

trative instructions related to the financing of terrorism. These acts include: the 2013 Administrative Directive on Training for Preventing and Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing; the 2015 Administrative Directive on Prevention and Detection of Terrorist Financing; the 2013 Administrative Instruction on National Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Risk Assessment; the 2013 Administrative Instruction on Compiling Statistics, Reports and Recommendations on Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing; and the 2014 Administrative Instruction on Minimum Standards, Written Procedures and Controls for Prevention and Detection of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing by Covered Professionals.⁷⁰

A consistent storyline throughout the literature and from interviews carried for this research is that Kosovan institutions have not paid attention to the problems of radicalization and Syrian recruitment up until the second half of 2014, when several imams suspected of recruitment for ISIS and other extremist organizations were arrested. These arrests and the general mobilization of Kosovo institutions against violent extremism were triggered by the YouTube broadcasted video of Kosovan extremist, Lavdrim Muhaxheri, decapitating an unarmed civilian in Syria. The police did not act on people's complaints about the radicalization processes in which their relatives were involved, apart from questioning in case it was appropriate because there was simply no evidence of any offence being committed at the time.⁷¹ In a similar tone, the 2016 EU Commission Progress Report on Kosovo notes that little attention was paid to the programs for prevention, de-radicalization and reintegration of those who returned from war in Syria.⁷² On the other hand, Kosovo is actively tackling radicalization in prisons, reviewing and confiscating all religion-related literature in Kosovan prisons, except for the Quran, and also providing imams from KIC to offer religious teachings in prisons as part of deradicalization and rehabilitation programs.

3.4 Gender Perspective on Violent Extremism

This report recognizes that in general there is a lack of research focusing specifically on gender perspective in violent extremism and further research should be undertaken in this regard. However, in the case of Kosovo out of a total of 316 citizens who have joined ISIS, 44 are women, 7 of which have returned.⁷³ Studies conducted in Kosovo suggest that most women who left for conflict zones in the Middle East have either voluntarily, or forcefully, joined their husbands.⁷⁴ Some features reveal that those that have done so have displayed peculiar behaviors, including withdrawal from the family and the society and self-isolation, prior to fleeing.⁷⁵ Those that joined their husbands in Syria focused on taking care of their men as well as the children they have taken along. In the beginning of 2017, there were 27 children in Syria, some of which were taken away by their fathers without the consent of the mothers.⁷⁶ Also, at the initial stages, extremist organizations did not recruit women — this began only when “state building” was introduced by ISIS, predominantly, in the conquered territory. It is suggested here that special attention must be paid to PVE and women's perspective since it would not only tackle the gender specific vulnerabilities, but could also be helpful in the prevention of extremism within the families.

70 Ministry of Finance, Financial Intelligence Unit. Legislation. At: <http://fiu.rks-gov.net/legislation/?lang=en>

71 Xharra, Arbana. 2016. “Few but Fanatical – the Kosovo Women Who Go Over to ISIS.” *Balkan Insight*. In <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/few-but-fanatical-the-kosovo-women-who-go-over-to-isis-01-22-2016#sthash.TElcmQC5.dpuf>.

72 European Commission. 2016. *Supra* 17, P. 71.

73 Jakupi Rudinë, Kelmendi Vesë. 2017. *Women in Violent Extremism: Lessons Learned from Kosovo*. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies. Prishtina. In: http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/women-in-ve-eng_594236.pdf

74 Ibid.

75 Xharra. *Supra*. 68.

76 Jakupi and Kelmendi. 2017. *Supra*. 70. P 20.

4. FOCUS GROUPS

4.1 Influence by radical and extremist religious ideologies

A finding across focus groups is that the Islam practiced in Kosovo today is influenced by atypical imported interpretations, mainly through imams educated in the Middle East and by the respective Middle Eastern organizations that were active in Kosovo after the conflict. Similarly, the level of religious tolerance, especially among the Muslim population, is at a low level because of the interpretative heterogeneity of Islam.

Kosovo's Islamic tradition is based on Hanafi juridical school.

Non-traditional interpretations of Islam for Kosovo, including Salafism, came through imams educated in the universities in the Middle East and through humanitarian organizations from Saudi Arabia.

The main finding from all focus groups is that traditional form of Islam practiced in Kosovo is based on Hanafi juridical school, which makes a moderate interpretation of Islam, based on social tolerance. However, “after the war, there has been an invasion of atypical interpretation of Islam for Kosovo, in which religion was paired with culture and preaching on how should people live, dress and dine,” one participant explained. This atypical interpretation of Islam “is based on Salafism, which is a rigid interpretation of Islam due to an increasing number of imams who have been educated in the Middle Eastern universities.”⁷⁷

Salafists reject any other interpretation which they consider as deviation from pure Islam.

This cultural indoctrination introduced intolerance against less religious or traditional believers and helped stratify religious adherents into “true believers” and “non-true believers”. In turn, the “social intolerance against those displaying a more conservative religious belief has increased,” a participant said. For example, a participant from Gjiilan/Gnjilane said that “religious interpretation made at many mosques is different now in comparison to the interpretation before the war. Some radicalized imams denounce national symbols against the wishes of the people.” Yet one participant from Hani i Elezit/Elez Han stated that “there are radicalized persons who publicly denounce imams as ‘deviated from true religion’ during the worship for their traditional interpretation of religion and the way they pray. They also denounce Albanian national symbols based on their interpretation of religion. They try to influence the identity of the people.”

An interesting finding is that there is no consensus within KIC about what exactly is traditional Islam because both Hanafi and more conservative imams pertaining to Salafi tradition claim to represent the true and traditional Islam. These divisions can be observed within the KIC itself, which hinders prevention of radical religious ideologies. The mainstream interpretation of Islam has been affected significantly in the sense that the religious doctrine has embraced new orientations viewing Islam as a global religion. “The doctrine is the biggest problem,” a participant argued. Another participant argued that the KIC “has failed to enforce traditional Islam to which it adheres.” On the other side, some local religious

Kosovo should offer a more accommodating version of secularism.

⁷⁷ There are four Islamic juridical schools of thought formed between the 7th and the 9th centuries. The oldest is the Hanafiyya school, followed by the Malikiyya school, Shafiyya and the latest, Hanbaliyya school. The latter was based on conservative, purist and non-tolerant interpretation of Islam, unlike for example, the Hanafiyya school. The Hanbaliyya school revived in the 18th century with the emergence of Wahabbism in Saudi Arabia. The term Salafism in Kosovo is used interchangeably to describe the Hanbaliyya school and Wahabbism. Salafi means “early Muslim,” and, according to Lauziere, since 19th century, it has been considered by Western scholars as a movement of reform ‘aimed at the revival and progress of Islam and Muslim societies in the modern era.’ However, Lauziere argues that the adherence of the Islamic reformist scholars of the 19th and early 20th century to Salafism is undocumented. He even questions the existence of such movement. He argues that Salafism as a term and as a slogan developed in the 19th century through a famous Cairo-based bookstore and publishing house called Salafiyya, which indeed published and distributed liberal literature. However, its franchised Saudi Arabia branch during the 1920’s contributed to the association of the term with Wahhabism, promoting illiberal, conservative and purist theological concepts of Islam, in the form which is known to the present day. According to Lauziere, this interpretation considers all other Islamic traditions as deviation from true Islam and tends to influence both theological concepts as well as the social etiquette. For more information about Salafism, see: Lauziere, Henri. 2010. The Construction of Salafiyya: Reconsidering Salafism from the Perspective of Conceptual History. International Journal of Middle East Studies Volume 4, Issue 3. Cambridge University Press.

leaders state that their capacity to control local mosques was limited and that their appeals to other institutions, such as police and municipality to intervene did not yield results. “We have made several requests to police and municipal authorities to check some mosques where we believed extremist ideologies were being taught, but our appeals were not taken seriously. For example, in one case, the imam whom we denounced and no action was taken by the authorities, was arrested some years later for his involvement in recruitment for the war in Syria,” a participant said. However, a participant from the Kosovo police in the focus group explained that the police cannot act if there is no evidence that a criminal offence is made.

The widespread dissatisfaction with the trends in economy and Kosovo’s general development after the 2008 unilateral declaration of independence has created avenues of influence for radical and extremist groups. As one participant said, “Kosovo institutions have not offered a more accommodating version of secularism and until that happens there will be problems with religious radicalism and extremism.”

Young people with no prior religious education can be more vulnerable to extremist indoctrination.

Extremist recruiters are opportunistic narrators, who create emotional bonds with dissatisfied and desperate individuals

An important finding about the influence of radical and extremist ideologies is that young men, who do not necessarily come from religious families, can be vulnerable to such influence. As one participant said, “recruiters provide young men discriminate or false information about religion, and due to the lack of previous religious education, they be-

come a prey to radicalization.” In contrast, “the elderly and those that already have traditional religious education are less prone to indoctrination,” the same participant added.

Recruiters are very apt at exploiting social isolation and general disenchantment of young people.

A feeling of being excommunicated by the society because of their religious belief, or feeling of lacking perspective for whatever reason, makes individuals

search for kinship and understanding. In this view, extremist recruiters are opportunistic narrators, who can skillfully use these situations to create emotional bonds with dissatisfied and desperate individuals, by commiserating: “They know how to approach these people to look more compatible. This form of indoctrination is very successful. They know how to speak the language of desperate people because they level out,” a participant argued.

This begs the question whether the long-debated and controversial issue of head-scarf wearing by students in schools should be allowed or prohibited, and if public schools should introduce religious education.⁷⁸ Most participants argued that banning head-scarfs “creates counter-effects because it stigmatizes and isolates individuals and their families from the mainstream society and makes them perhaps more vulnerable to the influence of radical and extremist ideologies.”⁷⁹ Display of religious belonging has long been viewed by the mainstream society and the institutions as radicalism and extremism, participants from a local community focus group argued. There is a non-selective usage of the term radicalism and extremism, thus, “stigmatizing unjustly imams and Islamic believers as extremists,” Some participants argued such attitude creates the impression among the more conservative believers that the public institutions are pursuing “anti-Islamic policy,” and may result in exacerbation rather than diffusion of the current tensions. In fact, this narrative is consistent with the narrative of a number of extremist organizations, including ISIS, highlighting the widespread influence of extremist groups and individuals in Kosovo. One participant acknowledged “such narratives exist in Kosovo and are used by extremist groups.”

⁷⁸ Wearing of head-scarfs by women at work-place or public schools has been a long-debated issue in Kosovo with those against and those supporting head-scarfs. In 2010, the Ministry of education has issued an administrative instruction banning wearing of head-scarf by students in public schools. Some municipalities, like Hani i Elezit, defy this rule.

⁷⁹ According to a USAID assessment, social intolerance towards display of a more conservative religious belief is a push factor.

Imams feel the Kosovo security institutions have been targeting them and thus fear of repercussions if they try to reach out to radicalized persons.

been refraining from approaching radicalized youths, including those who have returned from Syria out of fear from being labelled as extremists,” a participant from Hani i Elezit said. “When the imam of Mitrovica, Ekrem Avdiu was arrested, I was surprised and at the same time I felt injustice is being done. I was afraid they could come to arrest me the next morning although I have been working with municipal institutions for a long time to prevent radical and extremist elements from rooting here. You know, ‘muddy waters flush widely’,” another participant stated.

Forty-four women have joined ISIS, mainly accompanying their husbands.

One of the issues that emerged in the focus groups is the gender perspective on violent extremism. The UNDP’s Public Pulse reveals less concern among women regarding the likelihood of terrorist attacks in comparison to men. In the discussion with one of the focus groups, women’s perspective was raised in terms of their position within the religious community and within religious stratification between more moderate and more radical schools of Islam. A participant argued that “Women are a victim of discrimination in all three levels of authority: the official KIC, the Salafist circles, and in the decision-making in the public institutions.” Because they have no access, it is men that take decisions on their behalf and impose their beliefs and behaviors: “Women are in no position to make a choice. They have to accept decisions of men in the institutions and in the family,” one participant said. Because they do not have access in the KIC, they are exposed to alternative sources of religious education, including by the male members of family and internet. In general, women are more moderate than men, but lack of access does not allow them to influence processes, especially within the KIC. “KIC does not have local women councils, although they should,” a participant argued.⁸⁰

The ban of head-scarfs in public institutions may yield counter-effects. It is a way of stigmatizing and isolating conservative believers, but does not mitigate the problem of violent extremism.

One participant said that women who have been expelled from the public system, including schools and employment, were particularly targeted by extremist and radical groups, who have advised them to abandon public sector, because it threatens their religious beliefs. Women do not have access to official worship in mosques and therefore, they are exposed to other kinds of radical religious indoctrination, including men from families, foreign organizations and especially internet. Usually, family and personal acquaintances make for an appropriate ground for radicalization.⁸¹ Although women are in general more moderate adherents to religion, radical women tend to be true believers in radical and extremist ideologies and therefore they refuse to be part of any discussion regarding religion with those outside their circles. “They would not accept traditional religious teachings, because they consider us to have deviated from true religion,” one participant said.

⁸⁰ Jakupi and Kelmendi reveal that all (3) women interviewed for their research, which went in the conflict zone in Syria, have finished secondary school and at least one year of university studies. See: Jakupi and Kelmendi, Supra. 52. Other sources suggest there are such women with university degrees.

⁸¹ UNDP. 2015. “An Assessment to Counter Violent Radicalization in Kosovo.”

4.2 Push and Pull Factors

4.2.1 Push Factors

Discussions with the focus groups reveal that the factors pushing people towards radicalization leading to violent extremism are not uniform. For example, media reports highlight cases of quick radicalization of youngsters coming from well-to-do families with no problems such as drug addiction or social marginalization. Discussions with focus groups shed light on diversity of push factors in various geographic and social settings: “What influences someone in Kaçanik/Kaçanik, does not influence necessarily someone from Prishtina/Pristina,” a participant stated. Therefore, this study has considered push factors at play in three different settings in Kosovo: the capital Prishtinë/Priština, a small and isolated town of Hani i Elezit/Elez Han and Gjilan/Gnjilane, a relatively big regional center in Kosovo.

Another finding from focus groups is that although radicalization is generally a process, it can also happen quickly and there does not seem to be a common denominator determining the speed of radicalization. “Although typically, radicalization is a process, there is a case, in which a person got radicalized and committed a suicide attack within a year from his first contact with violent extremists” a participant explained. In this view, the “socio-economic factors should not be generalized, although they are an important factor in pushing people towards religious extremism” another participant claimed.

There is no common denominator of people who get radicalized. Their background and social position differs.

Findings from the focus groups show that various factors are at play in pushing young people to become part of extremist groups. Never the less, a common push factor is *disappointment* with institutions and the feeling that there is a *lack of perspective* for young people in Kosovo. Disenchantment with the system drives many young people to act against the system and one manifestation of this disenchantment is through violent extremism.

A general finding from the focus groups is that “lack of previous religious knowledge”, “weak education system and lack of critical thinking skills makes people buy into the traits of religious radicalism that leads to extremism.” Kosovo’s education system “fails to create skills that enable young people employability,” a participant argued. In addition, “public institutions’ corruption, dissatisfaction with the performance of the public institutions, has created a general depression and alienation from the system,” another participant suggested, adding that this creates favorable conditions for radical and religious groups to spread their ideologies.

The problem of identity crisis is a strong push factor, especially in the post-conflict and transition periods, where basic sense of belonging and nationhood must be re-built or even re-asserted. When statehood remains short of being consolidated, there is a lack of sense of loyalty, which would create bonds that are stronger than that of global Islam and the feeling of religious brotherhood and belonging to a large global community, which creates a sense of personal empowerment. This sense of self-importance as an internal driver versus dissatisfactions at the local level and non-admittance to and isolation from, other larger communities, such as regional or European community, is quickly satisfied by global ideologies, including extremist ones. The feeling that some communities, such as Hani i Elezit/Elez Han, are stigmatized as an extremist community is particularly dangerous since it increases dissatisfaction and the sense of isolation and fosters radicalization. Disappointment with the system and frustration of expectations from “independent state” can also be a source of radicalization. Thus, according to the revelations from the focus group there, the identity crisis forged by the “state politics of weakening the Albanian national identity in Kosovo,” has created confusion around identity that pushed people to find shelter in religion as their first self-identifier.

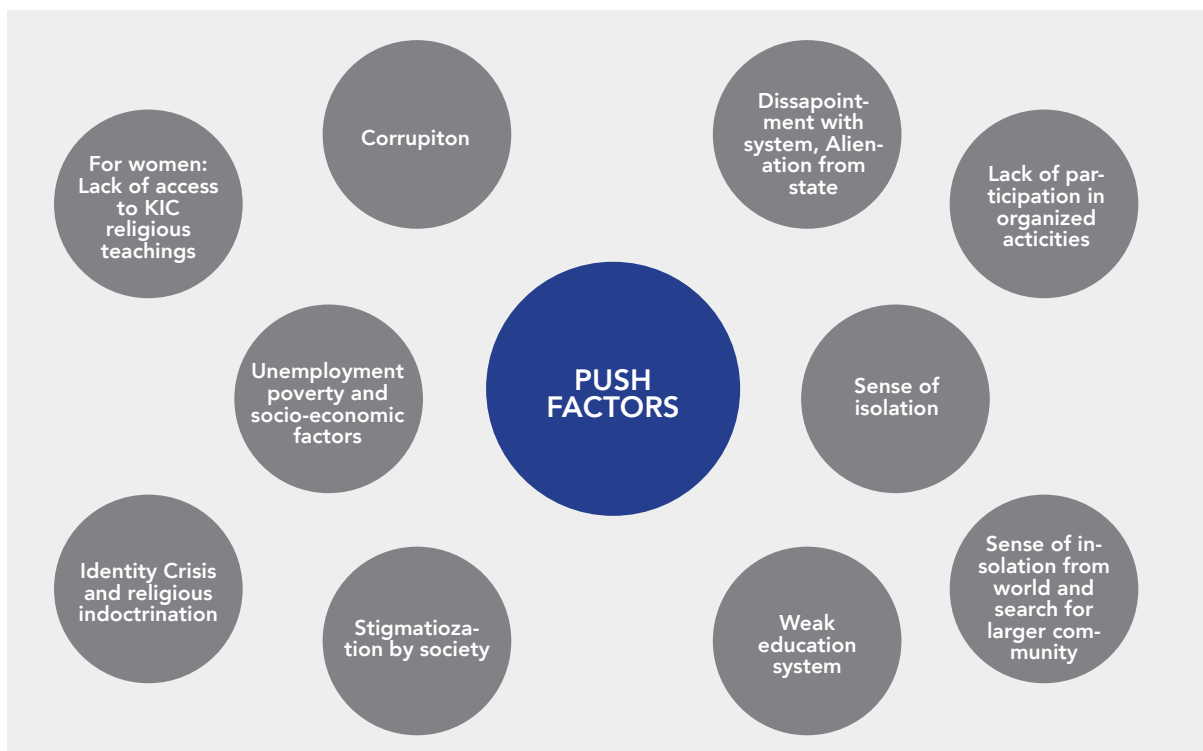
“Kosovo underwent enormous changes through its transition, which has affected the identity of the people, who were told sometimes they were Albanians, Kosovans or Yugoslavs. The only identity

which was not affected was the religious identity. Therefore, those people whose religious identity was stronger, who were more connected to religion and have embraced Islam as their primary identity, are more prone to radicalization,” a participant noted. This means the society has not been able to grasp all the caveats of transition, in which more people became religious and not all equally so. Some are more attached to religion than others and this creates more religious diversity among Kosovo Albanians belonging to the Muslim confession.

Socio-economic conditions including unemployment are found to be some of the main push factors. In the Gjilan/Gnjilane region, for example, which is one of the richest regions in Kosovo due to large diaspora community (also Ferizaj/Uroševac), “there was vast migration from deep rural communities in the city, contributing to the stratification of the local population, non-acceptance and marginalization in economic and social terms,” a participant explained. To take yet a smaller community of Kosovo, such as Hani i Elezit/Elez Han, a tiny and isolated community bordering FYR of Macedonia, where many extremist imams are based and have been residing in Kosovo, the story becomes even more intriguing. In addition to the push factors found in other places, Hani i Elezit/Elez Han displays some social characteristics, including “individual and general poverty, lack of perspective, feeling of being disadvantaged in comparison to other regions within Kosovo, lack of places where young people could undertake their social activities, including sports halls, cultural facilities and similar,” one participant noted. “The public institutions’ unfairness in investment due to the community’s political choices further alienates this community as a whole,” a participant from Hani i Elezit/Elez Han said.

Socio-economic factors including unemployment and lack of opportunities, weak education system and identity crisis along with religious indoctrination are the most frequent factors mentioned by the participants. Corruption and alienation from the society and sense of isolation and search for larger community are factors of the second order; while lack of infrastructure and organized participation in sports and cultural activities by young people are more factors of local importance, mentioned in Hani i Elezit/Elez Han. The figure below shows the push factors as presented in the order of frequency in the focus groups.⁸²

Figure 1: Participant responses on the push factors of violent extremism



⁸² The bigger the circle, the more frequently a factor was mentioned.

4.2.2 Pull Factors

The main pull factor, which can be described also as an umbrella factor, is the globalization itself and religious globalization. Extremist organizations view the predominantly Muslim Albanian population alongside Bosnian Muslims as potentially favorable elements in Europe for their agendas and thus have invested significant efforts to spread their influence in the Western Balkans. The internet is another factor, and has recently become the main pull factor in radicalization and extremism. Broadcasting videos and texts of religious teachings including propaganda videos by ISIS through social media has become a usual disseminating tool for recruitment and spreading of extremist ideologies. An imam from Kosovo, who has recently been charged with inciting religious and other hatred, broadcasted regularly via YouTube and paid TV time. There is an exaggerated perception that ISIS propaganda has been targeting Albanians in the Balkans.⁸³ As one participant stated, “ISIS communiques are also translated in the Albanian language,” to target Albanian audience in the Balkans.” However, extremist organizations in the Middle East broadcast as intensively in other languages including Russian, German, French, English, Dutch and other.

According to the focus groups’ participants, the introduction of extremist ideologies by some imams educated in the Middle Eastern universities remains the main pull factor, because some of them became part of the recruitment networks in Kosovo and in the region, thus creating a sustained focus on indoctrination with atypical religious ideologies and recruitment for extremist groups. Informal areas where these extremist imams deliver their religious lectures, including sports halls, YouTube, paid TV shows, have been noted in all focus groups.

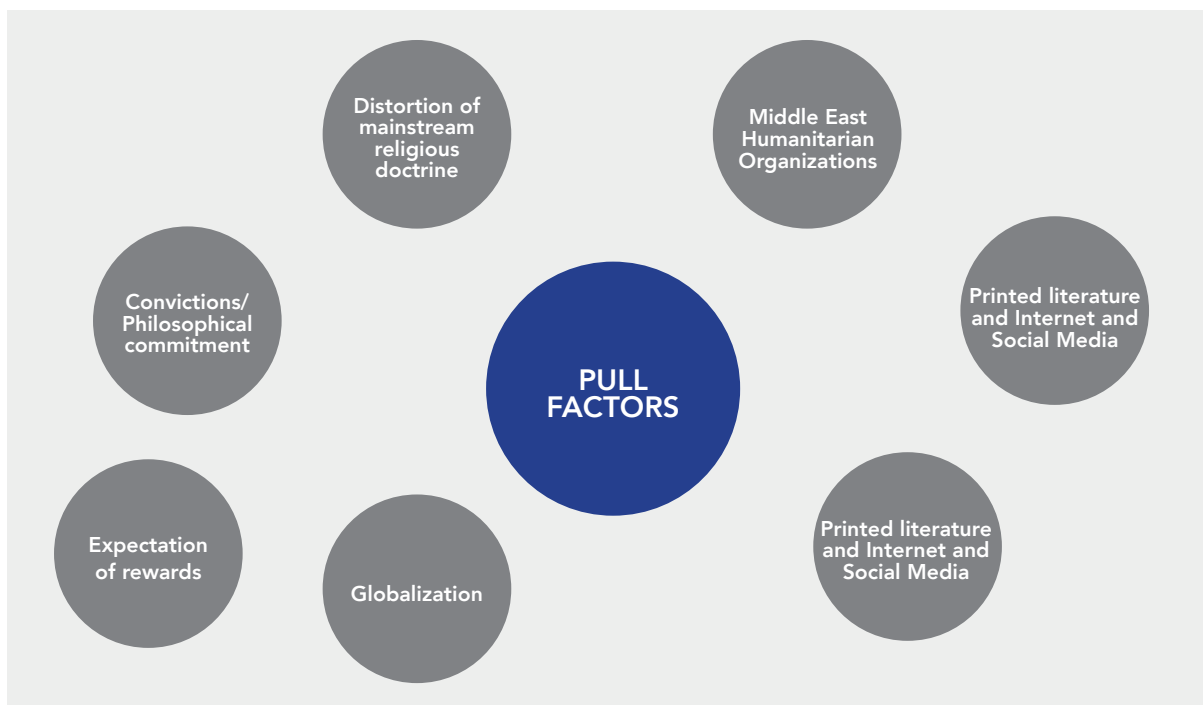
Religious literature printed by various organizations preceded internet publications and broadcasts. For over a decade extremist literature was published by various organizations and they circulated uncontrolled. For example, one participant revealed that a recent campaign to oversee literature in Kosovo prisons found that most literature in the prison libraries has radical and extremist content. Therefore, all religious books, except for the Quran, were withdrawn and “an agreement between the KIC and the Ministry of Justice was reached to have 10 (ten) imams serve worships in Kosovo prisons,” several participants explained. Similarly, “the KIC in Gjilan/Gnjilane has banned distribution of religious literature in the mosques, except for that approved by the KIC” one participant explained.

An important pull factor, especially for those joining the war in Syria, is the strong religious adherence, or as one participant put it “philosophical commitment,” as the highest level of extremist indoctrination. When all other push factors combine with a religious doctrine, which feeds such a worldview, it becomes a powerful tool to recruit people in extremist agendas.

Such philosophical commitment places individuals in the realm of the world described in the religious texts. As a participant in Hani i Elezit/Elez Han said, “the expectation of rewards from participation in the war including material ones such as benefiting land, becoming a lord in some region or other kinds of riches,” in Syria or Land of Sham as described in the religious texts, has been a key motivating factor for many people to decide to join ISIS and to take their families along with them. As the 2012 KIC circular states: “Damascus will be a fortress of believers...there will be migration after migration and the best people on earth are those that stick mostly to the place of migration of Ibrahim a.s. – The Sham.”⁸⁴ The figure below shows the pull factors found from the discussion in the focus groups in the order of frequency.

⁸³ See for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1AmJ71iBSD0>

⁸⁴ Sham is Levant.

Figure 2: Participant responses on pull factors of violent extremism

4.3 Threat from Terrorist Attacks

The likelihood of terrorist attacks has increased, despite lower number of people joining ISIS.

A general finding from all focus groups suggested the threat from terrorist attacks in Kosovo is permanent, unpredictable and long-term. Moreover, this threat is not only confined to Kosovo. “Kosovo is threatened as much as any other country in the region and wider,” one participant noted. The threat has increased since “ISIS has lost most of its positions it used to hold in the Middle East.” In fact, on many occasions, the official assessment of the scale of success of

counter-terrorism activities by the Kosovo public institutions was that the number of people joining ISIS is now lower. This does not show, however, that the threat from violent extremism is lower, for as subsequent sections presenting focus groups’ results show, ISIS global strategy has changed, relying on individuals carrying out attacks in the places they live, rather than joining ISIS in the Middle East.

The threat should not be judged by the number of people joining ISIS. The possibility of targeting soft targets is higher. Threat from terrorist attacks remains permanent, unpredictable and long-term.

The key assessment from the focus groups was that “the threat from terrorist attacks cannot be judged only by the number of people who join the war in Syria,” several participants in Prishtinë/Priština focus group argued. “Whereas the police assessment in previous stages was that terrorist attacks in Kosovo are possible but not likely to happen, now the likelihood has increased,” a participant said. In addition, according to one participant, possible targets include “soft targets, such as civilians in the street, including Kosovo civilians and foreigners.” A participant argued that “the threat should be assessed in terms of the threat to the region, not just Kosovo.” Attacks can be sudden and unannounced, since “there is no need for fatwas, due to a call from ISIS issued worldwide that people do not travel to Syria but that they undertake attacks in places where they live,” one participant noted.

Another finding from focus groups is the lack of a uniform approach by security forces. Whereas the central authorities in Prishtinë/Priština recognize the distinction between religious ideology and concrete terrorist attack threats, in other places that is not necessarily the case. In another Kosovo location,

results from the focus group suggest that the security forces in fact track people for the mere fact that they adhere to different styles of praying than the mainstream, “to prevent terrorist attacks before they occur.” One of the findings from all focus groups was that one of the dangers of this approach to prevent violent extremism may increase the level of alienation and legitimize the narrative of extremist groups that the “state is fighting Islam” and exacerbate the problem of radicalization and extremism.

The approach of security forces should be defined by a unified PVE doctrine.

While the returnees from Syria and others who have been suspect of being part of radical and extremist circles are generally known to Kosovo security forces, an assessment from a participant in Prishtinë/Priština is that “the main threat comes from loose individuals and groups who are not necessarily directly linked to ISIS or other organizations directly.”

Therefore, focusing only on religious habits of people when working on prevention of terror attacks may lead to missing true sources of threat from people who are not easily identified as potential terrorists. As a participant in Hani i Elezit/Elez Han said, the main threat “does not come from those that have returned from Syria, who have repented and security forces have been keeping an eye on them.” The real threat comes from people “who were not questioned by the police.” Rather than being worshipers and observers of religious customs, they “are not religious,” and tend to “bully exponents of mainstream religious values in Kosovo.” Participants in this focus group said “such people continue to remain in Hani i Elezit/Elez Han”.⁸⁵

There are latent people who are possibly out of the sight of security forces.

The identification of radicalized persons is not easy. However, a finding from focus groups reveal that the main signs radicalized people display are “verbal aggressiveness, especially against religious authorities whose religious interpretations differ from those of radicalized people believe in; refusal of Albanian national symbols due to the presence of the eagle, which is considered as a religious blasphemy; verbal and physical attacks on other symbols of national identity of Albanians.”⁸⁶ Withdrawal from the society and family is another sign being manifested by radicalized persons.⁸⁷

4.4 Kosovo's PVE Strategy

Central institutions in Kosovo adopted the Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020 (CVE Strategy) in September 2015. The Strategy has designed an action plan for the structures it has created and the roles were divided for each institution envisaged to have a role. Significant variation exists, especially regarding the push and pull factors in the PVE and in the focus groups.⁸⁸

Kosovo CVE strategy requires further improvements in the structure, process and results.

The question of the PVE Strategy was discussed with all three focus groups. The main finding regarding the PVE assessment are that the strategy was driven externally and that - as one participant noted - “it was drafted hastily as a response to international pressure to prevent violent extremism and thus has numerous deficiencies.” The overall finding is that the main deficiencies in the Kosovo PVE strategy can be tracked in its structure, process and implementation. As far as the structure is concerned, the main

⁸⁵ That extremists do not necessarily observe religion was revealed in both local focus groups. One of the main Kosovo participants in Syria, Ridvan Haqifi a.k.a. Al Kosovi, who said ISIS will undertake unprecedented attacks in Kosovo, had been reprimanded by KIC because he was partying in discotheques and using alcohol while being Imam in Gjilan/Gnjilane. Similar description of extremists was made by Kursani, under the label “Tekfir,” in Kursani, Shpend. 2015. Report inquiring into causes and consequences of Kosovo citizens’ involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. Kosovo enter for Security Studies: Pristina. None of participants in focus groups mentioned the term Tekfir, even when prompted.

⁸⁶ Eagle in the flag is considered a blasphemy because ‘living beings should not be part of symbols,’ a participant explained the attitude of radicalized persons. This is in line with ultra-conservative anti-idolatry views in Islam.

⁸⁷ Similar finding came out in another UNDP supported study. Please see: Goshi Anisa and van Leuven Dallin. 2017. “Kosovo-wide Assessment of Perceptions of Radicalization at the Community Level.” P. 32-33. UNDP and Government of Kosovo.

⁸⁸ Kosovo CVE had identified the following push factors: Economic and social factors and low institutional capacity and integrity, and; pull factors: radical leaders and online radicalization.

deficiency identified in the focus group in Prishtinë/Priština is the “lack of inclusion of municipalities and local communities in the PVE and no role envisaged for them, for local communities and a minor role for NGO’s.” Other deficiencies identified in the process involve budgeting. First, “the strategy has not envisaged budgeting for the action plan”. This has resulted in “ineffective and tangled budgeting at individual ministries’ level.” There is a “lack of commitment and policy coordination and no reporting on actions taken by different ministries.”⁸⁹ Thus, the scale of commitment and activities undertaken by the ministries differ substantially. Another problem noted is the “lack of creativity among people responsible for PVE in planning ahead.” Some changes were introduced in the meantime, including “the referral mechanism, aimed at the inclusion of municipalities,” the perceptions and the role of which is discussed in the subsequent section.

The CVE strategy should envisage a stronger role for municipalities. Municipalities should have a key role along with KIC and civil society.

In Gjiilan/Gnjilane, a referral mechanism has been introduced in 2016 as a pilot project to receive referrals about the people who show signs of radicalization. According to the PVE Strategy, the most endangered groups are teenage boys and students. The Referral Mechanism consists of representatives from the municipality including education, social works and employment sectors, Police, KIC, Youth Council, and

health sector. Participants explained that by the end of 2016, the Referral mechanism has dealt with three cases of radicalized youths.⁹⁰ All three cases were dealt with successfully, “despite challenges faced in the functioning process” of this body.⁹¹

Participants in both focus groups in Gjiilan/Gnjilane and in Hani i Elezit/Elez Han, argued that Kosovo needs a law on KIC, which would grant it the right to control mosques and imams, a right which it does not have according to its internal rules. On the other hand, KIC representatives argue that cooperation with Kosovo institutions is not satisfactory. A finding from focus groups show that whereas religious representatives tend to support reintegration approach, others believe that the Law on Prohibition of Joining the Armed Conflicts Outside State Territory should be implemented strictly on all those who went to Syria without exception and that reintegration efforts should begin while serving a sentence.⁹²

In Hani i Elezit/Elez Han, the perception on central authorities’ PVE policy is more negative. In fact, although Hani i Elezit/Elez Han is one of the places most affected by radicalization and violent extremism, it appears that the central authorities have not reached out to the municipal authorities and to other relevant local institutions. Thus, there

It was thought that representation of municipalities through the Ministry of Local Government Administration (MLGA) would be sufficient, but their absence in the table was problematic itself.

is little knowledge on the PVE and on the actions of central authorities. There is perception that the public institutions policy is confined only to prosecution and that public institutions do not have a policy of reintegration and no education reforms are being undertaken to educate young people on prevention of radicalization and violent extremism. Lack of cooperation between local and central institutions is perceived as one of the main problem. In fact, from what participants said, it can be inferred that there is a level of animosity between all local institutions and the public institutions at the central level. This refers especially to the local KIC authorities. Whereas cooperation with the police seems to be working well to a certain extent, the level of tensions because of what is perceived to be “unselective targeting of imams by the Kosovo police” is relatively high. For example, participants in the Hani i Elezit/Elez Han focus group said “Imams have not been reaching out to the returnees from Syria due to fear of prosecution by the security agencies.” While religious re-education of radicalized persons is viewed as

⁸⁹ Whereas concrete ministries were mentioned in the focus group, this report will evade mentioning names.

⁹⁰ The number has risen to 5 by end of May 2017.

⁹¹ In the time of the interview (December 2016), participants complained about the lack of support by Kosovo central institutions in terms of office space and computers that would enable a more efficient work of this body. These are now provided by UNDP in close cooperation with ICITAP and the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kosovo.

⁹² Full text of this law in English can be found here: https://www.mpb-ks.org/repository/docs/LAW_NO_05_L_002_ON_PROHIBITION_OF_JOINING_THE_ARMED_CONFLICTS_OUTSIDE_STATE_TERRITORYEMLJE.pdf

a key in all levels, in local communities, “KIC should be involved more in the prevention of violent extremism,” a participant argued.⁹³

4.5 Way Forward

This section will focus on key recommendations that emerged from focus groups in terms of preventing violent extremism and in terms of helping to boost the resilience of Kosovo society in relation to the influences of extremist ideologies and radicalism leading to violent extremism. What are the main areas and who are the actors that should be working to prevent violent extremism?

There is a consensus that violent extremism “is a long-term problem and sustained efforts in all levels of society and public institutions are needed to deal with it in the long term.” As all countries in the region share the threat from violent extremism, “strengthening regional police cooperation is of utmost important,” a participant said. However, according to one participant, every country, including Kosovo “should manage its expectations regarding PVE.”

The key actors identified in all focus groups are municipalities, civil society and religious communities. “The strategy should go down at the local level,” a participant said. For this, “more knowledge on violent extremism should be transferred in schools, communities and families,” another participant argued.

Solutions should be searched by engaging the local level and there needs to be more creativity.

Areas in which violent extremism should be dealt with should be focused mostly on education and economy. “While curricula and plans should be made at macro-level, implementation should go down at the local level,” one participant argued. Teachers should be trained to promote critical reasoning skills among their students, while “engagement of women and parents at schools should result in more effective PVE.” Participants in the focus groups agree “introduction of religious education at schools to be taught by sociologists and anthropologists, rather than clerics is necessary to counter extremist religious teachings.” In addition, KIC should have more of a role in the PVE. One of the ways identified in the focus groups is “issuance of disclaimers and creation of religious institutes that would engage in the study of religion and religious doctrine,” a participant argued.

Education and cooperation between institutions and communities at all levels is the key for sustaining long-term approaches to prevent violent extremism.

A consensus about the approaches needed to counter violent extremism exists at central and local level. For example, participants in the focus groups in Gjilan/Gnjilane said that “focused cooperation between various institutions that would act as part of one local community is necessary to successfully deal with violent extremism.” In Hani i Elezit/Elez Han, they have already taken some actions on their own, by “functionalizing the school councils and discussing manifestations of violent extremism and radicalization among students.” More support of these locally initiated efforts from the central level should be part of PVE Strategy. Media reporting frequently exacerbates the problem and therefore, they can reverse this situation by engaging as part of the society to help increase social resilience towards extremism. According to participants in Hani i Elezit/Elez Han, their efforts to prevent violent extremism “are frequently frustrated by media reporting, labelling their community as a hotbed of violent extremism.” Therefore, apart from more inclusion of KIC, “there should be media reporting of positive cases within the community.” Such reporting on positive cases would boost efforts at community level and show that the community can become stronger than extremist groups religious education should be part of PVE efforts, since the main problem remains indoctrination carried by extremist groups, which continue to be active in underground settings.

Some of the key recommendations deriving from the focus group data analysis are primarily con-

⁹³ Such cooperation is established between KIC and the Ministry of Justice to have 10 Imams serve worships in prisons.

cerned with the ways Kosovan institutions and society can increase Kosovo's resilience in relation to the influences of radical and extremist ideologies and groups as well as ways to prevent violent extremism in the long term. These recommendations are not exhaustive as the situation evolves constantly and thus the needs for different approaches and action may change too. The identified recommendations can be found here:

1. Key actors to engage in the prevention of violent extremism identified by all focus groups are **municipalities, civil society and religious communities**.
2. More support of these locally initiated efforts from the central level should be part of PVE Strategy.
3. More knowledge on violent extremism should be **transferred** in schools, communities and families, so they can become an active part of PVE.
4. Teachers should be trained to promote **critical reasoning skills** among their students, while engagement of women and parents at schools should result in more effective PVE.
5. Introduction of religious education in schools without compromising the **secular nature of Kosovo's education system** should also be considered as an alternative including the strengthening of civil education curricula and training of teachers to offer information on religion to pre-university level students.⁹⁴
6. There is a consensus that violent extremism "is a long-term problem and sustained efforts in all levels of society and public institutions are needed to deal with it in the long term." Because it is a long-term problem, Kosovo should manage its expectations regarding prevention of violent extremism.
7. As the threat from violent extremism is shared by all countries in the region, **strengthening regional police cooperation** is of utmost importance.
8. Internally, due to overall assessment that the threat of terrorist attacks is higher with the decreasing trend of recruitment for extremist groups in Syria, police should receive additional training on attacks from latent extremist individuals and small groups. Similar attacks like the ones in Western Europe should be expected.
9. Police and local KIC's should consider organizing joint outreach to the Syria returnees and talk to them.
10. Considering the subsequent release of several imams arrested in 2014, in connection to violent extremism and the reports that in some cases, there was lack of credible evidence about involvement of those arrested in extremist activities, the rate of approval of such arrests which was high may have changed.⁹⁵ It is therefore suggested that such polls to measure citizen perceptions on violent extremism and CVE activities from public institutions are organized on a regular basis.

94 This remains a highly charged issue and many do not support introduction of religious education in schools. Whereas religious education is covered in the civic education course in the primary and secondary schools, the subject itself has been subject to fierce criticism for lack of quality textbooks and unqualified teachers. Therefore, programs of civic education training for teachers within the Faculty of Education, where religious education could take significant part of the curricula should also be considered.

95 Qafimolla, Ervin and Govori, Skender. 2015. "Lax Precautions Over Kosovo Terror Suspects." Balkan Insight. In <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/lax-precautions-for-kosovo-terror-suspects> and Leposhtica, Labinot. 2017. "Supremja: Paraburgimi për të Dyshuarit për Terrorizëm u Caktua pa Prova" (Supreme Court: Detention of Suspects Made Without Evidence). In <http://kallxo.com/supremja-paraburgimi-per-te-dyshuarit-per-terrorizem-u-caktua-pa-prova/>

11. As for the Kosovo “Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020” (the PVE Strategy), there is a consensus within focus groups that it needs to be revised constantly, as Kosovo gains experience, increases its capacity and as situation evolves constantly, with urgent need to increase the collaboration between central and local level authorities to foster the community engagement in PVE.⁹⁶
12. The overall finding from focus groups is that the main deficiencies in the Kosovo’s PVE strategy can be tracked in its structure, process and implementation, including its inclusiveness, budgeting and commitment weaknesses.
13. Communities need to be more proactive in preventing violent extremism and central institutions need to **design more community friendly programs** that would help local communities be more vibrant in their overall activities⁹⁷. These communities should also receive support in fostering local production in agriculture and other sectors to improve local living standard.
14. Programs of organized engagement of youth in sports and cultural activities funded by the central institutions through municipal authorities and civil society organizations could be essential in building a sense of community and increasing community resilience vis-à-vis negative phenomena, including religious extremism, drugs and other deviations.
15. **Parents** could be **engaged** within schools, which can play a significant role in the PVE.
16. **Women can play and important role** in PVE within their families and in the community. Whereas KIC should be more open to women, municipal authorities should also consider opening offices for gender, family and community issues, which could be a starting point in women’s engagement in the PVE.
17. Further **research on gender perspective** on violent extremism should be undertaken. One of the topics could also be linked to women that have experienced rejection by Kosovo public institutions because they wore headscarf, including whether they were approached by radical individuals and groups.
18. Partnering with the KIC is an important aspect of the prevention of violent extremism in the sense of religious awareness among people to prevent penetration of extremist doctrines and ideologies.
19. KIC should have a more active role in PVE. One of the ways identified in the focus groups is issuance of disclaimers and creation of religious institutes that would engage in the study of religion and religious doctrine
20. The KIC should be more active in promoting religious interpretations matching Kosovo’s traditions. Whereas adoption of a law on religious communities is viewed as a way to strengthen the role of the KIC and its internal processes, this in turn, should be coupled with increased collaboration between institutions and religious communities at the local level.
21. Media reporting frequently exacerbates the problem and therefore, they can reverse this situation by engaging as part of the society to help increase social resilience towards extremism.
22. Apart from more inclusion of KIC, “**there should be media reporting of positive cases within the community**”. Such reporting on positive cases would boost efforts at community level and show that the communities can become stronger than extremist groups.

⁹⁶ This is especially urgent in communities more influenced by extremist groups, inclusion of municipalities, civil society and partnering with media to amalgamate the approach to the prevention of extremism.

⁹⁷ For example, small, isolated and poor communities like Hani i Elezit/Elez Han, should receive more investment in cultural and sport premises, which could help local institutions to orient youth towards more open activities, strengthen the sense of community, enhance the quality of life of the youth and thus, enhance the resilience of this community vis-à-vis, what has been proven so far, a very aggressive and powerful narratives of extremist groups and individuals in this area of Kosovo.

23. Kosovo Central Institutions should **design a communication strategy**, which should involve Kosovo's religious communities. Special attention should be paid in promoting religious and ethnic tolerance, issuing religious disclaimers to extremist religious interpretations, as well as nurturing Kosovo's image as a tolerant and peaceful society.

In summary, the PVE should be based on both institutional and social activities, with inclusiveness as the key principle for increasing the resilience of Kosovo society. The endurance of its secular character based on respect for its religious traditions and diversity, nurturing constructive dialogue between various communities, serves the purpose of creating an open society where the benefits of globalization can be enjoyed by its population thus minimizing various caveats, including violent extremism, which are part of the trends of globalization. By focusing on the opinions of Kosovo citizens and Kosovo-based experts, this study has attempted to shed light on some open questions, thus providing insights on the ways the resilience of Kosovo society vis-à-vis violent extremism can be sustained and increased.

5. AIMS, METHODOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

This study has analyzed the perceptions of Kosovans regarding violent extremism and the resilience of Kosovan society vis-à-vis internal and external pressures conducive to the penetration of extremist religious ideologies and the ways the institutions can increase this resilience. It did so by reviewing quantitative data collected by UNDP and other organizations, reports and some of the articles published by international media and by qualitative data collected through focus groups organized with public institutions and security agency officials, civil society and citizens. Three focus groups were organized for this study, including one in Prishtinë/Priština, one in Gjiilan/Gnjilane and one in Hani i Elezit/Elez Han. A total of 21 experts, including public institutions officials, civil society activists and religious leaders participated. Participants were recruited based on their expertise and functions in various religious issues and bodies, central and local public institutions, educational institutions and civil society, as well as based on their involvement in both prevention and countering of radicalization and violent extremism. Participants were informed previously about the topic of the focus groups and they gave individual written consent to participate. Focus groups consisted of minimum 5 and up to 10 participants. Discussions in the focus groups were based on structured set of questions, a method aimed at noting similarities and differences between various levels of public institutions and various social and geographical settings. The questions were organized in engagement questions, exploration questions and exit questions. Some questions prompted additional sub-questions, depending on answers given by participants. Each focus group lasted between one and a half hour to two hours.

The data collected in the focus groups were categorized and coded, to provide for a comprehensive set of themes and concepts that emerged during the focus group discussions. These data were then synthesized to check for most frequent responses on some of the issues discussed within focus groups. The main limitations to this study are the lack of interviews with participants in foreign wars in Iraq and Syria, analysis which has been conducted in other studies. UNDP has undertaken other studies involving these participants, including those who have been arrested by Kosovo authorities. The main terms used in this study are Radicalism, Extremism, Violent Extremism and Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE). There are no widely accepted definitions about these terms.⁹⁸ This study used the definition of the Oxford Dictionary for extremism, as “the holding of extreme political or religious views; fanaticism.”⁹⁹ Violent extremism is defined as direct usage of violence, or “encouraging, condoning, justification or supporting the commission of violent acts to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals.”¹⁰⁰ According to these definitions, while extremism is a passive belief in extremist ideologies and fanaticism, violent extremism is an active participation, or active support of violence to achieve the above goals.

98 The Kosovo PVE Strategy has adopted the UNDP definitions on extremism, violent extremism and radicalism. Please see: UNDP. 2015. “Comprehensive Assessment to Counter Violent Radicalisation in Kosovo.” (Supra. 13)). According to these definitions, Extremism is defined as “the rejection of one or more basic principles of its main ideology.” Religious extremism is defined as condemnation of “leaders or the majority of the members” of own religion. Radicalism is defined as a “process of approving extremist religious beliefs and in some cases converting into a violent extremist.” Violent extremism is defined as extremism which involves the use of violence...” For further information, please see: Office of the Prime Minister. 2015. “Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020.” P. 8.

99 See: <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/extremism>. Similar definition can be found to describe radicalism and extremism elsewhere: “Radicalisation is most often described as a process by which individuals and groups become socialised to a particular worldview that is considered radical or extreme.” For further details, see: Aly, Anne and Streigher Jason-Leigh. 2012. “Examining the Role of Religion in Radicalization to Violent Islamist Extremism.” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*. Vol. 35, Issue 12. Taylor and Francis.

100 Federal Bureau of Investigation. “What is Violent Extremism?” <https://cve.fbi.gov/whatis/>. Similar definition of extremism is defined elsewhere are radicalism: “Other definitions conflate radicalisation with a tendency towards or support for the use of violence as a legitimate avenue for achieving stated objectives.” For further details, see: Aly and Streigher, Supra 17.