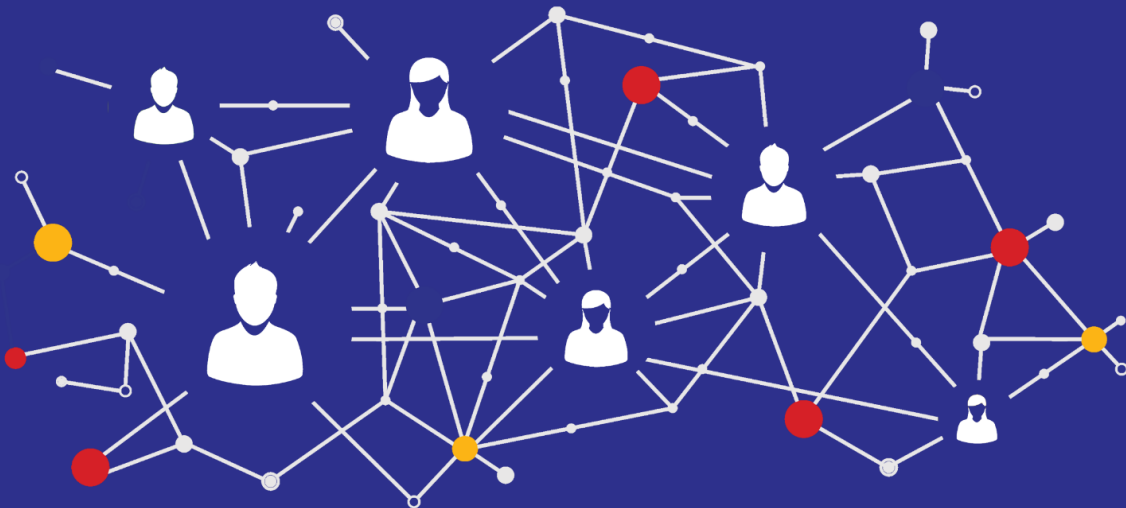




# Mapping stakeholders in Kosovo: Addressing violent extremism at central and local levels



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## List of Acronyms

- ATRC - Advocacy Training and Resource Center
- BIK – Islamic Community of Kosovo
- CBM - Community Building Mitrovica
- CDF - Community Development Fund
- CLWG – Counseling Line for Women and Girls
- CPCD - Centar za promociju civilnog društva
- CRPM - Center for Research and Policy Making
- CSOs – Civil Society Organizations
- CoE - Council of Europe
- DPRRP - Division for the Prevention and Reintegration of Radicalized Persons
- ERG 22+ - Extremism Risk Guidance 22+
- FIQ - Forum for Civic Initiatives
- FIU - Financial Intelligence Unit
- FTFs – Foreign Terrorist Fighters
- GCERF - Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund
- ICITAP - International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program
- IDM – Institute for Democracy and Mediation
- KIA - Kosovo Intelligence Agency
- KCS - Kosovo Correctional Service
- KCSS- Kosovar Centre for Security Studies
- KIP – Kosovo Institute of Peace
- KIPRED - Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development
- KPS - Kosovo Probation Service
- KRCT - Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims
- LPSCs - Local Public Safety Committees
- MCSC - Municipal Community Safety Council
- MIA - Ministry of Internal Affairs
- MESTI - Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation
- MFLT - Ministry of Finance, Labour, and Transfers
- MLSW - Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
- NGOs - Non-Governmental Organizations
- OVPA - Office for Victim Protection and Assistance
- PCK - Parents' Council of Kosova

- P/CVE - Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
- R&R - Rehabilitation and Reintegration
- QPS - Centers for Social Work
- SCK - Student Council of Kosovo
- SPVERLT - Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism
- SPRK - Special Prosecution Office
- UNDP - United Nations Development Programme
- VE – Violent Extremism
- VERA-2R - Violent Extremism Risk Assessment 2 Revised
- VETOs - Violent Extremist and Terrorist Offenders
- YAHR - Youth Association for Human Rights

# 1. Introduction

Identifying key stakeholders in the fight against violent extremism (VE) is crucial for developing effective strategies to prevent radicalization and mitigate its impact on society. In Kosovo, the rise of violent extremist groups, particularly following the 1999 war and the subsequent increase in foreign fighters joining conflicts in Syria and Iraq, has underscored the need for a coordinated and comprehensive approach. The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders, from governmental agencies to civil society organizations, is essential to address the multifaceted nature of violent extremism and to ensure that preventive measures are tailored to local contexts and needs.

The primary objective of the stakeholder mapping is to systematically identify and analyze the key players involved in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) at both central and local levels in Kosovo. By understanding the roles, capacities, and interrelationships of these stakeholders, the exercise aims to enhance coordination, optimize resource allocation, and develop targeted interventions that can effectively address the drivers of radicalization. Additionally, the mapping seeks to identify gaps and overlaps in current efforts, providing a basis for improving the overall effectiveness of P/CVE initiatives in the country.

This mapping exercise was conducted through rigorous desk research, which involved reviewing existing literature, policy documents, and reports on P/CVE in Kosovo. The research focused on identifying stakeholders across various sectors, including law enforcement, education, social services, religious institutions, and civil society organizations. Key sources included governmental strategies, academic studies, and reports from international organizations and NGOs engaged in P/CVE efforts. Accordingly, this report is largely descriptive, however some analysis is incorporated. In addition to desk research, this report also draws on interviews with municipal stakeholders in Ferizaj and Lipjan.

Stakeholders represented in this report were selected based on their relevance and active involvement in P/CVE efforts at both the central and local levels. The criteria for selection included the stakeholders' mandates, their role in the implementation of P/CVE strategies, and their capacity to influence or contribute to preventing radicalization and violent extremism. Particular attention was given to stakeholders with direct responsibilities in areas such as law enforcement, community engagement, education, and social services, as well as those involved in rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) programs for individuals affected by radicalization.

Key insights include the critical role of municipal-level actors, such as Centers for Social Work and Municipal Community Safety Councils (Këshillat Komunale për Siguri në Bashkësi) in addressing the local drivers of radicalization to violent extremism<sup>1</sup> as well as the role of CSOs supporting state actors at the central and local level. The exercise also highlighted the importance of religious institutions, particularly the local branches of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), in promoting counter-narratives and fostering community resilience. However, challenges such as limited resources, overlapping mandates, and insufficient coordination among stakeholders were identified as significant barriers to effective P/CVE efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> Read more about these mechanisms at: [mapl.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Udhezuesi-per-KKSB\\_14-janar-2015\\_shqip.pdf](http://mapl.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Udhezuesi-per-KKSB_14-janar-2015_shqip.pdf)

The report is structured as follows:

The first section provides an overview of the national landscape of P/CVE stakeholders, categorizing them into enforcement-focused and preventive/rehabilitative actors. The second section delves into the local drivers of violent extremism in Kosovo, based on existing research and stakeholder interviews. The third section presents the municipal landscape of P/CVE stakeholders, with a focus on specific municipalities such as Ferizaj, Lipjan, and Prishtina. The final sections provide detailed profiles of key stakeholders, both at the central and municipal levels, and include annexes with contact lists and a functional overview of the stakeholders.

This stakeholder mapping and baseline assessment is part of the project “Strengthening the Multi-Stakeholder Approach to Prevent Youth Violence and Build Resilience,” implemented by the Advocacy Training and Resource Center (ATRC) in Kosovo, Counselling Line for Women and Girls (CLWG) in Albania, and the Association for Active and Healthy Development of Women and Children Pleiades in North Macedonia. The report was developed with the support of the “SMART Balkans – Civil Society for a Shared Society in the Western Balkans” regional project, carried out by the Centar za promociju civilnog društva (CPCD), Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM), and Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM), and financially supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA). The content of the report is the sole responsibility of the project implementers and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NMFA) or the SMART Balkans consortium.

## 2. Brief context

Public perception studies conducted from 2012 to 2017 revealed an escalating concern among Kosovar citizens about the influence of religious extremist groups and the potential for terrorist attacks. Approximately half of the population during this period expressed alarm over the impact of radical Islamic ideologies, with two-thirds identifying ISIS and Al Nusra as significant threats<sup>2</sup>. This concern has shifted remarkably over the years. Data from the Security Barometer of the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) shows that by 2022, 47 percent of Kosovo's citizens no longer viewed religious extremism as a threat to security, with this sentiment rising to 51 percent among the Albanian population<sup>3</sup>. A gender disparity was also evident: over 52 percent of men dismissed the threat of religiously motivated violence compared to 41 percent of women. The respective data from the Security Barometer also shows notable contradictions in public attitudes. While more than 57 percent of respondents were opposed to their children associating with families returning from war zones in Syria and Iraq, over 65 percent supported the state's efforts to repatriate Kosovar citizens from these conflict areas. This dichotomy underscores a complex societal landscape where fear and safety concerns coexist with a strong sense of humanitarian responsibility.

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<sup>2</sup> Arben Qirezi. (2017). Public Pulse Analysis on Prevention of Violent Extremism in Kosovo. USAID and UNDP Kosovo. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ks/PublicPulse-English-FINAL-PRESS-5.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Explore the data from Security Barometer at: <https://securitybarometer.qkss.org/te-dhenat>

More recent studies show that Kosovar citizens are more concerned with ethno-political radicalization. Research from PAVE project revealed that online, ethno-political radical communities are more prevalent<sup>4</sup>. These groups perpetuate the politics of the 1990s, using historical grievances and myths to promote violence, particularly against specific ethnic groups. The unresolved legacy of the Kosovo-Serbia war remains a key driver of ethno-political radicalization, with polarizing political rhetoric and hate speech fueling divisions. Ethno-political radicalization is further stoked by conflicting narratives, about the past, and especially the atrocities committed during the war in the 1990s. Kosovo Serbs deny Kosovo's sovereignty and distort historical facts to fit their worldview, perpetuating radical ideologies among Kosovar Albanians. This "dual reality" strengthens the perception of Serbia as a malign actor and enemy state: *"One underlying cause of ethnic tensions, polarization, increased nationalism, and populism is lack of a process of dealing with the past and lack of genuine reconciliation efforts. This failure is not limited to strained relations between ethnic groups. Alongside these institutional failures, persistent war narratives and competitive interpretations of past events intensify the differences and animosity between Kosovo Albanians and Kosovo Serbs, increasing polarization. This can lead to competitive victimization between groups, adding to ethnic tensions."*<sup>5</sup>

The aftermath of the 1999 war in Kosovo saw the rise of violent extremist groups, with a notable increase in influence observed during 2012 and 2013. During this period, Kosovo witnessed the alarming phenomenon of foreign fighters, with an estimated 403 individuals joining armed groups in Syria, including ISIS and Al Nusra. Despite a decline in these activities by the end of 2015, the issue highlighted Kosovo's vulnerability to global trends in religious radicalization. In response to this threat, Kosovo implemented a comprehensive set of legislative and strategic measures. The Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020 (SPVERLT) and the Law No.05/L-002 on Prohibition of Joining the Armed Conflicts Outside State Territory were the cornerstones of these efforts. The SPVERLT strategy aimed to address the root causes of violent extremism through a holistic approach involving law enforcement, community engagement, and education.

Kosovo's approach to addressing the return of foreign fighters and their families from conflict zones has been two-pronged: punitive-restorative measures and societal reintegration support. The punitive-restorative measures involve legal proceedings and correctional programs aimed at ideological disengagement and skill development. Simultaneously, societal reintegration support includes housing, medical care, psychological counseling, and financial assistance to ensure the smooth reintegration of returnees into the community.

Despite decreased numbers of individuals joining extremist groups, the threat of radicalization remains in Kosovo. Key push factors include institutional corruption, socio-economic conditions, and weak education systems. Pull factors involve personal convictions, material and spiritual rewards, and the influence of Middle Eastern ideologies.

Women are both potential preventers and victims of radicalization. Their early recognition of radicalization signs and moderate views position them as crucial allies in P/CVE efforts. Young men, especially those not

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<sup>4</sup> Ramadan Ilazi, Ardit Orana, Teuta Avdimetaj, Bledar Feta, Ana Krstinovska, Yorgos Christidis and Ioannis Armakolas 2022. Online and offline (de)radicalisation in the Balkans. Working paper 5. PAVE Project Publications. [https://www.pave-project.eu/user/pages/07.publications/PAVE\\_870769\\_D5.1\\_publication\\_layout.pdf](https://www.pave-project.eu/user/pages/07.publications/PAVE_870769_D5.1_publication_layout.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.,

from religious families, are highly susceptible to radical influences, underscoring the need for targeted interventions.

### 3. National landscape of P/CVE stakeholders

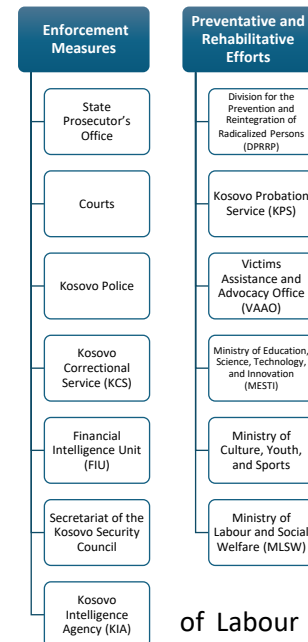
The primary actor in Kosovo's central government for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) is the **Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA)**. As the **leading governmental body**, the MIA is responsible for drafting, monitoring, and implementing policies and legislation related to general security and terrorism. This includes comprehensive measures to prevent, protect against, prosecute, and respond to all forms of terrorist activities and extremism. **The MIA also spearheads the implementation of the State Strategy for Preventing and Countering Terrorism (2023-2028).**

**The Minister of Internal Affairs**, who may delegate this role to an authorized representative, serves as the **National Coordinator for Preventing and Countering Terrorism**. This position entails coordinating and guiding the implementation of the government's P/CVE policies, advising the Prime Minister on counter-terrorism issues, and overseeing activities across various institutions. Additionally, the National Coordinator prepares strategic documents and acts as the primary liaison for inter-institutional and international matters related to terrorism and violent extremism, ensuring cohesive and collaborative efforts in addressing these critical security challenges.

For the purpose of this report and based on thorough research, the central-level actors can be broadly divided into two categories: enforcement-focused actors and those involved in preventive or rehabilitative efforts.

Enforcement-focused actors primarily work on enforcing laws and ensuring security. These include the State Prosecutor’s Office, Courts, Kosovo Police, Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS), Secretariat of the Kosovo Security Council, Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), and the Kosovo Intelligence Agency (KIA). These institutions are pivotal in the identification, investigation, prosecution, and punishment of individuals involved in terrorist activities. Their efforts are essential in maintaining law and order, disrupting potential threats, and ensuring the safety and security of the public.

On the other hand, preventive and rehabilitative actors focus on implementing measures dedicated to reintegration and rehabilitation. This group includes the Division for the Prevention and Reintegration of Radicalized Persons (DPRRP) in the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Kosovo Probation Service (KPS), The Office for Victim Protection and Assistance, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Science, Technology, and Innovation (MESTI), Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports, and the Ministry Social Welfare (MLSW). These institutions work towards preventing, facilitating the reintegration of individuals who have been radicalized, and supporting the broader community in fostering resilience against violent extremism.



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community in fostering resilience against violent extremism.



It is crucial to note that this demarcation serves practical purposes, as many institutions play overlapping roles. For instance, the Kosovo Police are involved in both law enforcement and community engagement efforts aimed at prevention. By categorizing these actors, we can better understand their distinct yet complementary contributions to Kosovo's comprehensive P/CVE strategy. This dual approach of enforcement and rehabilitation ensures a balanced and effective response to the challenges of violent extremism.

### 3.1 Enforcement stakeholders

The **State Prosecutor's Office**, an independent institution, handles the criminal prosecution of individuals involved in terrorist activities. The **Special Prosecution Office (SPRK)** has special jurisdiction over terrorism-related cases, focusing on investigation, prosecution, and legal proceedings. The judicial system in Kosovo, through the **Courts**, has played an active role in P/CVE related issues. Kosovo institutions have prosecuted both men and women involved in violent extremism cases. However, existing reports show that while the majority of returning men from the war zones in Syria and Iraq were detained and prosecuted, the repatriated women were uniformly indicted for joining a terrorist organization<sup>6</sup>. This disparity suggests a potential gender bias in the judicial process, possibly reflecting societal perceptions of women's roles in extremist activities<sup>7</sup>.

Data from civil society reports shows that by 2020, the Special Prosecution Office had charged 171 individuals in terrorism-related cases, securing 123 convictions. Specifically, in cases related to foreign conflicts, 87 indictments were filed, with 57 cases still ongoing<sup>8</sup>. Notably, 107 suspended sentences, predominantly given to women, indicate a leniency that might undermine the severity of their participation or attempt to participate in foreign conflicts. The average prison sentence stands at 3.5 years; however, recruiters and those who planned terrorist attacks received significantly harsher sentences.

**Kosovo Police** play a critical role in P/CVE through the **Directorate against Terrorism** and other supporting structures. The KP is responsible for investigating and preventing terrorist activities, maintaining public safety, and collaborating with other security agencies. Within the Kosovo Police, Crime Investigation Division, is tasked with "Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism, development of proactive and reactive investigations"<sup>9</sup>.

Through **community policing**<sup>10</sup> units KP is often the first address for many citizens to report their concern related to P/CVE. Besides the regular work related to P/CVE in terms of early detection, prevention and investigation, Kosovo Police, alongside KIA, provide regular risk assessments in their work related to P/CVE,

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<sup>6</sup> Delfinë Elshani. (June 2022). An Overview of Policies and Efforts on P/CVE in the Western Balkans (III). Prishtina Institute for Political Studies (PIPS). Available at: <https://pips-ks.org/en/Details/ArtMID/1444/ArticleID/4250/An-Overview-of-Policies-and-Efforts-on-PCVE-in-the-Western-Balkans-III>

<sup>7</sup> Elshani, 2022

<sup>8</sup> Ibid,

<sup>9</sup> Read more at: <https://www.kosovopolice.com/en/departments/investigation-department/>

<sup>10</sup> Read more at: <https://www.kosovopolice.com/en/community-policing/>

which help other institutions. Kosovo Police utilize models like VERA 2 and ERG22 to assess threats posed by foreign fighters (FFs).

The VERA-2R is an evidence-based protocol developed to support the risk analysis and management of violent extremism, using 34 empirically related indicators to assess and manage individual risks with specific guidelines and clearly defined criteria<sup>11</sup>. The Extremism Risk Guidance 22+ (ERG 22+) is a structured professional judgement assessment tool that informs operational decisions for individuals with extremism-related convictions, using 22 items across three dimensions—Engagement, Intent, and Capability—to evaluate cases as "strongly present," "partly present," or "not present."<sup>12</sup>

However, existing reports indicate that the effectiveness of Kosovo's efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) is hindered by the lack of standardized risk assessment tools. Currently, institutions employ different approaches and tools, leading to inconsistencies. To enhance effectiveness and ensure uniformity, it is recommended that all institutions adopt standardized tools such as VERA-2R and ERG22+.<sup>13</sup> Of particular concern is limited cooperation and data sharing between the Kosovo Police and Kosovo Correctional Services (KCS)<sup>14</sup>. This issue may stem from a lack of policies or platforms for exchange rather than political challenges or interinstitutional conflicts. The EU and the Council of Europe are reportedly providing support to address these challenges<sup>15</sup>.

The roles of the **Kosovo Intelligence Agency (KIA)** and the **Secretariat of the Kosovo Security Council** are crucial yet distinct, with respect to P/CVE. The KIA operates largely behind the scenes, focusing on identifying and mitigating threats to national security, including those arising from terrorism and violent extremism. This covert work is essential for preempting potential threats before they materialize into significant security breaches. On the other hand, the Secretariat of the Kosovo Security Council plays a strategic role by preparing reports and analyses on political security issues for the government. It coordinates the drafting of the National Security Strategy and related policies. Although the Secretariat is not directly involved in enforcement, it is a pivotal part of the institutional structure that coordinates enforcement efforts. This coordination is vital for ensuring that enforcement bodies operate within a cohesive strategy in countering violent extremism and terrorism.

**Prisons in Kosovo have inadvertently become significant incubators for radicalization, posing a major challenge to security and social cohesion.** This phenomenon arises from several key factors that turn correctional facilities into environments where violent extremist ideologies can thrive and proliferate. Firstly, the prison environment itself is inherently conducive to radicalization, as inmates, often disillusioned and susceptible to influence, are targeted by more radicalized individuals who use the prison setting to recruit and indoctrinate new followers. While there has been capacity development support, including from Council of Europe (CoE)<sup>16</sup>, the issue is exacerbated by the lack of proper training for prison

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<sup>11</sup> Read more about the Violent Extremist Risk Assessment 2 Revised (VERA-2R) at: <https://www.vera-2r.nl/>

<sup>12</sup> Read more about the Extremism Risk Guidelines (ERG22+) at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/641c2b8f32a8e0000cfa9288/extremism-risk-guidance-22+.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> Ardit Orana and Skender Perteshi. (2022, March). Disengagement, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Foreign Terrorist Fighters. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS). DRIVE Project, Country Report

<sup>14</sup> Orana and Perteshi, March, 2022

<sup>15</sup> Orana and Perteshi, March, 2022

<sup>16</sup> See for instance this news article from CoE on capacity development efforts for prison staff from Kosovo and Serbia, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/belgrade/enhancing-penitentiary-capacities-in-addressing-radicalisation-in->

staff in identifying and mitigating radicalization. Secondly, the social and psychological factors within prisons play a crucial role, as inmates face feelings of marginalization, injustice, and isolation, which are fertile grounds for extremist narratives that offer a sense of belonging and purpose. Moreover, the integration of violent extremist offenders (VETOs) with the general prison population facilitates the spread of extremist ideologies. Effective deradicalization and rehabilitation require cooperation between prison authorities, social services, mental health professionals, and community organizations, which is not very strong in Kosovo.

**The Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS)** focuses on the correction and resocialization of individuals convicted of criminal activities, particularly preventing radicalization within prisons. In 2014, Kosovo Correctional Services (KCS) started receiving repatriated foreign terrorist fighters in the system from the war zones in Syria and Iraq<sup>17</sup> for the first time. Initially unprepared to address the unique needs of these individuals, an internal assessment by the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) of the US Justice Department recommended centralizing these inmates and developing specialized rehabilitation programs. In response, KCS launched comprehensive 'rehabilitation and resocialization' programs in 2016, offering educational opportunities, vocational training, and access to verified imams from the Islamic Community of Kosovo. These efforts aim to rehabilitate and disengage inmates from radical beliefs. The country also suffers from insufficient capacity and resources for the long-term reintegration of returnees from Syria and the deradicalization of homegrown extremists, relying heavily on donor-driven programs.

An official from the Kosovo government, interviewed for this report, communicated that the prisoners convicted of terrorism-related offenses are treated similarly to other inmates, participating in all rehabilitation programs, educational opportunities, vocational training, work within the prison, and recreational activities<sup>18</sup>.

An official at the Kosovo Correctional Services (KCS) explained that the management and rehabilitation of prisoners convicted of terrorism-related offenses in Kosovo has seen significant contributions from international partners such as ICITAP and the Council of Europe, and various NGOs such as Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

Some notable projects of support in KCS included, "Strengthening Penitentiary Capacities in Addressing Radicalization in Western Balkan Prisons," part of the Horizontal Instrument for the Western Balkans and Turkey (2019-2022), developed essential tools such as the Examination Instrument, Risk/Needs Assessment Instrument, and a Rehabilitation Program for radicalized and violent extremist prisoners (VEP) in Kosovo. Moreover, the **ongoing Council of Europe project, launched in December 2023**, aims to "Enhance Cooperation in the Western Balkans for Managing Violent Extremism in Prisons and Preventing Further Radicalization Post-Release." This project focuses on developing comprehensive Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programs and preparing pre- and post-release programs for at-risk and marginalized prisoners to prevent further radicalization.

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[prisons-in-the-western-balkans/-/asset\\_publisher/rGDx0rbZrf32/content/prison-staff-in-kosovo-and-serbia-raise-their-capacities-on-assessing-violent-extremist-prisoners](#)

<sup>17</sup> Skender Perteshi and Ramadan Ilazi. (2020). Unpacking Kosovo's Response to Returnees from the War Zones in Syria and Iraq. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

<sup>18</sup> Written interview with Tefta Bytyqi, from the Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS). August 2, 2024

Despite these initiatives, government officials recognize that incarcerated foreign fighters remain a security concern<sup>19</sup>. Kosovo prisons lack tailored interventions for radicalized inmates, such as cognitive behavioral therapy and mentoring, and have no mechanisms for monitoring terrorism convicts post-release<sup>20</sup>.

**While Kosovo has a well-established institutional framework at the central level to deal with P/CVE, challenges with coordination, communication, cooperation and resources are persistent.** Coordination both between governmental institutions, and government and non-government sectors needs improvement, and there are gaps in the implementation of reintegration programs. Notably, community and family ties have played a crucial role in the successful resettlement of returnees, highlighting the importance of grassroots involvement in countering violent extremism, yet municipalities are often overlooked or not properly included in the process.

Potential challenges arise from **overlapping responsibilities** among governmental institutions in managing the post-incarceration phase for individuals radicalized or involved in terrorism. For example, there appears to be a mandate tension between the Kosovo Probation Service and the Division for Prevention and Reintegration of Radicalized Persons regarding post-prison responsibilities. This conflict, combined with a **lack of structured and effective institutional coordination** in the prison-exit continuum, could lead to serious security breaches. Without clear delineation of roles and coordinated efforts, the reintegration process may become fragmented, increasing the risk of re-radicalization and compromising overall security.

The willingness of communities to welcome repatriated individuals from Syria and Iraq and the strong social cohesion in Kosovo has been pivotal in preventing relapse into radicalization. This **community support plays a crucial role in reintegrating individuals back into society**, providing them with a sense of belonging and purpose that can counteract the pull of extremist ideologies or other drivers. However, despite its importance, this aspect is not fully integrated into the P/CVE efforts of central-level institutions.

Central-level authorities often **focus on punitive and rehabilitative measures** and more can be done to adequately leverage the existing community networks and social frameworks that are essential for **sustainable reintegration of violent extremist offenders**. This is the subject of analysis of the next section.

## 3.2 Preventive and rehabilitative stakeholders

In terms of preventive and rehabilitative efforts, two key central government institutions have been leading the way: the **Division for Prevention and Reintegration of Radicalized Persons (DPRRP)** within the Department for Public Safety of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Kosovo Probation Service (KPS). The functionalization of the DPRRP by 2018 marked a significant step by the Kosovo government to address the radicalization and reintegration of individuals returning from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. The creation of this specialized unit within the central government, with a mandate to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of radicalized individuals and returnees, has set Kosovo apart not only from other Western Balkan countries but also from those in the EU. This initiative has formalized cross-sector and multi-level cooperation on radicalization and reintegration efforts, demonstrating Kosovo's

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<sup>19</sup> Perteshi and Ilazi, 2020

<sup>20</sup> US Department of State, Country Reports on Terrorism 2021: Kosovo, <https://www.state.gov/reports/country-reports-on-terrorism-2021/kosovo>

commitment to addressing these critical issues. However, the lack of a sub-legal framework has impeded the decentralization of these efforts<sup>21</sup>. For instance, a dedicated government regulation significantly supports the work of the Department for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons and Integration of Foreigners within the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>22</sup> Adopting a similar regulation (or amending the existing one) focused on the (re)integration of radicalized individuals and violent extremist offenders into society could greatly enhance the effectiveness of these efforts and capacities of the DPRRP.

The DPRRP, composed of dedicated civil servants, has developed strong partnerships with repatriated families and individuals, successfully providing support such as housing, school registration, financial assistance, counseling, and social welfare<sup>23</sup>. The division's work, which began in 2017 with emergency relief for voluntary returnees, has faced challenges due to a lack of human resources and heavy donor reliance<sup>24</sup>.

**Managing the post-prison phase for violent extremist offenders (VETOs) poses significant challenges for Kosovo, and this is the particular area where currently the national and municipal institutional framework is largely failing.** One major challenge is the reluctance of VETOs to cooperate with prison staff and other professionals<sup>25</sup>. This resistance is compounded by the lack of targeted training for prison personnel, who often approach their roles with a security-first mindset. Effective management of VETOs requires training staff to build rapport and trust, applying human rights-based investigative interviews, and employing dynamic security methods. Additionally, prison conditions must improve to create an environment conducive to rehabilitation, where offenders see real opportunities for reintegration.

Another critical issue is the lack of communication and cooperation between social services, security agencies, and communities. This gap hinders the preparation for and support during the post-release phase. For example, in Kosovo, reports on VETOs from KCS to the Kosovo Police and other institutions involved in the reintegration process such as the municipal offices for social welfare, upon release are often generic and lack detailed information, making it difficult for institutions to plan effective support measures. Ensuring social workers and psychologists can access VETOs while still in prison would allow for better preparation and more tailored reintegration plans. Gender-specific challenges also exist. Women VETOs are often economically dependent on their partners and lack specific resocialisation programs, which deepens mistrust toward public institutions<sup>26</sup>. Additionally, male VETOs may be reluctant to work with female social workers, further complicating the reintegration process.

To address these challenges, a multi-agency approach is essential. Strengthening cooperation, coordination, and communication between government authorities, religious institutions, civil society, and communities can enhance the prison-exit continuum and reduce the risk of recidivism. In this context, **the Kosovo Probation Service (KPS)**<sup>27</sup> is a central level institution that operates in the framework of the

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<sup>21</sup> Perteshi and Ilazi, 2020

<sup>22</sup> Regulation (GRK) No. 22/2020 on Reintegration of Repatriated Persons, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=31862>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>25</sup> Ramadan Ilazi. (2022, April). Working with violent extremist or terrorist offenders along the prison-exit continuum. Product of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-08/ran\\_wb\\_prison-exit\\_continuum\\_30032022\\_en.pdf](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-08/ran_wb_prison-exit_continuum_30032022_en.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Ilazi, 2022, RAN

<sup>27</sup> Read more at: <https://md.rks-gov.net/page.aspx?id=2,19>

Ministry of Justice and plays an essential role in the organization, implementation, and supervision of alternative punishments and the social reintegration of individuals convicted of various criminal offenses, including VETOs. The KPS operates under a comprehensive legislative framework, including laws on the execution of criminal sanctions, the Criminal Code, and the Juvenile Justice Code. This legal foundation empowers KPS to supervise and assist individuals convicted of terrorism as well as violent extremism, ensuring they receive necessary support pre- and post-release to facilitate their resocialization. KPS's involvement is particularly significant for the rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) of foreign fighters (FFs) and returnees from the war zones, mainly from Syria and Iraq.

The KPS has been instrumental in providing targeted assistance, including legal, psychological, and social support in the process of reintegration in the society of terrorism and violent extremism offenders, demonstrating its indispensable role in Kosovo's comprehensive strategy to counter violent extremism and radicalization. Despite its critical role, the Kosovo Probation Service (KPS) faces significant challenges that hinder its effectiveness. One major issue is the lack of internal capacities and resources<sup>28</sup>. Since violent extremism and radicalization were unfamiliar phenomena to KPS until late 2018, the institution has struggled to manage and treat individuals convicted of terrorist acts<sup>29</sup>.

The lack of experience and specific knowledge among staff for managing cases of reintegration of terrorist and violent extremist offenders has led to the application of the same procedures used for other criminal offenses. This general approach fails to account for the ideological and psychological specifics of these individuals, thereby limiting the success of their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Despite efforts to increase staffing, the KPS continues to struggle with inadequate internal capacities. More than often, the same officers who handle general criminal offenses are tasked with managing the complex cases of terrorism and violent extremism offenders, which require distinct approaches<sup>30</sup>. The absence of comprehensive inter-institutional coordination and information sharing exacerbates these challenges, limiting the KPS's ability to effectively monitor and support individuals convicted of terrorism

Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), with support from the Dutch and the UK governments, has implemented a project of capacity building and technical assistance support for Kosovo Probation Service (KPS) and Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS), which includes supporting advance a digital database platform for KPS, to include data, including from regional offices.

Another important institution, that is often ignored in the conversation concerning support for reintegration in the society of radicalized individuals, or offenders of terrorism and violent extremism is the **Office for Victim Protection and Assistance (OVPA)** Operating within the Office of the Chief State Prosecutor, the OVPA is mandated to protect the rights of crime victims within the justice system. With offices throughout Kosovo, the OVPA offers a wide range of services to victims of crime, including medical examinations, psychological assistance, translation services, temporary shelter, and legal assistance through public defenders. The office represents victims at the police, prosecution, and court levels, ensuring their rights are upheld throughout the investigation, prosecution, and sentencing phases. Victim advocates, with the consent of the victims, take specific actions to effectively represent them during these processes. While the VAAO mainly assists victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, human trafficking,

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<sup>28</sup> Skender Perteshi. (2021, December). Baseline Assessment of Kosovo Probation Service. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.,

murder, and robbery, it can also provide crucial support to individual who were victims of violent extremism and radicalization. However, it is unclear from the existing available information if this institution has been involved in supporting the victims of radicalization and violent extremism. Accordingly, further research on this matter is required and will be important in the overall understanding of Kosovo's approaches to P/CVE.

**The Ministry of Finance, Labour, and Transfers (MFLT)**, which incorporates now the former Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, plays an active role in supporting the implementation of the P/CVE Strategy through budget allocations and cooperation with relevant institutions. The MFLP has a particularly important role in the context of preventive and restorative efforts for individuals affected by terrorism and violent extremism. The ministry is integral in coordinating and providing essential social services that facilitate the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees and other vulnerable groups into society. This support encompasses psychological assistance, temporary shelter, and various social services aimed at stabilizing and reintegrating these individuals into their communities. The ministry's efforts are crucial in addressing the immediate and long-term needs of victims, ensuring they receive the necessary care and assistance to recover from their experiences and rebuild their lives. In collaboration with other institutions, such as the Victim's Advocacy and Assistance Office (VAAO) and the Kosovo Probation Service (KPS), the MFLP ensures a multi-faceted approach to rehabilitation and reintegration. This includes providing social workers and counselors who work directly with individuals and families affected by extremism, helping them navigate the challenges of resocialization and preventing further radicalization.

Within the MFLT, in the context of the P/CVE, the key stakeholder is the **Social Schemes Department**. The Social Schemes Department is responsible for developing and implementing social scheme policies aimed at supporting families and individuals in need, thereby reducing poverty and enhancing overall social well-being. Its duties include drafting policies, programs, and strategies in social assistance and benefits, coordinating budget planning for these initiatives, and conducting analyses and research in social policy. The department also manages cash benefit schemes for poor families, child allowances, and maternity payments, while planning the budget for these services. Additionally, it develops indicators for collecting social welfare data, participates in capacity building for social services, collaborates with stakeholders for professional development, and reviews and approves annual work plans from municipal directorates. The department comprises the Social Policy, Social Assistance, and Social Benefits Divisions, and the Director reports to the Secretary General. The Social Schemes Department works with the Centers for Social Work, and in this context the department is an important stakeholder in the P/CVE context.

**The Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI)** plays a pivotal role in Kosovo's preventive and rehabilitative efforts concerning radicalisation and violent extremism, and it was involved in the process of reintegration of returnees from conflict zones mainly from Syria and Iraq. In this context, MESTI established a specialized team to coordinate the implementation of responsibilities related to the social reintegration of returnees, including a critical focus on the reintegration of returned children into the school system.

One of the primary roles of MESTI in this process is to facilitate the registration of returned children in schools, ensuring their swift integration into the educational framework. This initiative, conducted in close cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), has demonstrated success in enrolling these children back into school. However, the reception and engagement of these children with their peers and the school curriculum remain areas requiring further attention. MESTI officials have identified the lack of



a continuous support policy to prevent the marginalization of these children due to perceptions related to their return from conflict zones. As already mentioned in this report, majority of the Kosovars did not support their children socialization with children returned from the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq.

In the framework of the previous Kosovo Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation leading to Terrorism 2015–2020 and its action plan, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) was assigned the role in early identification and prevention of radicalization. UNDP Kosovo provided expertise support to, then, MEST based on the Abu Dhabi Memorandum on Good Practices for Education and Countering Violent Extremism, emphasizing the role of education in preventing and countering violent extremism<sup>31</sup>. The technical specialist supported by UNDP Kosovo offered support in developing a strategy for teachers and administrators to prevent radicalization, creating curricula for students in elementary, middle, and high school, and providing CVE-specific advice on capacity development, and curricula improvement.

In 2018 the “Prevention of Violent Extremism: Teacher’s Guide<sup>32</sup>” was published, in accordance with the planned actions from the 2015-2020 Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism<sup>33</sup>. The Manual aims to raise awareness among institutions, foster community cooperation, and build institutional capacities to address challenges related to violent extremism. It is particularly connected to the Strategy's first strategic objective, which focuses on the early identification of causes, factors, and target groups. The Manual emphasizes the role of teachers, pedagogues, and psychologists in early identification of radicalization among students.

Existing research shows that a significant challenge faced by MESTI is the absence of specialized training for dealing with the reintegration of returnees<sup>34</sup>. Teachers and school administrators need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to support these children effectively, addressing their unique educational and psychosocial needs. Moreover, MEST recognizes the importance of engaging with the parents of returned children, responding to their educational needs, and ensuring a holistic approach to reintegration.

**The Ministry of Justice (MoJ)** develops legislation related to justice and coordinates international legal cooperation in criminal matters. The MoJ collaborates with various ministries, agencies, and religious communities on the deradicalization and resocialization of individuals convicted of terrorism. The role of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in P/CVE is primarily viewed from the perspective of the role of the Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS) and Kosovo Probation Service (KPS), which fall under the remit of the MoJ. The primary role of the MoJ is to assure Kosovan citizens that the judicial system in Kosovo does not have a retributive purpose. Instead, through the KCS, the role of the justice system in Kosovo is to rehabilitate and reintegrate all individuals who commit crimes, including those related to violent extremism. This Ministry has primary responsibility for implementation of re-integration and de-radicalization programmes, particularly within the KCS.

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<sup>31</sup> Read more about the work of the technical specialist in the Ministry of Education on P/CVE related issues: [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00WPH6.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WPH6.pdf) and [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00WPH8.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00WPH8.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> See the manual available at: <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ks/023fa5e4dc95ce4f3e8b7afa91f90415aa482e5b88b6b9f8fd5bef3ccac537ed.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Read more at: <https://www.undp.org/kosovo/stories/launch-teachers-manual-prevention-violent-extremism>

<sup>34</sup> Perteshi and Ilazi, 2020



In 2018, the Ministry of Justice (MJ) and the **Islamic Community of Kosovo (ICK)** launched a program in Kosovo Correctional Services (KCS) aimed at deradicalizing and ideologically disengaging incarcerated returnees from Syria and Iraq. According to the Agreement of Cooperation, ICK provided verified imams to conduct religious lectures, while the MJ handled logistics. The program sought to counter radical ideologies that had driven these individuals to join conflict zones. However, the program faced significant challenges from the outset due to its public nature. The Ministry's announcement that the participating imams would be verified by the Kosovo Intelligence Agency (KIA) undermined their credibility<sup>35</sup>. As a result, many incarcerated returnees refused to engage with the imams, viewing them as collaborators with the government and security institutions. Consequently, despite the organization of lectures, the intended participants did not attend, and KCS officials criticized the program, attributing its failure to political interference.

**The Ministry of Healthcare** has played a crucial role in the Kosovo government's rehabilitative efforts, particularly in providing psychological support to Kosovar returnees from war zones in Syria and Iraq and dealing with violent extremism in prisons. The Ministry assigned a healthcare professional with expertise in mental health to support the reintegration of these returnees into society.

Within the Ministry of Healthcare, the Division for Mental Health, part of the Department of Health Services, is an important stakeholder in the context of P/CVE, but of particular relevance is the **Prison Health Department**<sup>36</sup>, which works directly within Kosovo's prisons system. This department has a specific project, supported by the US Embassy and the ICITAP Program, aimed at deradicalization.

The 2023 report of the Department of Health in Prisons—remarkably detailed and publicly accessible—demonstrates their continued efforts in implementing the deradicalization project, offering comprehensive mental health services within the prison system.<sup>37</sup> This project was managed through active participation of psychologists in multidisciplinary panels organized by the Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS). A critical component of the department's P/CVE strategy was the prevention of suicides among inmates, particularly those at risk of violent extremism. The department maintained a standardized process for identifying and managing individuals at high risk of suicide. Support was provided to multidisciplinary commissions focused on deradicalizing inmates, especially in high-security facilities like Dubrava and the High-Security Prison (BSL).

The department also emphasized training and capacity building to enhance the effectiveness of its P/CVE programs. Continuous training was provided for healthcare staff, including specialized sessions organized by the Council of Europe. Additionally, three psychologists began specialized training in clinical psychology, as part of the department's strategy to build professional capacity. Despite these efforts, the department faced challenges such as the high number of pre-trial detainees with mental health issues and the lack of professional supervision for mental health service providers.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>36</sup> Read more at: <https://msh.rks-gov.net/Department/Index/10?type=1>

<sup>37</sup> The Annual Report of the Prison Health Department for 2023. Ministry of Healthcare of the Republic of Kosovo. <https://msh.rks-gov.net/Department/GetDocument?fileName=35864799.9265.pdf&original=0.%20Raporti%20vjetor%20i%20pun%C3%ABs%20s%C3%AB%20DShB%20p%C3%ABr%20viti%202023.pdf>

**The Institution of the Ombudsperson** is a crucial yet often overlooked institution in the context of P/CVE efforts. Although not explicitly assigned a role in P/CVE strategies and policies, the Ombudsperson can significantly contribute especially to the process of reintegration in the society of violent extremist offenders, and in general in support disengagement efforts. By ensuring that suspected extremists or their families have access to social benefits and are not unjustly denied these resources, the Ombudsperson helps prevent further radicalization that can arise from feelings of marginalization and injustice<sup>38</sup>. The effectiveness of the Ombudsperson in supporting returnees or overall dealing with the reintegration in the society of VETOs, or victims affected by radicalization and violent extremism, is largely dependent on their awareness and willingness to reach out for assistance. This highlights a crucial gap that needs to be addressed: ensuring that returnees are fully informed about their rights and how to access the Ombudsperson's services. Without this knowledge, many returnees VETOs or victims of violent extremism, may not seek the support they are entitled to, potentially leaving their needs unmet. Therefore, it is essential to implement outreach and awareness programs that educate returnees about the role of the Ombudsperson and how they can utilize this resource to protect their rights and facilitate their reintegration into society.

Moreover, while the Ombudsperson does not have a specifically defined role in CVE issues in Kosovo, there are several ways this institution can contribute. For instance, the Institution of the Ombudsperson in Kosovo can take a more proactive role in addressing concerns related to Islamophobia and other issues affecting marginalized groups. The Institution of Ombudsperson can help counter perceptions of marginalization and lack of respect, which are considered major push factors towards radicalization and violent extremism.

Another key stakeholder in P/CVE efforts is the **Parents Council**. The Administrative Instruction No. 01/2023<sup>39</sup> outlines the election, establishment, and functioning of the Parents' Council in Kosovo at three levels: central (Kosova), municipal, and school. The central-level Parents' Council of Kosova (PCK) was established by the Ministry of Education and serves as a communication and advisory body between parents and the ministry. It is tasked with representing parents' interests on issues related to pre-university education, drafting annual work plans, and implementing projects aimed at improving the educational environment. The council also plays a role in identifying issues affecting educational quality and proposing activities for improvement.

**At the municipal level, the Parents' Council (PC) is established by the Municipal Education Directorate (MED)** and functions similarly by representing parents and students' interests at the municipal level. It coordinates closely with both the School Parents' Councils and the central Parents' Council to ensure that local concerns are addressed in broader educational policies.

**The School Parents' Council (SPC), established at the school level,** focuses on the direct involvement of parents in the school community. It works to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, supports

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<sup>38</sup> Florian Qehaja, et.al. (2017, February). Mapping the state of play of institutional and community involvement in countering violent extremism in Kosovo.

[https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/KCSS\\_Needs\\_Assesment\\_final\\_42754.pdf](https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/KCSS_Needs_Assesment_final_42754.pdf)

<sup>39</sup> Administrative Instruction: No. 01/2023 Election, Establishment and Functioning of the Parents' Council, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=9994>

project implementation at the school level, and ensures that parents are actively engaged in the educational process.

The role of these Parents' Councils is particularly significant in the context of P/CVE (Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism) as they provide a structured mechanism for parental involvement in educational and community activities. The councils can contribute to creating a more supportive and inclusive environment for students and their support is vital to implement any P/CVE related activities in schools. At both the central and municipal levels, the councils can influence policies and programs that address the root causes of extremism, making them important stakeholders in P/CVE efforts across Kosovo.

In addition to the existing institutions, the Kosovo government has outlined plans to establish a National Centre for Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism. However, progress towards achieving this goal has been limited. The 2023 Country Report for Kosovo by the European Commission highlights the need for Kosovo to either establish this National Centre or strengthen the Office of the National Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism (CT/CVE) by providing it with adequate financial and human resources.<sup>40</sup> The report also emphasizes the importance of implementing regular joint threat assessments to enhance the effectiveness of these efforts.<sup>41</sup>

Kosovo's institutional framework for dealing with P/CVE, encompassing punitive, enforcement, rehabilitative, and preventive measures, is well established. However, it faces challenges related to capacity, potential overlap of responsibilities, and sometimes weak political leadership concerning the P/CVE agenda, as most stakeholders mentioned in this section involve the technocratic level. The Division for Prevention and Reintegration within the Department for Public Safety of the Ministry of Internal Affairs plays a crucial role in coordinating efforts among central-level institutions. Despite the significant focus on the central level, the local level is equally critical for P/CVE. Municipal actors in Kosovo operate in an everyday context that presents unique challenges, which the next section will explore.

#### *Non-state actors*

The previous section has shown public institutions in Kosovo have the primary responsibility in dealing with the P/CVE and in this context have developed dedicated programs for both P/CVE and R&R. However, public institutions often face challenges related to capacities and financial support, and even outreach. Accordingly, international and non-governmental organizations in Kosovo have been playing a crucial role in putting some of the P/CVE and R&R initiatives into practice, but not only. International organizations have been covered in the previous section, as their main support is directly to governmental institutions. NGOs in Kosovo are also active in supporting both governmental institutions at the central level as well as organizing local PVE and R&R activities. An overview of the different NGOs and their role in PVE at the local level, including in Prishtina, will be addressed in section 6. It is however important to note that some organizations also contribute to PVE and R&R in their support to central level institutions and to R&R, which is organized mainly at the central level.

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<sup>40</sup> 2023 Kosovo Country Report, [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/760aacca-4e88-4667-8792-3ed08cdd65c3\\_en?filename=SWD\\_2023\\_692%20Kosovo%20report\\_0.pdf](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/760aacca-4e88-4667-8792-3ed08cdd65c3_en?filename=SWD_2023_692%20Kosovo%20report_0.pdf) p. 42

<sup>42</sup> Dr Gëzim Visoka and Dr Adem Beha. (2021). Mapping Local Perspectives on Radicalization in Kosovo. Community Building Mitrovica (CBM) and Kosovo Institute of Peace (KIP).

Several civil society organizations have provided support at the central level to improve coordination, train central level practitioners on different forms of violent extremism, and generate policy change.

The Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS), with the support of the Dutch government, is working with the DPRRP, to develop a digital database, that will be used to track and record all activities implemented in the P/CVE area, by government and non-government stakeholders. This is to facilitate coordination and prevent overlap in P/CVE area. The platform will be managed by the DPRRP.

The Advocacy Training and Resource Center (ATRC) supported by the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) organizes quarterly coordination meetings chaired by MIA to bring together P/CVE and R&R actors at the central level. They have conducted several training courses with government institutions on different forms of VE, which are also scheduled to be organized at the local level according to the country's strategy. ATRC also developed a supportive framework specifically designed to integrate returnee children and those with learning difficulties into the educational system in Kosovo, which was adopted by the Ministry of Education.

In some cases, NGOs have implemented R&R activities in close coordination with MIA. These efforts have included providing psycho-social counseling, tutoring and educational support, and recreational activities for returnee children, as well as psycho-social counseling and financial empowerment programs for returnees and their families. Key NGOs implementing these activities are Community Building Mitrovica (CBM), Community Development Fund (CDF) and Integra, all of them supported by GCERF. Similarly, KCSS, Partners Kosova, and KRCT, supported by the US Department of State, have implemented R&R programs specifically for children returnees, focusing on activities such as drama, recreational painting, sports, and mental health support. These activities help stimulate creative thinking, self-expression, and soft skill development while preventing trauma and supporting the integration of children into the community.

## 4. Local drivers of violent extremism and resilience in Kosovo

This section provides an overview of existing research on the main drivers of violent extremism at the local level in Kosovo. It is important to clarify that the term "local drivers" is used conditionally, as studies do not suggest that there are specific drivers of extremism at the national and local levels for Kosovo. In this context, "local drivers" refers to the perspective that some drivers of violent extremism identified at the central level are perceived as more prevalent or pronounced at the local level. This section, like the entire report, is based on existing research and secondary sources, including the analysis of reports, official government documents, and other relevant literature.

A comprehensive study in 2021 by Community Building Mitrovica (CBM) and Kosovo Institute of Peace (KIP), including over 50 in-person interviews notes that majority of the participants of the study identified three major factors which can cause radicalization in the local communities: 1) Unemployment, economic injustice, and corruption; 2) Misinformation and inappropriate religious indoctrination; and 3)

Signalization and marginalization of those practicing non-traditional Islam<sup>42</sup>. Furthermore, the study argues that one of the primary drivers of violent extremism in Kosovo is socio-economic inequality. High unemployment rates, poverty, and lack of social welfare support are predominant factors pushing individuals towards radical behaviors. Furthermore, the CBM and KIP study argues that the spread of radical ideologies through misinformation and the influence of informal religious preachers is another critical driver. The study highlights that non-traditional religious groups promoting radical versions of Islam have misled individuals through private mosques, internet, and social media.

Cultural indifference and the stigmatization of individuals practicing religion in public have also played a role in radicalization, according to the CBM and KIP study. The study mentions that societal intolerance towards practicing and preaching non-traditional versions of Islam has created enclosed and radicalized groups, further alienating them from mainstream society. In addition to this, the study argues that local insecurities, such as domestic violence, theft, abuse of narcotics, environmental degradation, and job insecurity, are more pressing concerns for local communities than religiously inspired radicalization. These every day and structural issues indirectly contribute to deviant social behaviors, including radicalization and violent extremism.

In 2017 the International Republican Institute (IRI), published a study on the local drivers of violent extremism and found that participants of the study did not believe “Kosovar democracy is sufficiently developed to address the rise in radicalism and violent extremism”<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore, the study finds that the primary local driver of violent extremism in Kosovo is the perceived inefficacy and corruption of the government. Focus group discussions (FGDs) in the study revealed a widespread belief that the state's inability to address corruption and unemployment significantly contributes to the problem. In addition to this, the IRI study found that high unemployment rates and a lack of economic opportunities are critical factors pushing individuals towards violent extremism. What the study notes is also how participants emphasized the struggles for employment even among those with university degrees, which reinforces perception of nepotism in employment opportunities, especially in the public sector, further diminishing public confidence in the state.

Another significant driver identified by the 2017 IRI study is the influence of foreign-funded organizations and religious leaders. Participants of the study noted that many radical ideologies in Kosovo are imported through these channels. This implies that for most Kosovars, radicalization and violent extremism are largely perceived as foreign and not endogenous or locally grown. Such a perception was particularly noted in the municipality of Ferizaj/Urosevac.

The role of media in exacerbating the perception of violent extremism is also considered an important local driver of violent extremism by the 2017 IRI study. This finding is also echoed in the problem analysis section of the P/CVE strategy of Mitrovica South. As in Mitrovica, citizens feel that media sensationalizes, especially, the issue of Islamic terrorism, which not only misrepresents the scale of the problem but also perpetuates negative stereotypes about Muslims. In the P/CVE strategy of Mitrovica South, media

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<sup>42</sup> Dr Gëzim Visoka and Dr Adem Beha. (2021). Mapping Local Perspectives on Radicalization in Kosovo. Community Building Mitrovica (CBM) and Kosovo Institute of Peace (KIP).

<sup>43</sup> International Republican Institute (2017). Understanding Local Drivers of Violent Extremism in Kosovo. Available at: [https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/kosovo\\_report\\_spring\\_2017.pdf](https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/kosovo_report_spring_2017.pdf) p.4

sensationalization of the violent extremism problem is outlined as a pull-factor, and Islamophobia is implied as an outcome.

In more specific terms, the Mitrovica South P/CVE strategy, notes that often media, would debate religious issues, or issues of violent extremism, with experts that are mainly and exclusively representing one perspective, and that is often a liberal perspective. In other words, citizens in Mitrovica became antagonized when main debate shows in national media would examine issues of violent extremism with known liberal voices, while neglecting to include any religious scholars in such discussions. The lack of youth activities and community engagement opportunities contributes to the vulnerability of young people to radicalization, and this is noted as drivers in both the IRI study and the Mitrovica South P/CVE strategy.

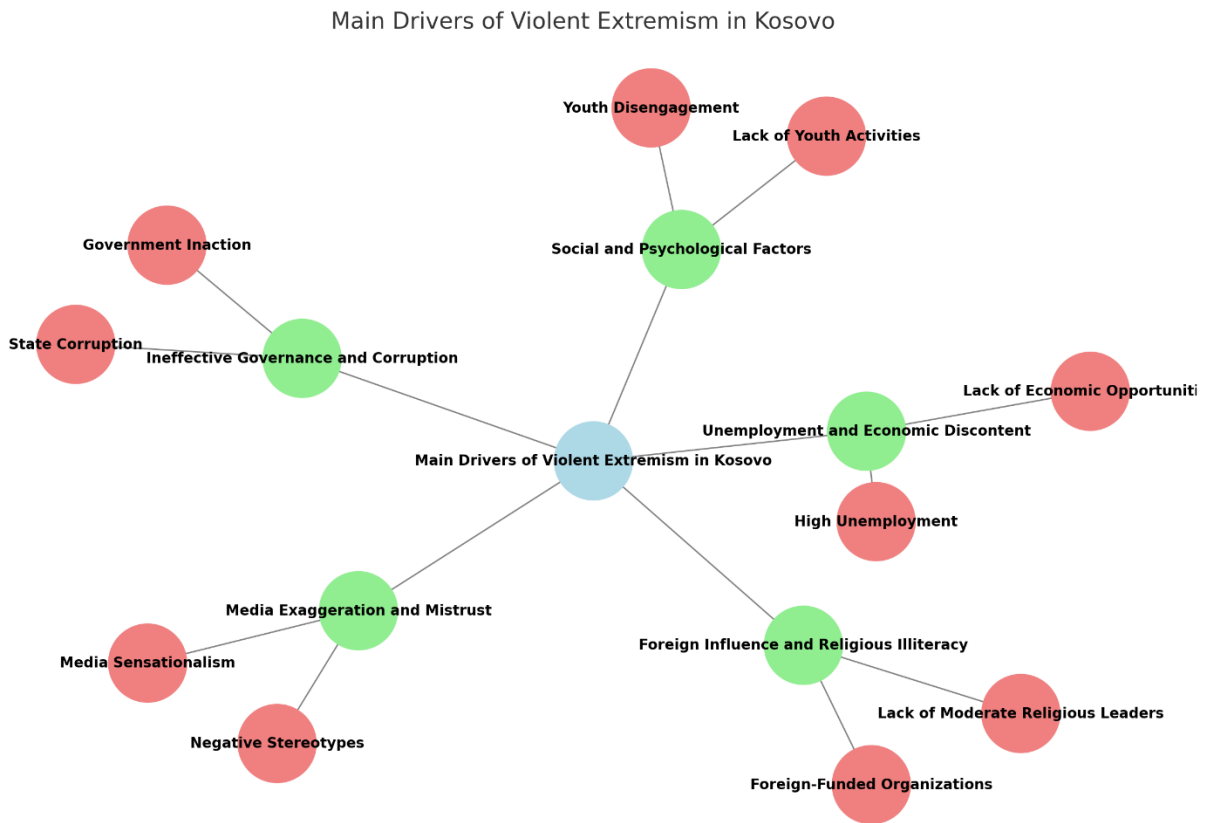


Figure 1: Mind map of main local drivers of violent extremism in Kosovo prepared by the author on the basis of the findings of the 2017 IRI study

Other studies have shown that violent extremism should be examined beyond individual push and pull factors, such as socio-economic conditions and unemployment<sup>44</sup>. For instance, while the municipality of Deçan has no registered participants in foreign wars, the municipality of Hani i Elezit has eleven fighters who joined ISIS. This discrepancy persists despite both municipalities having similar population

<sup>44</sup> Rudine Jakupi and Garentina Kraja. (2018). Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo. Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) and Berghof Foundation. Available at: <https://berghof-foundation.org/library/accounting-for-the-difference-vulnerability-and-resilience-to-violent-extremism-in-kosovo>

compositions, economic development levels, unemployment rates, and numbers of mosques. Notably, Deçan has 76 private enterprises compared to Hani i Elezit's 68, and Deçan has 17 mosques while Hani i Elezit has 11. This suggests that factors beyond the commonly cited socio-economic variables influence the propensity for violent extremism.

Aside from the discussion on the drivers of extremism, A study from KIPRED, focusing on cases of municipalities of Podujeva and Suhareka focuses on factors of resilience against violent extremism. The factors of resilience noted in this report, can be at the same time factors of vulnerability, when turned around. The report notes that a significant local driver is the effective collaboration between local religious authorities, local government, and the police. Structural measures, such as rejecting foreign influences that promote radicalism, have been effective.<sup>45</sup> The report indicates, local Islamic Community in Podujeva and Suhareka have repeatedly rejected numerous offers from foreign organisations for the construction of new mosques or reconstruction of mosques destroyed during the war, if such a (re)construction process has been conditioned with the appointment of certain Imams in these mosques or by insisting on preaching the radical forms of Islam in these religious objects

The KIPRED study by Dr Demjaha, also notes that the engagement of political parties and the media also plays a crucial role, noting that in Suhareka, political parties have been actively involved in promoting religious tolerance. Furthermore, the community's rejection of radical ideologies has been instrumental in maintaining low levels of extremism. The

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<sup>45</sup> Agon Demjaha. (2018). Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Lessons from the Positive Cases of Podujevo and Suhareka Municipalities. The Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED). Available at: [https://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Prevention\\_of\\_Radicalism\\_and\\_Violent\\_Extremism\\_-\\_Positive\\_Cases\\_-\\_Podujevo\\_and\\_Suhareka\\_\(1\)\\_2\\_851758.pdf](https://www.kipred.org/repository/docs/Prevention_of_Radicalism_and_Violent_Extremism_-_Positive_Cases_-_Podujevo_and_Suhareka_(1)_2_851758.pdf)



Factors of Resilience Against Violent Extremism in Kosovo

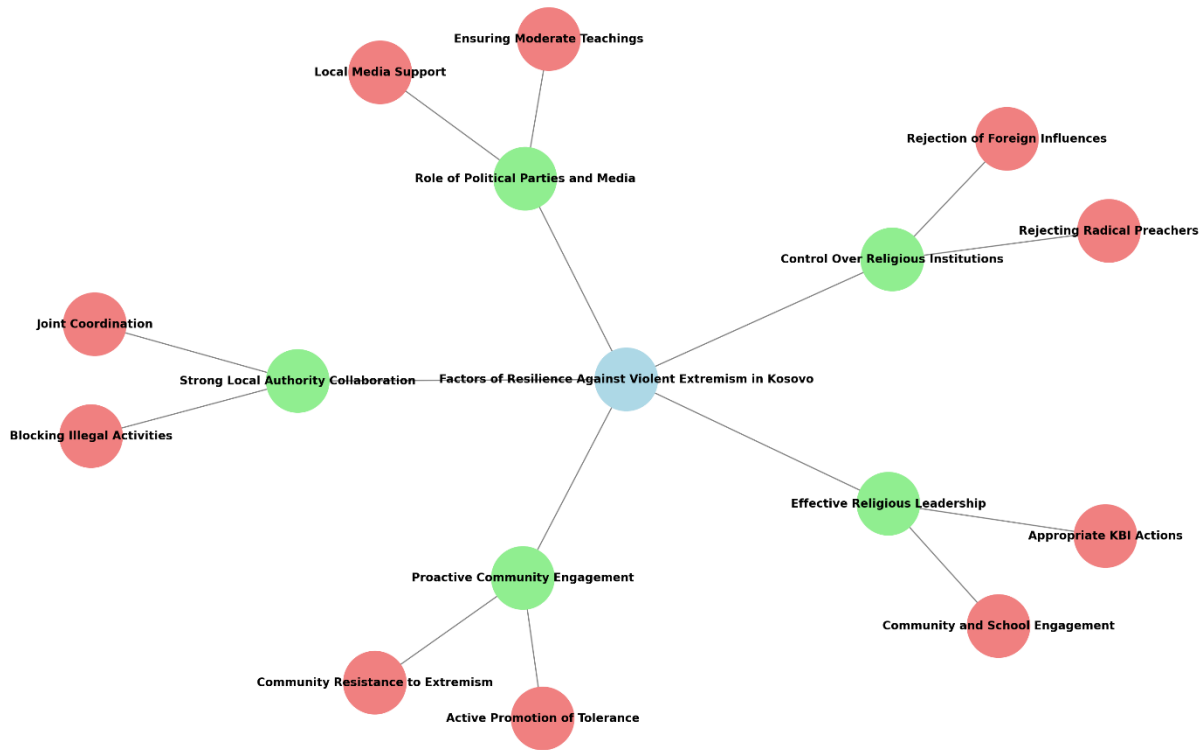


Figure 2: Mind map of the local factors of resilience against violent extremism in Kosovo prepared by the author on the basis of the findings of the KIPRED study by Dr. Agon Demjaha

## 5. Municipal landscape of P/CVE stakeholders

In Kosovo, as in many other countries, efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) have traditionally been centralized. However, recent years have seen a growing recognition of the need to decentralize these efforts and enhance the role of municipalities.

Kosovo has 38 municipalities, some of which have been affected by extremist ideology. According to the national strategies, municipalities should play an important role in preventing violent extremism. Their roles are emphasized in the area of education, social welfare, and youth. Currently, municipalities lack funds and human resources (professionals) to prepare plans to address the challenges of CVE, and often the issue is overly securitized or only looked at through the lens of securitization.

While municipalities have largely been overlooked in P/CVE discussions and policies, the Municipality of South Mitrovica stands out as an exception. In 2019, it became the first and only municipality to adopt a dedicated municipal strategy on P/CVE, highlighting its proactive approach and setting a precedent for local-level engagement in addressing violent extremism.

The strategy, developed by a working group initiated by Community Building Mitrovica (CBM) in collaboration with the Municipality of Mitrovica South and in a framework of a project supported by Global



Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), outlines a detailed plan for the years 2020-2022. It emphasizes the importance of community resilience, focusing on three main pillars: high schools, families, and municipal institutions, including religious and civil society organizations.

For high schools, the strategy included several measures: establishing debate clubs to promote critical thinking; training teachers and students on preventing violent extremism; creating working groups in schools to address violent extremism; and providing educational materials and assigning psychologists to support students. For families, the strategy proposed setting up a family center to proactively visit and assist families facing challenges related to violent extremism and supporting NGO projects focused on preventing violent extremism and increasing community engagement.

The strategy also aimed to enhance cooperation among local stakeholders to strengthen religious tolerance and prevent violent extremism, establish a municipal forum for religious tolerance, and create an online resource center.

The strategy is notable for its inclusion of families as key stakeholders in the municipality's efforts to prevent violent extremism. However, despite the enthusiasm for the strategy and its approval by the municipal assembly, its implementation never truly materialized. Nonetheless, it is important to include in this analysis the efforts of a Municipality to establish itself and acquire agency in the P/CVE efforts.

In this section, the report outlines the key stakeholders working on P/CVE issues at the municipal level. Although the research focuses primarily on three municipalities (Ferizaj, Prishtina, and Lipjan), many of the institutions discussed are consistent across municipalities in Kosovo. These include:

- **Centers for Social Work (QPS):** These centers play a crucial role in addressing the socio-economic factors that contribute to radicalization by providing support to vulnerable individuals and families.
- **Municipal Community Safety Councils (MCSC):** These councils facilitate coordination between local authorities, police, and the community to enhance public safety and address issues related to violent extremism.
- **Municipal Directorates:** While the organization of portfolios may differ slightly from one municipality to another, these directorates generally cover areas such as social welfare, youth, and education. Their involvement is essential for implementing comprehensive P/CVE strategies.

**The Centers for Social Work (QPS)** in Kosovo are vital institutions within the country's social welfare framework, tasked with providing a wide range of professional social services. These centers are mandated to support all citizens of Kosovo, as well as those temporarily or permanently residing in the country<sup>46</sup>. The QPS offers essential services, including the Social Assistance Scheme, and handles various administrative matters, ensuring that assistance is accessible to individuals regardless of nationality, age, language, race, or ability.

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<sup>46</sup> Labyrinth. (2021, October). Analizë për rolin dhe përgjegjësitë e Qendrës për Punë Sociale në Kosovë, available at: <https://labirinti-ks.org/Uploads/EditorFiles/News/148/Analizë%20për%20rolin%20dhe%20përgjegjësitë%20e%20Qendrës%20për%20Punë%20Sociale%20në%20Kosovë.pdf>

Each QPS operates within the territorial competence of its respective municipality. The QPS's role and responsibilities are governed by primary and secondary legislation. Each municipality in Kosovo, except for Prishtina which has three units, hosts a QPS to serve its local population. QPS were integrated under the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare but in 2009 saw the role and responsibilities decentralized to local governments. The operational structure of QPS includes three main departments: professional social services, the social assistance scheme, and administration. Clients who seek services from QPS undergo a structured process beginning with an initial assessment by the head of social services and continuing under the management of a designated case manager.

The QPS faces significant challenges, including limited financial and logistical capacities<sup>47</sup>. These constraints necessitate contracting certain direct services to licensed NGOs, underscoring the importance of NGO support in delivering comprehensive care. Licensed NGOs, meeting the standards set by the MFLP, play a crucial role in providing specialized and round-the-clock services, which QPS staff support administratively.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs initiated the establishment of the **Referral Mechanism** in 2016, initially piloted in the Municipality of Gjilan, to address violent extremism and radicalization. Administered by the mayor's office, this inter-institutional mechanism includes 15 members from local institutions such as the police, education, social work, hospitals, and religious affairs. Referrals come from community members and families, with a dedicated team of two to three members formed to handle each case, ensuring strict confidentiality.

The Referral Mechanism aims for the early identification of individuals at risk of radicalization and violent extremism, thereby preventing further radicalization within society. Members, who are representatives of local institutions with community contact, act based on their legal responsibilities. By 2018, the mechanism had successfully handled ten cases, steering nearly all individuals away from violent extremism<sup>48</sup>.

Despite its early successes, the mechanism faces challenges due to limited resources and support packages. The implementation of local referral mechanisms is a key performance indicator in Kosovo's National Strategy for Preventing and Countering Terrorism, highlighting the importance of expanding and strengthening these initiatives across more municipalities.

Referral mechanisms will be the next step in strengthening the institutional framework on P/CVE at the municipal level. The government plans to establish these mechanisms in all municipalities, and it has done so already in some municipalities, such as Hani i Elezit, but it is yet to establish the referral mechanism in Prishtina, Ferizaj and Lipjan.

The **Regional Directorates of the Kosovo Probation Service (KPS)** are crucial stakeholders in P/CVE activities within their respective areas of responsibility. These regional directorates facilitate communication and coordination with other institutions, managing the mandate of the KPS on the ground. They play a vital role in understanding the challenges related to reintegration and the prevention of

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<sup>47</sup> Fjolla Muçaj. (2023, April). Where are the Centers for Social Work? Kosovo 2.0.

<https://kosovotwopointzero.com/en/where-are-the-centers-for-social-work/>

<sup>48</sup> OSCE. (2019). Understanding Referral Mechanisms in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism. Navigating Challenges and Protecting Human Rights: A Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe, available at: <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/4/418274.pdf>

radicalization and violent extremism. Furthermore, their involvement is essential in designing and implementing effective P/CVE measures, ensuring that local insights and expertise are integrated into broader strategies.

**Municipal Community Safety Councils (MCSC)** are key security forums established in each municipality of Kosovo. These councils are led by the municipality mayor and are characterized by their diversity in membership. As higher-level forums compared to Local Councils for Public Safety (LCPS), MCSC includes the commander of the Police Station, who participates in regular monthly meetings to report on the security situation within the municipality and addresses security problems collected from these meetings.

MCSC are created by the Municipal Assembly and chaired by the Mayor, or by the Vice Mayor in the Mayor's absence. The MCSC has a four-year mandate, aligning with the term of the Municipal Assembly members. Each Mayor appoints a Coordinator to manage the MCSC's affairs. The MCSC is composed of various representatives, including the Mayor, the Commander of the Municipal Police Station, one representative from each religious community, one representative from each ethnic community, the Chairperson of the Committee for Communities from the Municipal Assembly, an official for gender equality, the Director of the Directorate of Education, the Chairperson of the Educational Parents' Council, one representative from the Kosovo Security Force, one representative from each Local Public Safety Committee, one representative from the Community Safety Action Teams, one representative from the municipal civilian emergency sector, one NGO representative, one local media representative, one business community representative, and one representative from the Disabled Persons Community

The Municipal Community Safety Councils (MCSC) in Kosovo play a critical role in addressing and mitigating the factors contributing to local violent extremism. The report from the MCSC highlights that addressing the socio-economic disparities through targeted economic development initiatives and social support programs is crucial in preventing radicalization.

**Local Public Safety Committees (LPSCs)** are consultative bodies that assist the police in identifying and addressing community problems. They can be initiated either by citizens who wish to improve their cooperation with the police or by the police station commander, based on safety analyses and reported cases. Requests for their establishment are submitted to the General Director of Police for approval. These committees are notable for their cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity, and they play a significant role in implementing the National Strategy for Community Safety and Action Plan 2011-2016. Regular meetings between police representatives and residents facilitate the exchange of information and concerns, thereby advancing cooperation and communication within the community.

The poorly written **National Strategy and Action Plan for Community Safety 2018-2023**<sup>49</sup>, includes the number of established and functional MCSCs and LPSCs as a key performance indicator. Issues related to Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) are integrated throughout the strategy. The strategy acknowledges the interconnected nature of community risks and the need for proactive measures to address them. It focuses on building a society free from risks affecting public, personal, and property safety, aiming to create a peaceful, multi-ethnic, and multicultural environment. However, despite having

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<sup>49</sup> National Strategy and Action Plan for Community Safety 2018-2023, <https://kryeministri.rks-gov.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Strategjia-Nacionale-per-siguri-ne-Bashkesi-anglisht.pdf>

a national strategy on community safety, the reality on the ground is that this is not truly seen as a priority of either central or municipal governments.

**Municipal directorates** play a crucial role in the Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) framework at the local level. Their involvement is essential for implementing strategies that address the socio-economic and cultural drivers of extremism within communities. While the organization of municipal portfolios can vary—such as youth being part of the Directorate for Culture in Prishtina but having its own portfolio in municipalities like Lipjan and Ferizaj—three key thematic areas consistently emerge as critical: social welfare, youth, and education.

The role of **municipal directorates covering social welfare** is pivotal in addressing the socio-economic conditions that contribute to radicalization. These directorates are responsible for ensuring that vulnerable communities and citizens receive the necessary support, which can mitigate feelings of marginalization and disenfranchisement. Effective social welfare programs can reduce the economic strains that often make individuals susceptible to extremist ideologies. Offering psychological support and counseling services can help individuals cope with personal and societal stressors, reducing the likelihood of radicalization.

**Municipal directorates focusing on youth** are integral to P/CVE efforts. Young people are often the primary targets for recruitment by extremist groups, making it essential to engage them constructively. Developing and supporting youth centers, sports activities, and cultural programs can provide positive outlets for young people's engagement. This helps in fostering a sense of belonging and community. Providing opportunities for education and skill development can help young people secure employment and build a stable future, thereby reducing their vulnerability to extremist recruitment.

**Municipal directorates responsible for education** can implement programs that promote critical thinking, tolerance, and resilience against radical ideologies. Integrating P/CVE topics into the school curriculum can help students understand and resist extremist ideologies. Subjects on civic education, human rights, and conflict resolution are particularly important. Training teachers to recognize signs of radicalization and to promote inclusive and critical thinking can create a school environment resistant to extremism. Teachers can act as early warning systems and intervene appropriately. In this context, the UNDP Kosovo manual can be utilized.

Another municipal directorate relevant to P/CVE is related to emergency and safety. This directorate exists as a standalone entity in the Municipality of Mitrovica South. However, in the municipalities of Prishtina, Ferizaj, and Lipjan, emergency and safety issues fall under the Directorate for Public Services instead of having a separate directorate.

In addition to governmental institutions, **cultural institutions in municipalities**, particularly municipal theatres, are significant stakeholders in P/CVE activities. These theatres have been actively involved in overall P/CVE activities, including by organizing cultural events for children repatriated from Syria and Iraq, contributing to their reintegration and psychological well-being. Theatres in Prishtina, Ferizaj, and Lipjan have demonstrated their potential to play a vital role in any P/CVE efforts. Besides theatres, other cultural institutions within municipalities can also provide valuable support in these initiatives. Their involvement can foster community engagement, promote positive narratives, and offer a platform for creative expression, all of which are essential components in preventing and countering violent extremism.

Another key stakeholder, especially at the municipal level and when dealing with youth is the **Kosovar Youth Council (KYC)**. The organization aims to represent the youth's voice, and supports the development of youth policies. The organization's work is driven by its staff, dedicated volunteers, and the Student Council of Kosovo (SCK). KYC's most notable achievement is the establishment of the Student Council of Kosovo in 2005, the largest high school student representative structure in the country. SCK consists of 100 representatives from 100 high schools across 30 municipalities. This national body represents all secondary school students in Kosovo, advocating for their interests and rights and collaborating with officials, parents, professors, and educational institutions. KYC's highest governing body is the Assembly, composed of all organization members, supported by a board of directors with three members. The organization engages over 600 active volunteers annually, covering 30 out of 38 municipalities in Kosovo.

**Local branches of religious institutions** are essential stakeholders in the effort to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE) at the municipal level. Their involvement is critical due to their deep-rooted influence within communities and their ability to shape religious and cultural narratives.

The local branches of the **Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK)** play a pivotal role in P/CVE efforts. As trusted religious authorities, imams and other leaders can help with counternarrative efforts. Their close ties to the community allow them to detect early signs of radicalization and intervene through counseling and support. Additionally, BIK branches often engage in charitable activities, addressing socio-economic grievances that can lead to radicalization. In recent times, BIK has been involved in important activities of promoting interethnic dialogue.

For instance, in Ferizaj, an inspiring example of interfaith dialogue emerged when the local Imam and the Orthodox priest developed a close friendship. This bond between the two religious leaders became an affirmative story celebrated by the international media, including Radio Free Europe<sup>50</sup>. Their mutual respect was important in promoting messages of interethnic understanding and cooperation. This friendship not only bridged the gap between different religious communities but also illustrates how local leaders can play a transformative role in fostering peace and cohesion within their communities. This story underscores the potential impact of grassroots efforts in P/CVE and highlights the importance of inclusive approaches.

The local branches of the **Catholic Church** contribute to social cohesion and P/CVE through their extensive community engagement and social services, including Caritas offices. **Protestant Church** branches also can play a significant role in community building and promoting interfaith dialogue.

Other religious institutions, including **Orthodox Christian** communities and various smaller religious groups, also hold critical positions in the P/CVE landscape. Their ability to reach and influence different segments of the population is invaluable in creating a comprehensive and inclusive approach to preventing violent extremism.

CSOs are also active P/CVE actors at the local level. However, this report will focus only on the local CSOs active in the focus municipalities, which will be included in the next section.

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<sup>50</sup> See the Radio Free Europe story of the Imam and the Orthodox Priest, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x5Uxmyoi2hQ> and <https://telegafi.com/ne-ferizaj-xhamia-dhe-kisha-ne-nje-oborr-flasin-imami-dhe-prifti-video/>

## 6. Focus in Ferizaj/Uroševac, Lipjan/Lipljan and Prishtina/ Priština

This section serves a dual purpose: first, to provide a comprehensive overview of the profiles of Ferizaj/Uroševac, Lipjan/Lipljan and Prishtina/ Priština; and second, to discuss the specific P/CVE-relevant stakeholders in these municipalities. For the sake of clarity and practicality, this section will refer to each city by a single name.

### 6.1 An overview of the profiles of Ferizaj, Lipjan and Prishtina

**The Municipality of Ferizaj/Uroševac** is a significant administrative region in Kosovo, ranking as the third-largest in terms of population size. According to the 2011 census, the municipality had approximately 108,690 inhabitants, with 96% Albanian while the Ashkali community represents 3% of the population and other ethnic groups 1%. Youth represent a substantial portion of Ferizaj's population, with 27% of its residents aged between 15-29 years according to the 2011 census. This demographic trend is particularly pronounced in rural areas, where 60% of the youth live in the municipality's 45 villages. However, there has been a continuous migration of young people from rural areas to the city, reflecting broader socio-economic shifts within the region<sup>51</sup>. There are over 25,696 pupils across all levels of educational system in the municipality.

Ferizaj has a relatively robust educational infrastructure, with 63 educational institutions, with the secondary education schools located only in the city. The establishment of the University of Applied Sciences in 2015, along with several private university campuses, has expanded higher education opportunities, though comprehensive data on student enrollment remains sparse. Ferizaj has a high rate of Internet penetration both in rural and urban area, with 96% of households having internet access.<sup>52</sup>

Based on the 2011 census data Ferizaj's population is overwhelmingly Islamic (98.6%), with a minority identifying as Catholic (0.38%), Orthodox (0.04%), or non-religious. The municipality contains 49 mosques, the majority of which are in rural areas, and a small number of other religious institutions. As in other parts of Kosovo, in recent years, there has been a proliferation of new mosques, indicating a strong religious presence. Ferizaj also has a Catholic church, an Orthodox and a Protestant church in the city.

Ferizaj's municipal budget for 2024 is estimated at €41.1 million in and it is primarily funded through governmental allocations<sup>53</sup>. Budget allocation for youth activities is minimal.

With respect to violent extremism, an estimated 18 individuals joined the terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq<sup>54</sup>. These individuals typically had secondary education, a criminal background, and came from economically average or poor conditions. NGOs with religious affiliations operating in the municipality,

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<sup>51</sup>Lulzim Peci, Mentor Agani, Diedon Nixha and Valdrin Ukshini. (2018). The Municipalities of the Ferizaj Region Socio-Economic Profiles. The Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED). [Peci, et.al., 2018]

<sup>52</sup> Read more at: <https://globaldatalab.org/areadata/profiles/KSVr107/>

<sup>53</sup> Miratohet buxheti i Komunës së Ferizajt për vitin 2022-2024, available at: <https://kk.rks-gov.net/ferizaj/news/miratohet-buxheti-i-komunes-se-ferizajt-per-vitin-2022-2024/>

<sup>54</sup> Peci, et.al, 2018

particularly those that prioritize religious activities outside the framework of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), is seen as potential security risk in the municipality<sup>55</sup>.

Research conducted during the peak of violent extremism concerns in Kosovo, primarily between 2014 and 2016, identified Ferizaj and Lipjan as high-risk locations for radicalization and violent extremism<sup>56</sup>. These areas were considered vulnerable due to their socio-economic conditions—being poor, rural regions with limited economic, social, or cultural opportunities. The gravity of the situation was underscored by a tragic incident in 2014 when the first recorded suicide attacker of Kosovo origin, was a young adult from Ferizaj, who carried out a suicide attack, killing 52 Iraqi soldiers<sup>57</sup>.

A study from 2017 by the Security Policy Research Center (SPRC) highlights Ferizaj as a significant area of concern for radicalization and violent extremism, primarily due to its socio-economic conditions<sup>58</sup>. The study notes that the municipality faces several challenges, including limited economic opportunities, social isolation, and a lack of cultural engagement. The municipality's economic activity is relatively low, with only 42.4% of the population over 15 years being economically active, and of those, only 56% are employed<sup>59</sup>.

These factors contribute to the vulnerability of its youth to radicalization. More recent research and data paint a different picture about Ferizaj municipality, with a vibrant economic sector, especially in IT services and gastronomy<sup>60</sup>. The 2024 Kosovo census shows Ferizaj, as the third largest city in Kosovo, after Prizren.

**The Municipality of Prishtina**, is the largest urban center in Kosovo and the capital of the country. The municipality is predominantly Albanian, with 97.7% of residents identifying as such, while smaller communities include Turks (1%), Ashkalis (0.3%), and other ethnic groups. Prishtina boasts a well-developed educational infrastructure, with 72 elementary and secondary schools<sup>61</sup>. Despite this, educational attainment varies, with a notable proportion of the population having only completed elementary school.

Religiously, Prishtina is predominantly Islamic (97.2%), with a minority identifying as Catholic, Orthodox, or non-religious. The municipality is home to 46 mosques, a Catholic Cathedral and church, several Protestant churches, and an unfinished Orthodox church that started constructions during the 1990s in the campus of the University of Prishtina, and it is often subject of tensions.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>56</sup> Dr. Valery Perry. (2016). Initiatives to Prevent/Counter Violent Extremism in South East Europe: A Survey of Regional Issues, Initiatives and Opportunities. Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/38/initiatives-to-preventcounter-violent-extremism-in-south-east-europe-a-survey-of-regional-issues-initiatives-and-opportunities>

<sup>57</sup> Telegrafi. (2014). Blerim Demiri nga Ferizaj kryen sulm vetëvrasës, vrau 52 ushtarë irakianë. Available at: <https://telegrafi.com/blerim-demiri-nga-ferizaj-kryen-sulm-vetevrases-vrau-52-ushtare-irakiane/>

<sup>58</sup> Burim Ramadani and Rifat Marmullaku. (2017, March). Influencing Factors on Radicalization and Violent Extremism: Lessons from Peja, Mitrovica, Gjilan, Ferizaj, and Kacanik. Security Policy Research Center (SPRC). Available at: <https://advocacy-center.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Influencing-factors-on-radicalization-and-violent-extremism.pdf>

<sup>59</sup> Peci.et.al, 2018

<sup>60</sup> Lekiqi, et.al., (2020). The Increase of the Prosperity and its Effect on Gastronomic Enterprises in the Region of Ferizaj. European Academic Research. Vol. VII, Issue 11.

<sup>61</sup> Lulzim Peci, Mentor Agani, Diedon Nixha and Valdrin Ukshini. (2020) The Municipalities of the Prishtina Region Socio-Economic Profiles. The Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED) [Peci, et.al, 2020]



Criminality is another issue, with 6,218 criminal offenses reported in 2019, translating to 31 offenses per 1,000 inhabitants<sup>62</sup>. Prishtina has also faced challenges related to violent extremism. Data from the Kosovo Police indicate that 58 individuals from Prishtina joined terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq, with a concerning number having a low to medium level of education and coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds<sup>63</sup>. Additionally, there have been 16 arrests related to terrorist activities, underscoring the need for more proactive measures at the municipal level. Despite this, there is no public record of the Municipal Council addressing these security concerns in its meetings.

Economically, Prishtina is active, with 51.2% of the population over 15 years being economically engaged, and a significant proportion employed<sup>64</sup>. However, nearly half of the population is economically inactive, primarily due to continuing education or household responsibilities. A small percentage relies on social assistance or pensions for their livelihood<sup>65</sup>.

The municipal budget for 2023 was approximately €105 million, primarily funded through government allocations and local revenues<sup>66</sup>. A significant portion of the budget, €40 million, is allocated to capital investments, however, investments in youth, while larger than other municipalities, can be further expanded. In 2020, 7.47% of the total budget was earmarked for youth-related capital investments and subsidies.

**The Municipality of Lipjan**, is considered as part of the Prishtina region, with an estimated population of around 57,605. Lipjan is a diverse municipality with different ethnic and religious groups. The demographic composition is predominantly Albanian 94.5%, with smaller communities of Ashkalis (3.14%), Serbs (0.9%) as well as Croats. Youth aged 15-29 years constitute 27.5% of the population, with a significant majority (88.1%) residing in rural areas, indicating a distinct rural character in its demographic structure. Education in Lipjan shows varying levels of attainment. Among residents aged 10 and above, a considerable number have only completed elementary education, with relatively few having pursued higher education<sup>67</sup>. The municipality has 54 elementary and secondary schools, with a relatively high school-to-youth ratio<sup>68</sup>.

Religiously, the population is predominantly Islamic (97.8%), with a small Catholic and Orthodox minority. The Municipality of Lipjan is home to 32 mosques, of which seven were damaged or destroyed during the 1999 conflict and later reconstructed, while 17 new mosques have been built post-conflict. There are five Serbian Orthodox churches in the municipality, with three currently in use—two in Lipjan town and one in Rubovc village<sup>69</sup>. The remaining two churches, located in Kraishtë and Sllovi, were destroyed or damaged after the 1999 conflict. The churches in Lipjan town, located within the Special Protective Zone, sustained minor damages during the March 2004 riots and were subsequently reconstructed by the Reconstruction

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>64</sup> Peci, et.al., 2020

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>66</sup> Kuvendi i Komunal i Prishtinës miraton buxhetin mbi 100-milionësh për vitin 2023,

<https://zeri.info/aktuale/464322/kuvendi-i-komunal-i-prishtines-miraton-buxhetin-mbi-100-milionesh-per-vitin-2023/>

<sup>67</sup> Peci, et.al., 2020

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>69</sup> OSCE Kosovo, Lipjan/Lipljan Profile, [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/4/13121\\_1.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/7/4/13121_1.pdf)



Implementation Commission in 2005<sup>70</sup>. Additionally, the municipality has two Catholic churches, both of which remain undamaged and in use.

Lipjan has faced challenges related to violent extremism, with 11 individuals reportedly joining terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq<sup>71</sup>. These individuals typically had a medium level of education and came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds<sup>72</sup>.

Crime statistics of the Municipality of Lipjan indicate a medium level of criminality, with 877 offenses reported in 2019, primarily related to property and personal safety<sup>73</sup>. Economically, only 39.8% of the population over 15 years of age is active, with a significant portion engaged in household duties or education<sup>74</sup>. A notable percentage of the population relies on social assistance or pensions, reflecting economic challenges within the municipality.

In all three municipalities, a major stakeholder is the **Municipal Council of Parents**, which are legally mandated to be established and, in each municipality, based on the desktop research, they are very active.

Across the municipalities of Ferizaj, Prishtina, and Lipjan, several commonalities emerge, particularly in the context of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE). All three municipalities are characterized by a significant youth demographic aged 15-29 years, which is particularly vulnerable to radicalization. All three municipalities have experienced challenges related to violent extremism, with individuals from each municipality having joined terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. These individuals often share common backgrounds, including low to medium levels of education and poor economic conditions, which are prevalent across these municipalities.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>71</sup> Peci, et.al., 2020

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>73</sup> Peci, et.al., 2020

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.,

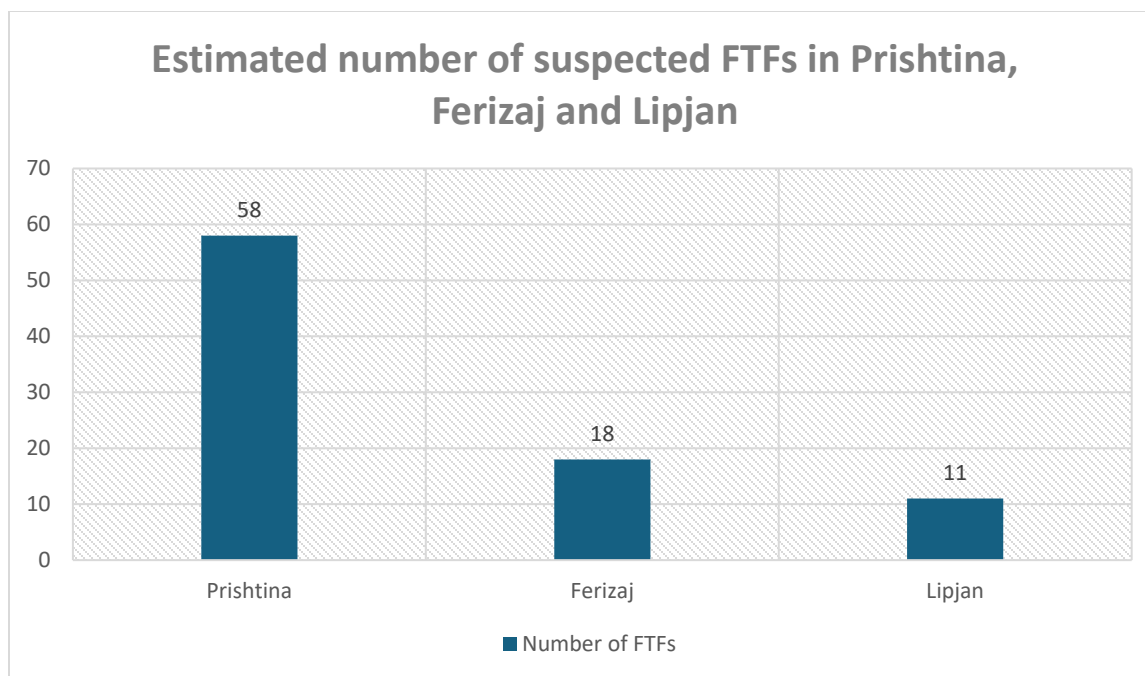


Figure 3: Estimated number of suspected Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) in the municipalities of Prishtina, Ferizaj and Lipjan based on the data from the KIPRED report from 2020 and 2018<sup>75</sup>

## 6.2 A closer look of P/CVE stakeholders in Ferizaj/Uroševac, Lipjan/Lipljan and Prishtina/ Priština

### *Ferizaj*

In the municipality of Ferizaj, in addition to the overall stakeholders, such as the Social Welfare Centers examined in the previous section, there are particular stakeholders that are relevant to P/CVE efforts. The municipality of Ferizaj has undertaken various initiatives to address these issues. **The Municipal Council for Community Safety (MCCS)** in Ferizaj plays a central role in coordinating P/CVE activities. One notable initiative is the engagement of Islamic religious clergy in high schools to raise awareness about the dangers of radicalization among young people. Public Safety Action Teams and LPSCs are part of these efforts, and the municipality has organized and supported lectures in local high schools with Islamic religious clergy to raise awareness among young people.

What sets Ferizaj apart from other municipalities is that it has appointed a dedicated contact persons/official on P/CVE matters, Mr. Shkelzen Marevci, who also participated in the process of development of the new national strategy against terrorism. Mr. Marevci's tasks are related to advice and support on P/CVE matters for the municipality of Ferizaj.

<sup>75</sup> Peci, et.al., 2020 and Peci, et.al., 2018

In Municipality of Ferizaj, there are three particular NGOs which are considered actors and are overall active: Initiative for Progress (INPO), AVONET and youth organization Rin'ON. INPO, although not specifically focused on P/CVE, has been a central hub for various civil initiatives aimed at good governance and democratic development. **AVONET** has occasionally collaborated with security institutions like the Kosovo Police and KFOR to address issues related to violent extremism. The youth organization **Rin'ON in Ferizaj** has been a confident partner to the municipality and to other stakeholders on P/CVE related issues, especially in providing a safe space for youth to build their life and soft skills, as well as encouraging them to become an active member of their communities. In 2023 they initiated their first PVE focused project as part of the Resilient and Inclusive Communities Program as part of the ATRC Consortium and funded by GCERF. In this project they place a large focus on the villages surrounding the city of Ferizaj, working with both student councils and village councils to tackle key push and pull factors that contribute to the enabling environment of radicalization to violent extremism.

In 2021, in Ferizaj Municipality, the **NGO Youth Assembly of Ferizaj** was established, and operates independently of the Kosovo Youth Assembly. This organization has been very active on youth related matters and monitoring developments in schools in the municipality<sup>76</sup>.

### *Lipjan*

In Lipjan, the **Youth Association for Human Rights (YAHR)** stands out as a key NGO, focusing on democratization, civic activism, youth, and gender equality. YAHR is an active member of the Municipal Council for Community Safety, contributing to raising awareness through various civic initiatives. In 2023, YAHR implemented a short project funded by the OSCE on violent extremism and radicalism, which included workshops for young people and roundtables with local state institutions. In Lipjan there were also cases of youth NGOs cooperating with the Islamic Community on socially responsible activities, such as blood donation events<sup>77</sup>. The Youth Center in Lipjan is moderately active. While they do not have any activities focusing on PVE, they do occasionally bring together young people on topics such as tolerance, inter-community dialogue and youth development.

Two other organizations are active in Lipjan, but are based in the rural parts of Lipjan. *Vizioni Rinor i Shalës* operates out of the village of Shala, but is active also in Lipjan with a focus on engaging and empowering youth. They contribute to the PVE agenda mainly through their activities on youth development, teaching them life and soft skills, encouraging a sense of purpose, and critical thinking activities. *Vizioni Rinor i Shalës* is set to start their first PVE focused project at the start of 2025. Additionally, based in Janeve the Ideas partnership is active with young people and students from different communities in the field of education. Villages and youth in villages are often left out, both by CSOs operating in the capital or in the city, despite youth in villages being equally or more vulnerable to radicalisation to violent extremism. Their experience highlights the need for more work to be done in villages as well as the need for their inclusion in discussion, in order to have a more holistic understanding of the context of municipalities.

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<sup>76</sup> See for instance this public reaction: <https://ferizajpress.com/kuvendi-i-te-rinjve-te-ferizajt-shkeputet-nga-gendra-kuvendi-i-te-rinjve-te-kosoves/>

<sup>77</sup> See for instance the activities of the HOPE organization, not active since 2022, based on the last date of their posting on Facebook account. <https://www.facebook.com/hopelipjan/>

*Prishtina* When it comes to **Prishtina**, there is no realistic separation between stakeholders of central and local level, as in there are no specific stakeholders only focused on Prishtina, with the exception of social welfare centers, and other standard municipal institutions. Civil society is a major stakeholder at the local and central level on P/CVE. Civil society organizations (CSOs), respectively, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Kosovo have played an integral role in community-wide rehabilitation and reintegration (R&R) efforts. NGOs like KCSS, CDF, KRCT, FIQ, ATRC, and CBM, have benefited from the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), which aims to strengthen community resilience against various forms of violent extremism (VE) and support local R&R efforts for individuals radicalized and repatriated from foreign conflicts. This initiative has provided vocational training for repatriated individuals and their relatives, focusing on business startups, business management, and agriculture.

Local CSOs like KCSS, Partners Kosova, and KRCT, supported by the US Department of State, have implemented R&R programs specifically for children returnees, focusing on activities such as drama, recreational painting, sports, and mental health support. These activities help stimulate creative thinking, self-expression, and soft skill development while preventing trauma and supporting the integration of children into the community.

**Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS)** has been one of the main non-governmental organizations and think tank in Kosovo tackling the issue of violent extremism. Its flagship study “Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Kosovo’s citizens’ involvement as foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq” in 2015<sup>78</sup>, represents the first comprehensive and locally written account of the drivers of violent extremism in Kosovo.

Additionally, the **Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED)** has contributed significantly to P/CVE matters through research publishing the first analysis of the phenomenon in Kosovo, in 2004. KIPRED's research includes foreign and security policies, European integration, governance practices, environmental sustainability, inter-ethnic relations, and political parties. Burim Ramadani, a former head of inspection at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency and former Deputy Minister of Defense, is active as a blogger, tackling topics of radicalization, violent extremism, and foreign malign influence operations through his YouTube channel and Facebook page.

**The Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT)** is a well-established NGO providing treatment and rehabilitation support for victims of torture in Kosovo. Supported by the US Embassy in Kosovo, KRCT has provided reintegration support for returnees, with a particular focus on children. This includes developing the capacities of public institutions, especially primary care institutions, to identify signs of trauma or radicalization early. The project also includes awareness-raising activities, such as creating informational materials for schools and families on available healthcare services and conducting information sessions for teachers and educators.

**Foltash.com** - This is a portal established in 2015 aiming to counter and prevent violent extremism. They produce religious news and arguments to condemn ISIS and other extremist groups’ ideologies and

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<sup>78</sup> Access the report from the KCSS official web site, available at: [https://kcss.org/images/uploads/files/Report\\_inquiring\\_into\\_the\\_causes\\_and\\_consequences\\_of\\_Kosovo\\_citizens\\_involvement\\_as\\_foreign\\_fighters\\_in\\_Syria\\_and\\_Iraq\\_307708.pdf](https://kcss.org/images/uploads/files/Report_inquiring_into_the_causes_and_consequences_of_Kosovo_citizens_involvement_as_foreign_fighters_in_Syria_and_Iraq_307708.pdf)

propaganda. Their contribution is particularly notable with respect to creating counter-narratives and news productions which are increasingly disseminated.

Despite the significant role of NGOs in R&R, the Kosovo Probation Service (KPS) has not been consistently involved in these programs, even though it plays a crucial role in reintegration in the society of the violent extremism offenders<sup>79</sup>.

In Kosovo, the majority of NGOs working on issues related to violent extremism focus mainly on advocacy and oversight of government approaches, rather than directly involving themselves in the reintegration of returnees, with some exceptions. This highlights an opportunity to establish constructive partnerships between NGOs and government institutions to address the key challenges in the social reintegration process. One area where this can be further explored is in subcontracting of the NGOs by the Social Welfare Centers in municipalities.

The continuous support from international donors, such as the Netherlands, which has been a major donor to GCERF, has been instrumental in these efforts. Organizations like IOM have also been active in supporting the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Correctional Service with R&R projects, including business ideas and capacity-building for returnees. Community Development Fund (CDF), with GCERF's support, has organized informal education and recreational activities for returned children and professional training for returned women, in close cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Kosovo Probation Service (KPS).

New initiatives by organizations like ATRC aim to create a safe environment for R&R by enhancing the professional capacities of state institutions involved in these efforts. Community Building Mitrovica (CBM) also contributes to R&R activities in the Mitrovica region, supporting returned children with educational activities and offering professional training and business ideas for returnees.

Other organizations that have contributed to P/CVE include **Youth Councils in Kosovo Municipalities**, which are central stakeholders to P/CVE efforts, across all municipalities, and particularly active in the municipality of Lipjan.

Overall, while NGOs in Kosovo have made significant contributions to P/CVE and R&R efforts, there is a need for more structured and inclusive participation of institutions like Kosovo Probation Service (KPS) to ensure a comprehensive and effective reintegration process for individuals returning from conflict zones.

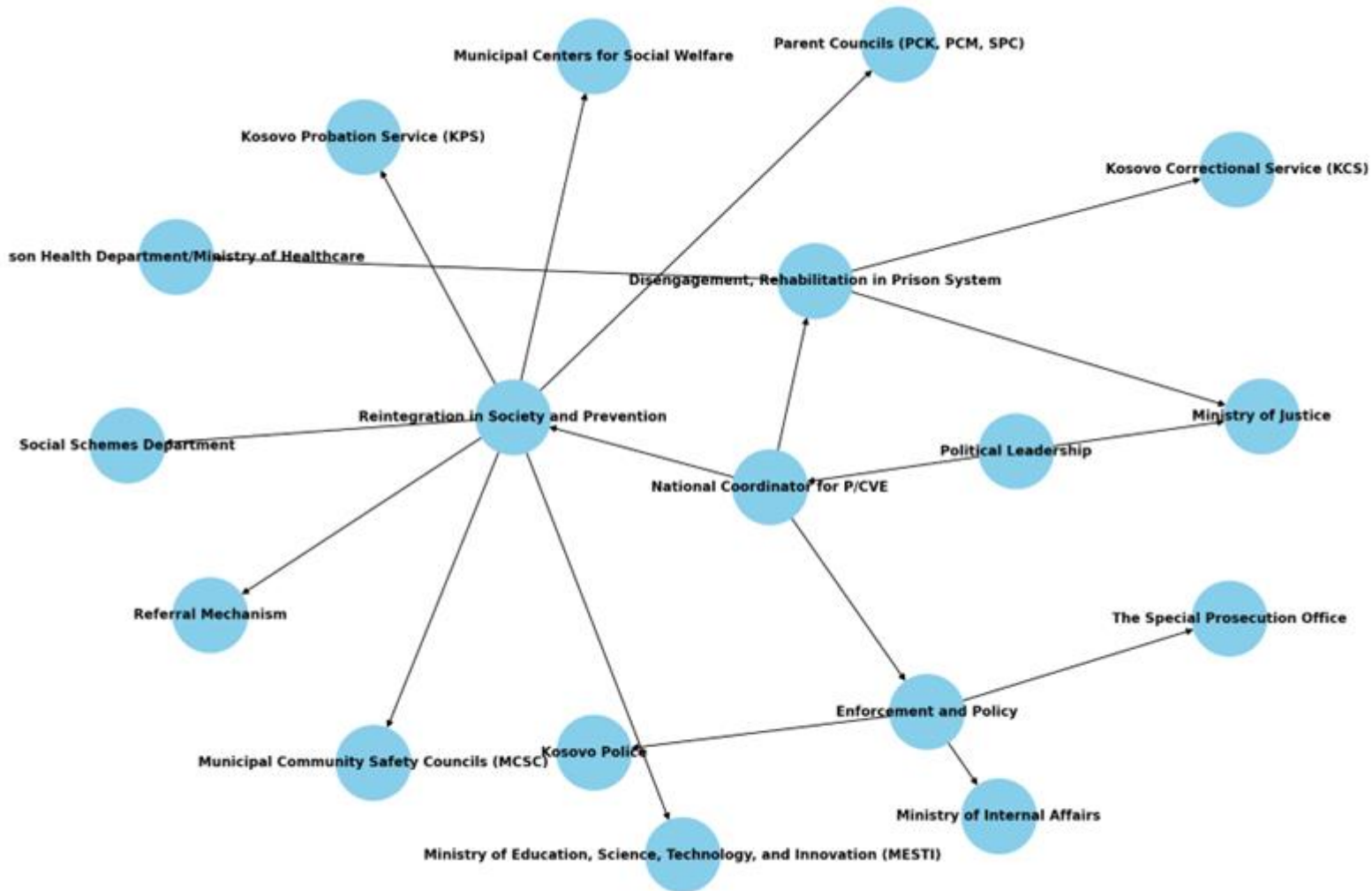
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<sup>79</sup> Orana and Perteshi, 2022

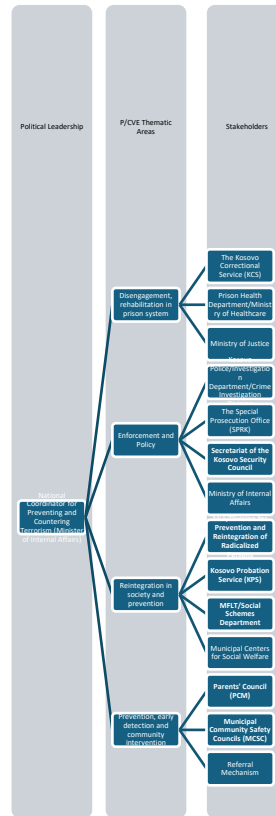
## Annex A: Overview of key stakeholders

<b>Central Level</b>	Minister of Internal Affairs/ National Coordinator for Preventing and Countering Extremism
	Ministry of Internal Affairs/ Division for Prevention and Reintegration of Radicalized Persons (DPRRP)
	Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers (MFLT)
	Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI)
	Ministry of Justice (MoJ)
	Ministry of Healthcare/ Prison Health Department
	Victims Assistance and Advocacy Office (VAAO)
	Kosovo Probation Service (KPS)
	Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS)
	Secretariat of the Kosovo Security Council
	Institution of the Ombudsperson
	Kosovo Police
	Civil Society Organizations
<b>Municipal Level</b>	Municipal Community Safety Councils (MCSC)
	Regional Directorates of the Kosovo Probation Service
	Municipal Directorates
	Kosovar Youth Council (KYC)
	Referral Mechanisms/ Multi-disciplinary teams
	Centers for Social Work
	Municipal Religious Institutions (i.e Islamic Community Office)
	Cultural Institutions
Civil Society Organizations	

## Annex B: Thematic overview of key stakeholders



# Annex C: Functional stakeholder overview







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