

WESTERN BALKANS

EXTREMISM RESEARCH FORUM

KOSOVO REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Violent extremism stemming from the foreign fighter phenomenon, and the Islamist religious extremism in general has dominated the public discourse on threats in Kosovo since the end of 2013 to this day. Nevertheless, while the foreign fighter threat has been evident, this report suggests that violent extremism in Kosovo has manifested itself in other forms as well, such as political based and ethnic based violent extremism. While the “supply” of foreign fighters from Kosovo has diminished, some of the emerging threats from the phenomenon include the imprisoned foreign fighters and radical extremists, and the potential returnees that still remain in conflict zones. For the latter category, the report suggests that the risks are not as high as generally believed.

There is no single profile that can describe foreign fighters in Kosovo or those embracing similar violent extremist ideas shared by the Islamic State and other similar groups in Syria and Iraq. Most of those that travelled to Syria or Iraq belong to 20-30 age-group. If children (0 to 15 age group) are included in the count, as many as 80 per cent of Kosovo originating foreign fighters were 30 or younger at the time of their departure. Kosovo originating foreign fighters and those embracing similar ideas, generally have slightly more advanced levels of education than the average Kosovo citizen. Yet their average socio-economic condition is below the Kosovo average; they tend to be poorer, and seem to have had less access to opportunities to reach good standards of living compared to the average Kosovo citizen. Likewise, the unemployment rate among Kosovo originating foreign fighters is double than the Kosovo average, and most of those that have had prior employment, have worked in non-permanent and unstable jobs.

There are several factors that drive people to become foreign fighters or embrace similar ideologies even if they do not travel to conflict zones. The often-mentioned factor, such as education, does not appear to be a compelling explanation, though this report recognises the fact that education entails a much broader category than simply the level of education one attains. Nonetheless, when conducting tests with other education indicators (such as illiteracy rate, or school (non)attendance), education still does not appear to be a strong factor in driving the phenomenon. Instead, the findings of this research suggest that significant drivers of the phenomenon seem to be based around the notion of an identity vacuum (expressed as a detachment from the established social fabric), as well as very close intra-family ties of younger generations (such as siblings, relatives, or even long-time friendships outside families). A closer investigation of profiles of 90+ randomly selected individuals who have travelled to Syria/Iraq, or those that belong to violent extremist groups, shows that around 70 per cent of them had

close or extended family relations. Close to 40 per cent of these 90 individuals were siblings.

These factors working in conjunction seem to also play a role in those few cases where individuals may have very stable socio-economic conditions. Poorer socio-economic conditions on individual/family level (not general country- or municipal-level structural levels), appear to also exacerbate the phenomenon.

The inquiry into potential links between violent extremism and organised crime did not reveal evidence of any such links. There are a number of examples whereby individuals have attempted to profit out of the phenomenon, but this certainly appears to be neither organised nor structural, and quite isolated.

As for the links between those who embrace violent extremist ideas, their cooperation transcends state borders. It should be noted that there is little (if any) evidence that the often-mentioned cases of Middle East funded religious based NGOs directly recruited people into violent extremist ideological groups, or exacerbated the phenomenon. Nonetheless, the report also shows that state actors, especially those dealing with matters of security, almost always view the Middle Eastern presence with heightened suspicion. The cooperation between violent extremists does not happen through such NGOs that are registered and operate publicly. The international cooperation between violent extremists occurs more through close personal contacts, either physically or virtually.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The Extremism Research Forum is a UK government funded research project¹, examining drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism in the Western Balkans – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

The research commenced in 2017, exploring a range of themes and topics with key stakeholders within communities, civil society and government, in order to build a coherent picture of the specific situation in each country. This research seeks to inform and assist in the development of CVE policies and programming, offering key findings that could be relevant to practitioners and policymakers working in the field of countering violent extremism.

Each country study: 1) maps out the forms of extremism; 2) examines drivers and contributing factors of radicalisation (global, regional, national and local drivers, political and socio-economic); 3) develops a profile of at risk communities.

Taking into account the multifaceted nature of extremism, the research also; 4) identifies any potential links with organised crime, money laundering, links to terrorism; and; 5) analyses trans-national co-operation of violent extremist groups.

This study forms one of the six contextual research pieces, presenting findings from in-depth primary research conducted with communities and wider stakeholders with knowledge of the violent extremist threats specific to the country. The findings are based on primary, and where credible, secondary data sources in order to create an informed and nuanced picture of the violent extremist activity or potential threat within the country. Importantly, it is intended that this research usefully informs policy development, providing practical recommendations, while also feeding into an overarching regional report, where broader linkages and key transnational issues that have been identified from the research will be examined.

It is expected that this project will result in an increased understanding of the size of extremist threats emanating from the WB region, and ultimately increased ability of the UK and Western Balkans partners to address radicalisation based on increased understanding of the issues and the problem.

INTRODUCTION TO KOSOVO RESEARCH REPORT

This report sets to inquire into the problem of violent extremism in Kosovo. The report is motivated primarily by the unprecedented emergence of the foreign fighter phenomenon in Kosovo, where around 400 people have travelled to Syria or Iraq between 2012 and 2017. Around a third of these have already returned to Kosovo, another third (mainly non-combatants, i.e. women and children) still remain in conflict zones, while the others have already lost their

¹ Implemented by the British Council, in partnership with the International Conflict and Research Institute (INCORE), Ulster University.

lives. The report also highlights other forms of violent extremism present in the country, and the way they manifest; nonetheless, the primary focus of this research remains with violent extremism that relates to the phenomenon of foreign fighters and other individuals that have not necessarily travelled, but embrace similar ideologies, and perhaps characteristics.

There are around a dozen reports that explore the phenomenon in Kosovo, which have already been published between 2015 and 2017. These reports provide some useful insights with regards to the emergence of foreign fighters. Push and pull factors are something that all of these reports address, and offer suggested factors that have influenced individuals to travel to conflict zones. While some of the existing research is innovative and provide various hypotheses and possible answers with regards to these factors, many are repetitive and provide limited additional insight on the matter.

In understanding the condition of presently available research findings, the aim of this report is to cover some areas that are left unexplored. When dealing with questions for which there are already available answers, such as push and pull factors that drive the phenomenon, the report aims at further testing these factors in light of newly available evidence. For example, the report negates some previously claimed factors as drivers of the phenomenon, while validating others with special focus on new details, such as questions of identity, intra-family aspects, which appear to be more important than previously suggested. The report also attempts to make some claims about the ways in which questions of identity may or may not relate to individuals' or small groups' (i.e. families') socio-economic background. Additionally, it is worth stating that many of the available reports focus on what drives individuals to become foreign fighters. Though this is quite important, the approach in this report examines not only drivers behind individuals' decision to become foreign fighters, but also individuals' drive to embrace similar violent extremist ideologies, even when these individuals do not necessarily partake in violent acts or who may not have taken the step of travelling to conflict zones (not-yet-violent).

The report is structured as follows:

- The first part presents the various forms of violent extremism in Kosovo and how they manifest;
- The second part presents the findings regarding the drivers behind violent extremism;
- The third part identifies communities at risk with regards to violent extremism;
- The fourth part explores whether there are links between organised criminal groups and violent extremism; and
- The fifth and final part considers the extent to which there is international cooperation between violent extremists.

METHODOLOGY

The findings of this report rely on a number of primary and secondary data collection and data analysis strategies. Initially, several reports on violent extremism which have been published on Kosovo were drawn on primarily to understand the context of the phenomenon of violent extremism, and the current state of research and primary data (un)availability. Data and information from existing reports were used only when addressing gaps in the primary data collected during this research process. Such secondary literature was also particularly useful when designing the overall research strategy, questions to be asked during interviews and focus groups, as well as in identifying some of the problems of contradictory findings in the available literature.

As for the primary data, 41 interviews were conducted with different stakeholders in different parts of Kosovo. Twenty interviews were conducted with state officials in ministries, departments, municipalities, education institutions, and justice related institutions. These include: (i) prosecutors handling cases of foreign fighters; (ii) officials of correctional services (prisons); (iii) ministry of internal affairs; (iv) Kosovo Intelligence Agency, (v) Council of National Security; (vi) Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare; (vii) high-level officials of municipalities where the emergence of foreign fighters was more problematic than in others; and (viii) directors of education and social welfare within select municipalities. These also include interviews with some experts in this field that have given insight and commentary on the problem, or have knowledge about the phenomenon. Eight former foreign fighters were interviewed, and a number of others were met informally to discuss the matter under research. Eight individuals from the Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK) were interviewed, of which there were some imams serving in different municipalities that are included in this group. Other informal meetings were held with some prominent religious activists. All the interviews were conducted in the following areas: Gjilan, Hani i Elezit, Kacanik, Mitrovica, Peja, Pristina, and Shtime. These sites were chosen due to the location of a number of main institutions, such as security agencies, parliament, ministries, and the Islamic Community, among others. The other areas, such as Hani i Elezit and Kacanik were chosen because both of these municipalities saw a higher rate of the emergence of foreign fighters on per capita basis. The other selected areas were chosen due to the location of some key religious figures and religious activists – which helped in understanding the phenomenon from religious authorities’ and activists’ perspective.

Two focus groups have been conducted, one with religious conservative figures of Hani i Elezit – the municipality bordering Macedonia from which high numbers (on per capita basis) of foreign fighters travelled to Syria or Iraq. The other focus group has been conducted with a group of young people in Pristina, with the aim to identify (in their opinion) the drivers of violent extremism. The religious figures were selected since they are generally known as being not religiously liberal, and thus more conservative interpreters of religion. Some of the conservative religious figures in the area did not want to be included, but the overall number (total of 9) of those that were included is a representative sample for the purposes of the focus group. The groups of young people in Pristina were selected according to the following criteria: (i) above 20 years of age, (ii) studying, and (iii) being involved in civic activities. A total of 10 of them were part of the focus group.

In addition to interviews and focus groups, other data gathering techniques were employed, so as to triangulate the information collected using a variety of sources. Interviews provided some

general context (especially with the state institutions), and some details (especially with foreign fighters). However, for the purposes of this research, the analysis could not be based solely on interview or focus group data, because it is often difficult to distinguish between facts and opinions that are provided in interviews – even though they were indispensable for this research.

LIMITATIONS TO THE RESEARCH

To circumvent some of the weaknesses that come with the interviews and similar data gathering approaches, for the purposes of a more credible analysis, data was also gathered from 10 court proceedings dealing in detail with 106 cases of foreign fighters in which a wealth of information was available; prosecutors' evidence and defence teams' evidence were available, in addition to foreign fighters' own claims. These documents should be publicly available by law, but there were difficulties in obtaining them – particularly for cases of terrorism. Therefore, the documents had to be acquired through numerous negotiations with different journalists and defence lawyers who were believed to have had access to some of these documents. Additionally, data on the phenomenon were also gathered from various local and international media outlets that reported on the problem. An early stage database was developed which helped in cross-checking information and general statements that were provided during the interviews, and for updating the currently available data from other reports.

While the research process, including interviews and focus groups, went generally well when exploring issues of interest for this report, there were some problems that were encountered especially during interview processes with certain stakeholders. One of the most important problems is the availability and readiness of different stakeholders to meet and talk about the phenomenon. There was rather a general sense of fatigue to talk about the phenomenon. This was not a surprise, given the popularity of the topic (especially in Kosovo). This was the case with those in state institutions dealing with matters of security, but also with former foreign fighters who would often claim that “we have already spoken to you and other researchers many times”. The strategy that was used to circumvent such a limitation was to inform some of these stakeholders that the report intends to address issues that have not been tackled in any of the previous investigations, and such an approach was generally received well. The reader should consider that some of the interviewed stakeholders may also be sources in a number of previous reports addressing this phenomenon. This could not be circumvented in any way, as some stakeholders, such as key figures in security institutions, continue to be in their official positions, and some foreign fighters are generally more open to discuss their experiences than others.

1. FORMS AND THREATS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

1.1. MANIFESTATION OF FORMS AND THREATS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Potential threats stemming from the foreign fighter phenomenon have dominated the public discourse on threats in Kosovo since 2012, when news headlines began featuring first losses of life among Kosovo's citizens in the Syrian conflict.² Ever since, the foreign fighter phenomenon, and the violent extremist ideas motivated and propagated by the Islamic State structures, became the leading narratives on threats among various local and international media as well as state structures. For example, in May 2016, *The New York Times* featured on its first page a headline story on "How Kosovo Was Turned into Fertile Ground for ISIS" suggesting that Kosovo's "once-tolerant Muslim society at the hem of Europe [has been transformed] into a font of Islamic extremism and a pipeline for jihadists".³ Similarly, in January 2016, a local investigative journalistic piece suggested that some of the Kosovo women who have gone to fight for the Islamic State run ISIS camps in Syria serve as a source of online recruitment for other women from Kosovo.⁴

Such a narrative seems to have also been adopted by representatives of various state institutions in Kosovo who view threats predominantly within the confines of Islamist religious extremism - and more specifically from the perspective of foreign fighters and the Islamic State. A high-level official in Kosovo's Intelligence Agency (KIA), when asked about his views on the presence of violent extremist threats in Kosovo, stated that "ISIS continues to be a serious threat here, and I am talking about 'inspired attacks' which have now begun to spread [around the world]".⁵ The KIA interviewee, furthermore, asserted that these "inspired attacks [...] do not necessarily come directly from members of ISIS; rather, they come from individuals who are inspired by ISIS actions".⁶ The KIA official's assertions are interesting because they echo Thomas Hegghammer's and Petter Nesser's assessment of the Islamic State's commitments to attacking the West, where they suggest that there have been more plots in the West involving ISIS sympathisers that have had no direct contacts with ISIS structures, than plots involving foreign fighters, who may have had more direct links to such structures.⁷

A security adviser at the Kosovo Assembly also viewed violent extremism from an Islamist religious prism, claiming that violent extremism is simply an "excessive escalation and misinterpretation of religion" and that the security problems have "to do not only with the fact that our citizens have gone to Syria and Iraq, but also those that never went there but who in one form or another have been radicalised" through religious discourse.⁸ Such a stance is also reflected in the conversation with other stakeholders. For instance, two prosecutors that were interviewed from the Special Prosecution of Kosovo – an institution that deals with high profile criminal activities and security threats – shared similar views on violent extremist threats in Kosovo, indicating that they mainly come from Islamist religious extremist narrative.⁹

² Xhymshiti, V. (2012) Si "Vdiq" Naman Demolli në Siri. *Gazeta JNK*. Available from: <http://kallxo.com/gjnk/si-vdiq-naman-demolli-ne-siri/>.

³ Gall, C. (21 May 2016) How Kosovo Was Turned Into Fertile Ground for ISIS. *The New York Times*. Available from: <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/22/world/europe/how-the-saudis-turned-kosovo-into-fertile-ground-for-isis.html>

⁴ Xharra, A. (26 January 2016) Few but Fanatical – the Kosovo Women Who Go Over to ISIS. *BalkanInsight*. Available from: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/few-but-fanatical-the-kosovo-women-who-go-over-to-isis-01-22-2016>

⁵ Interview 1 with high-level official at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Pristina, Kosovo.

⁶ Interview 1 with high-level official at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Pristina, Kosovo.

⁷ Hegghammer, T. & Petter, N. (2015) Assessing the Islamic State's Commitment to Attacking the West. *Perspectives on Terrorism* 9, no. 4. Available from: <http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php/pot/article/view/440>

⁸ Interview with the Security Advisor at the Kosovo Assembly, Pristina, Kosovo.

⁹ Interview with Prosecutor 1 and Prosecutor 2 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

Despite the fact that many representatives of Kosovo's state institutions view violent extremist threats mainly within the confines of Islamist religious threats, it is interesting that no violent extremist threat of Islamist religious nature has resulted in fatalities or incited terrorism towards the population in Kosovo. According to some representatives within Kosovo's security structures, this is due to the security authorities having taken appropriate measures to prevent Islamist violent extremist acts to take place.¹⁰ An often-mentioned case is the prevention of a planned attack in Albania during the 2018 World Cup qualifying match between Albania and Israel, where more than a dozen individuals (including those from Kosovo) were arrested by the Kosovo authorities.¹¹ The same source in the KIA also suggests that the inexistence of terrorist attacks in Kosovo can also be attributed to the fact that Kosovo's society does not accept such acts and that "the society harshly rejected this kind of ideology, which helped in preventing the legitimisation of such attacks".¹²

When asked about why it is that violent extremist threats are viewed mainly through the Islamist religious prism, a high level official from Kosovo's Ministry of Interior (MoI), emphasised that it is the Islamist religious extremism that triggered the use of the term violent extremism "because it is with this very term that we began establishing a jargon for violent extremism, especially after the conflicts in the Middle East – in Syria and in Iraq – emerged".¹³ On the very same matter, the KIA representative acknowledged in the margins that Kosovo also faces ethnic/nationalist based violent extremism, but pointed out that "these individuals [foreign fighters] possess military experience" and that in addition they have been "trained ideologically and propagandistically to also indoctrinate other people".¹⁴ A prosecutor who has dealt with several cases of foreign fighters in Kosovo, claimed that "the fact that there already were some suicide attacks taken in Syria and Iraq by Kosovo originating foreign fighters there, they can also commit such acts in Kosovo when they return to Kosovo".¹⁵

In the overall narrative of threats and concerns within Kosovo's institutions, Islamist religious violent extremism is considered to be the dominant form of threats. While evidently present, a recent study published by the *Kosovo Center for Security Studies (KCSS)*, which has assessed various possible violent extremist threats in Kosovo, suggests that it is in fact the politically motivated threats that have dominated the share of all violent extremist threats in Kosovo in the past ten years.¹⁶ The KCSS report maintains that close to 80 per cent of violent extremist threats that were executed (actions taken) were political in nature, while close to 70 per cent of unexecuted (actions not taken) threats were religious in nature.¹⁷

For example: in August 2016, politically motivated individuals attacked the Kosovo Assembly building in the capital Pristina with a rocket propelled grenade, causing damage within the Assembly's building.¹⁸ More recently, in March 2017, a secret (nationalist) organisation called "Syria i Popullit" [in English: "The Eye of the People"] was in operation with the purpose of assassinating a list of high level politicians in the country whom they considered to be "traitors of

¹⁰ Interview 2 with high-level official at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Pristina, Kosovo.

¹¹ Kosovo Police. (16 November 2016) Policia e Kosovës Arrin Rezultate Pozitive Në Parandalimin Dhe Arrestimin e Personave Të Dyshuar Për Terrorizëm. Available from: <http://www.kosovopolice.com/sq/informacione/policia-e-kosoves-arrin-rezultate-pozitive-ne-parandalimin-dhe-arrestimin-e-personave-te-dyshuar-per-terrorizem>

¹² Interview 2 with high-level official at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Pristina, Kosovo.

¹³ Interview with high-level official at Kosovo's Ministry of Interior, Pristina, Kosovo.

¹⁴ Interview 1 and 2 with high-level official at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Pristina, Kosovo.

¹⁵ Interview with Prosecutor 1 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

¹⁶ Kursani, S. (2017) Kosovo Risk Assessment Report Since Independence: February 2008 – June 2017. Report. Pristina, Kosovo: Kosovar Center for Security Studies. Available from: <http://www.qkss.org/en/Reports/Kosovo-Risk-Assessment-Report-since-independence-February-2008-June-2017-1012>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Bërbatovci, S. (2016) SRSQ Tanin Condemns Violent Attack on Assembly of Kosovo. UNMIK. Available from: <https://unmik.unmissions.org/srsq-tanin-condemns-violent-attack-assembly-kosovo>. Sulmohet Kuvendi i Kosovës me zollë, Policia vëzhgon gjendjen përreth objektit. (4 August 2016) Bota Sot. Available from: <http://www.botasot.info/aktuale-lajme/562623/sulmohet-kuvendi-i-kosoves-me-zolle-policia-vezhgon-gjendjen-perreth-objektit/>

the nation”, which was evidenced by the assassination attempt of a former communist leader in Kosovo.¹⁹ Furthermore, in December 2014, the Kosovo Police arrested a Serb national in Pristina who was caught carrying 25 explosive devices consisting of a total of 12 kg of Pentaerythritol Tetranitrate type (a substance used in many terrorist attacks in recent years) which according to authorities had the aim and capability of causing a great number of casualties and material damage.²⁰ Other examples of politically motivated violent extremist acts include the assassination of a member of the EU Rule of Law Mission (EULEX) in the Serbian dominated northern part of Kosovo, and several other politically motivated attacks in the same area, most of which involved the use of different types of explosives against the civilian population as well as against domestic and international institutions over the years.²¹ Violent extremist attacks of a religious nature with such magnitudes, both in terms of damage and fatalities, and in terms of lethal material used, have not been witnessed so far in Kosovo.²²

There are other examples that show how Islamist religious extremism has been “reserved” as a term to refer to violent extremism by state institutions. For example, when asked about other forms of violence that take place in Kosovo, i.e. the recent attack on a Novo Brdo Mosque, or the attack which set the Mitrovica hospital on fire in the northern part of Kosovo, a KIA interviewee claimed that “as far as the first case [attack on Novo Brdo Mosque] is concerned, we have to deal with a person with mental disabilities, while in the second case [attack on Hospital], we are dealing with a case with criminal motivations”.²³ Such purposeful distinctions between religiously (Islamist) motivated threats which often fall under the denominations of “violent extremism” or “terrorism” on the one hand, and politically motivated threats which often fall under the denominations of “criminality” or “acts by psychologically disabled”, regardless of the damage and fatalities the latter cause, has been already problematised by other actors in Kosovo. For instance, a high-level official working at the Municipality of Hani i Elezit in southern part of Kosovo, when interviewed about his municipality’s problem with foreign fighters, was quick to bring up the example of the attack on the Novo Brdo Mosque by an ethnic Serb citizen. This municipal official rhetorically asked “how is it possible for the police to identify whether somebody is a criminal or a psycho? If somebody is a Serb, they immediately find psychological problems, and if somebody is an Albanian they call them a terrorist”.²⁴ The same case was brought up by an imam interviewed in the Municipality of Gjilan. When discussing the potential problems of violent extremism in Gjilan, the interviewed imam stated that:

“We feel quite safe here; we live in religious harmony and there have never been problems among different religious communities, except for a case in which an ethnic Serb attacked the mosque and tried to destroy the minaret. I was there and I saw everything. We could not do anything about it, besides calling the police. The perpetrator was never charged for attacking the mosque.”²⁵

¹⁹ Lëvizja “Syri i Popullit” quhet organizata e Murat Jasharit. (14 March 2017) *GazetaExpress*. Available from: <https://www.gazetaexpress.com/lajme/levizja-syri-i-popullit-quhet-organizata-e-murat-jasharit-339635/>

²⁰ Serb national jailed for 13 years in Kosovo on terrorism charges. (29 June 2016) *Reuters*. Available from: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-kosovo-explosives-idUSKCN0ZF1H0>

²¹ EULEX Policeman Shot Dead in North Kosovo. (19 September 2013) *BalkanInsight*. Available from: <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/eulex-attacked-in-north-kosovo> and US Department of State. (2013) *Country Reports on Terrorism 2012*. Report. United States Department of State Publication, Bureau of Counterterrorism. Available from: <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/210204.pdf> and ICG. (2012) Tracking Conflict Worldwide. *International Crisis Group*. Available from: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/crisiswatch/print?i=Crisiswatch+April+2012&crisiswatch=553&date=April+2012> and RFE/RL. (19 June 2012) Grenades Thrown At NATO On Border With Serbia. *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*. Available from: <https://www.rferl.org/a/nato-serbia-kosovo-border-grenades/24619160.html>

²² For more details on this, see: Kursani, S. (2017) Kosovo Risk Assessment Report Since Independence: February 2008 – June 2017. Report. Pristina, Kosovo: Kosovar Center for Security Studies. Available from: <http://www.qkss.org/en/Reports/Kosovo-Risk-Assessment-Report-since-independence-February-2008-June-2017-1012>

²³ Interview 2 with high-level official at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Pristina, Kosovo.

²⁴ Interview with high-level official at the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, Hani i Elezit, Kosovo

²⁵ Interview with imam in Gjilan, appointed by the BIK – Islamic Community of Kosovo, Gjilan, Kosovo.

According to some media reports, the other form of threat that has manifested, is another form of foreign fighter phenomenon, which comes from the Serb population (especially) in the northern part of Kosovo that allegedly travelled to Ukrainian separatist territories in great numbers. There are reported to be around 300 Serbian foreign fighters fighting in Ukraine, which are allegedly funded by the Russian organisation called “the Kosovo Front”.²⁶ Not all of these fighters are from Kosovo, and the exact numbers are difficult to discern, because they are usually referred to as Serbs from the Balkans, namely Serb nationals, including among others those from Serbia proper, and Republika Srpska in Bosnia.²⁷ Except for being able to spot this kind of possible threat form media reporting, the emergence of foreign fighters fighting in Ukraine has not come up as an issue by any of the interviewed stakeholders during this research project²⁸.

In summary, violent extremism in Kosovo has manifested in various forms, which can be categorised into politically and religiously motivated threats, where politically motivated threats have dominated the share of all violent extremist threats. Despite this, the narrative that has been adopted by representatives of various state institutions in Kosovo with regards to threats stemming from violent extremism is confined within Islamist religious threats. This is clearly influenced by the unprecedented emergence of the foreign fighter phenomenon in the country between 2012 and 2015.

1.2. VIOLENT EXTREMISTS' PROFILES

Despite the manifestation of different forms of violent extremism in Kosovo, the scope of this research focuses on the specific analysis of Islamist extremism, with attention to foreign fighters who have travelled to Syria or those embracing similar ideologies. There is no single profile that fits all violent extremists who choose to travel, and embrace the concepts of the *jihad* being waged in Syria and Iraq; there are individuals who have been poor or uneducated or both, and others who come from economically well-off families or are highly educated or both. However, there are some general indications that can be drawn from various sources analysed in this report. Complete individual level data on every single individual foreign fighter from Kosovo do not exist for public use. Also, simply drawing a foreign fighter profile from the conducted interviews is not satisfactory, given that the number of those that were interviewed, or that can possibly be interviewed, is not representative of the entire population of foreign fighters that have travelled to Syria.

Taking this into account, this part of the report presents the most recent publicly available data that provide statistical information on Kosovo foreign fighters in general, which, while not completely definite, provides a credible overview of the Kosovo originating foreign fighters. Most of the data in this section relies primarily on data provided by the Anti-Terror Directorate of the Kosovo Police that is published in one of the most recent reports commissioned by the United

²⁶ Stelmakh, A. and Kholodov, P. (30 October 2017) *How Russia recruits Serbian mercenaries into the ranks of its fighters in Donbas*. Euromaidanpress. Available from: <http://euromaidanpress.com/2017/10/30/how-russia-recruits-serbian-mercenaries-into-the-ranks-of-its-fighters-in-donbas/>. Velebit, V. (29 December 2017) *Serb fighters in Ukraine continue to worry the West*. European Western Balkans. Available from: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/12/29/serb-fighters-ukraine-continue-worry-west/>

²⁷ Zhivanović, M. (2017) *Luftëtarët nga Ballkani Refuzojnë të Largohe nga Fushëbeteja në Ukrainë*. Gazeta JNK. Available from: <http://kallxo.com/qjnk/luftetaret-nga-balkani-refuzojne-te-largohen-nga-fushebeteja-ne-ukraine>

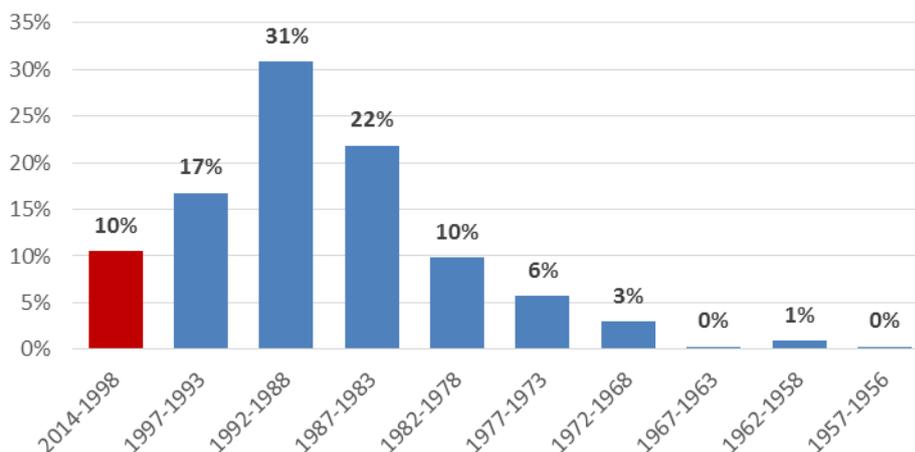
²⁸ The scope of this research is focused on Islamist violent extremism.

Nations Development Programme (UNDP),²⁹ with some updates by the author of this report.³⁰ (Of note when considering this data are the total number of observations (N).³¹)

The available data suggest that the majority of Kosovo originating foreign fighters (53 per cent) belong to the generation born between 1983 and 1992 (see Figure 1). This means that:

- At the time of their departure to Syria or Iraq, travellers to Syria were roughly between 21 and 30 years of age;³²
- If children (0 to 15 age group) are also included in the calculation, then the data indicates that as many as 80 per cent of those that travelled to Syria and Iraq were 30 years old or younger at the time of their departure;
- Children alone,³³ represent 10 per cent of travellers to Syria or Iraq, while another 17 per cent belong to the age-group between 16 and 20;
- Foreign fighters older than 30 years of age, represent only 20 per cent of all those that travelled to Syria or Iraq.

Figure 1. Age distribution of Kosovo originating foreign fighters, N=334



Source: author's reconfiguration of data from: Xharra, B. & Gojani, N. (2017) *Understanding Push and Pull Factors in Kosovo: Primary Interviews with Returned Foreign Fighters and their Families*. Pristina, Kosovo: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Available from: http://unckt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/UNDP_Push-and-Pull-Factors_ENG.pdf.

As for the level of education, the overwhelming majority of Kosovo originating foreign fighters, or more than 80 per cent, appear to have finished only the secondary education, while only nine per cent have completed their higher education (see Figure 2). Furthermore, around eight per cent

²⁹ Xharra, B. & Gojani, N. (2017) *Understanding Push and Pull Factors in Kosovo: Primary Interviews with Returned Foreign Fighters and their Families*. Pristina, Kosovo: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Available from: http://unckt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/UNDP_Push-and-Pull-Factors_ENG.pdf

³⁰ The UNDP data in some parts are updated with publicly available data from the media; the minutes of the court cases featuring indicted foreign fighters; interviews with foreign fighters, as well as general observations during field work. Just to illustrate with some examples; the UNDP report suggests that there are 7 foreign fighters that left from the municipality of Klina, while the present report features 10 foreign fighters from Klina – information that has been secured from the media outlets and author's previous field work in this municipality and conversations with individuals close to these foreign fighters. Another example includes the municipality of Partesh, where the UNDP report features 0 foreign fighters from this municipality, while the present report features 2 foreign fighters – information that has been secured previously by the Anti-Terror Directorate of the Kosovo Police.

³¹ The total (N) varies across different categories, because data varies based on the available data that exists for each category. For example, despite the total number of 340 estimated foreign fighters (information as of March 2017), data on age distribution exists (so far) for 334 individuals, and data on other categories may exist for different numbers of foreign fighters. As such, the information will be presented in percentage form, in order to be able to make more reasonable claims about each category.

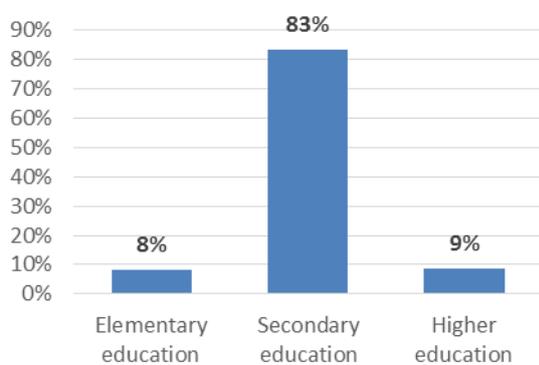
³² The year 2013 has been used as a base year to calculate their rough age at the time of departure, because 2013, and closer dates to 2013, such as the end of 2012, and the beginning of 2014 is the period when most of the Kosovo originating foreign fighters travelled to Syria.

³³ Those who left Kosovo, not those who were born there.

of the adult foreign fighters from Kosovo have completed only their elementary school (see Figure 2). Whether education is a driving factor behind somebody's decision to travel to Syria or Iraq as a foreign fighter is examined later in this report.

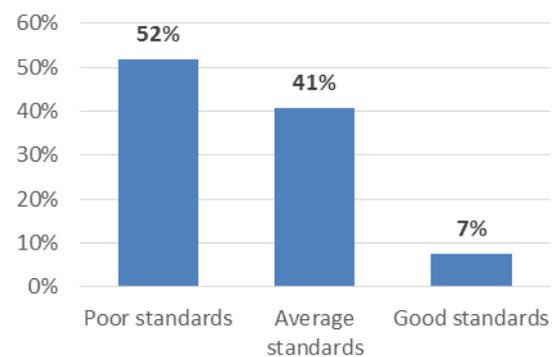
The socio-economic conditions for the Kosovo originating foreign fighters, where data exists, show that the majority, or 52 per cent, are poor, while 41 per cent of them are registered to have average standards of living (see Figure 3). Only seven per cent are reported to have good standards of living (see Figure 3). This may not be surprising given that generally the living conditions of an average Kosovo citizen are not exceptionally good. Nonetheless, in later sections this data will be put against average Kosovo living standards to see whether this may provide any insight to the emergence of the phenomenon.

Figure 2. Level of education of Kosovo originating (adult) foreign fighters, N=289



Source: author's reconfiguration of data from: Xharra, B. & Gojani, N. (2017) *Understanding Push and Pull Factors in Kosovo: Primary Interviews with Returned Foreign Fighters and their Families*. Pristina, Kosovo: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Available from: http://unkt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/UNDP_Push-and-Pull-Factors_ENG.pdf.

Figure 3. Socio-economic conditions of Kosovo originating foreign fighters, N=54



Source: The following court proceedings: PRP KR nr. 406/2014, August 13, 2014; PPS nr. 25/2015, May 7, 2015; PPS nr. 48/2014, December 4, 2015; PKR 54/15, May 20, 2016; PPS nr. 48/2015, March 16, 2016; PPS nr. 26/2015, May 7, 2015; PPS nr. 56/2016, December 1, 2016; PPS nr. 115/2014, December 29, 2015; PKR nr. 754/15, January 19, 2016; PAKR nr. 225/2016, June 10, 2016

1.3. NEW/EVOLVING THREATS

Notwithstanding the fact that the foreign fighter phenomenon in Kosovo has subsided since the beginning of 2016, scars certainly remain, and two forms of threats may be emerging in the future as a result. One of these is the possible threat related to foreign fighters and some religious authorities that have been imprisoned, serving sentences on terrorism charges. The second is the possible threats that a number of state authorities interviewed for this research have highlighted, relating to the possibility of future returnees. This section synthesizes and analyses the information with regards to both of these possible threats.

1.3.1. The imprisoned

The problem with imprisoned foreign fighters and some religious authorities is two-fold. Some interviewees within Kosovo's security structures pointed to potential problems regarding the influence of inmates on other inmates. The interviewed official from KIA stressed the potential risk of the imprisoned violent extremists to radicalise others, but maintained that "perhaps, foreign fighters themselves are not the problem here; the problem in prisons remains with some

of the imams that have been imprisoned”.³⁴ The KIA official reasoned that “foreign fighters usually do not have the personal characteristics to influence others; the imams, on the other hand, have the charisma and the knowledge as the leaders of a certain narrative to radicalise others”.³⁵ An interviewee from the secretariat of the National Security Council raised the same issue with regards to those who were imprisoned on terrorism charges. He maintains that “prisons are not the best solution for the de-radicalisation of foreign fighters, because in fact we may double up the problem whereby those that are in prison radicalise and recruit others inside the cells”.³⁶

The concerns raised by the above-mentioned sources from Kosovo’s state institutions can be further illustrated by the case study of one of the interviewed foreign fighters, Visar Trimi,³⁷ who has spent time in detention in several premises of Kosovo’s correctional services. Visar was in detention on charges of participating in a foreign conflict, with three other foreign fighters in the same prison cell.³⁸ Visar expressed that they had no problem whatsoever with the prison authorities, who interacted openly and cordially with them.³⁹ There was another (non-foreign fighter) inmate in another cell, who appeared to have had some psychological problems, and with whom the authorities had experienced problems, as he presented a significant suicide risk. According to Visar’s account, it appeared that this inmate had previously committed an “immoral deed with another member of his family, and this apparently affected him badly”.⁴⁰ Visar claimed that the prison authorities decided to swap the troubled inmate with another inmate in the same cell Visar and the other three foreign fighters occupied. Visar and the other foreign fighters offered the new inmate solace: they offered him religious books to read and were open to discussions on matters relating to immorality, and life in general, so that the inmate could find some peace. Visar claims that they did not force him to adopt their practices, views or beliefs, but over time “he [the troubled inmate] got attracted by our daily routine of praying inside the cell, and asked if he could join us in our routine”.⁴¹ During the discussion with Visar, he said:

“You cannot believe how fast he [the troubled inmate] changed in a short period after he joined us as a group in our dedication to religion. He never wanted to commit suicide anymore. The prison director called me to ask what have we done to the guy, because the authorities simply noticed that they had no trouble with this person anymore. I jokingly told the prison director that we are watching news on how you guys want to rehabilitate us, but now we are rehabilitating people you have problems with here”.⁴²

Visar’s account could not be independently verified. However, the situation is plausible, and gives a realistic insight into the potential influence that different inmates may have on others depending on the inmates’ past conditions and circumstances in which they are found inside prison cells. Kosovo’s institutional stakeholder’s concerns about possible dissemination of the Islamic State’s radical ideology inside the prisons may also be justified, given that there are several credible accounts that agree on the fact that people with previous criminal records may be much more susceptible to such ideology, than those without a criminal past. For example, data from various reports acquired from the Anti-Terror Directorate of the Kosovo police,

³⁴ Interview 1 with high-level official at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Pristina, Kosovo. Similar views were also shared by two experts in the locally based NGO’s in Pristina, Kosovo.

³⁵ Interview 1 with high-level official at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Pristina, Kosovo.

³⁶ Interview with an official at the secretariat of National Security Council, Pristina, Kosovo

³⁷ Name has been changed to protect identity.

³⁸ Note that Visar was speaking about his time in detention as his case was being processed in court. This is important because sources within various state security structures in Kosovo already indicated that those who have been already sentenced to spending time in prison by the court, are not put in the same cell.

³⁹ Interview with Visar Trimi (not the real name), former foreign fighter, Ferizaj, Kosovo

⁴⁰ Interview with Visar Trimi (not the real name), former foreign fighter, Ferizaj, Kosovo

⁴¹ Interview with Visar Trimi (not the real name), former foreign fighter, Ferizaj, Kosovo

⁴² Interview with Visar Trimi (not the real name), former foreign fighter, Ferizaj, Kosovo

indicate that around 50 per cent of foreign fighters from Kosovo had one or more criminal records registered with the authorities before they joined the conflict in Syria.⁴³

Another aspect of the problem with imprisoned individuals on terrorism charges, is what a high-level official of the Correctional Services of Kosovo called, the “post penal” phase, when these individuals finish their prison terms.⁴⁴ While believing that religious extremism is a problem, the source in the Correctional Services of Kosovo expressed his disagreement with what others, especially the media (as he suggested), are purporting about the radicalised individuals in prison cells.⁴⁵ He stressed that the situation is not as dire as others are claiming, because “there is a higher risk from those that are outside the prison than from those who are inside”⁴⁶ The concerns of this official are focussed on those who finish their prison terms, as he firmly believes that if opportunities such as employment or other activities are not offered to those who finish their terms in prison, then “we cannot rule out the problem of having the same people going back to their radical ideas and violent extremist groups”.⁴⁷ He provided the example of the infamous inmate, Enver Sadiku⁴⁸, who is about to finish his term, saying that “Enver Sadiku, who was in Syria; this guy is at the end of his term. We visited his family and they live in terrible conditions. We need to offer them something [referring to employment and other activities] because we cannot rule out him getting back to violent extremist circles”.⁴⁹

The possibility of the currently imprisoned foreign fighters re-joining violent extremist groups is also present; however, another potential risk regarding those due to complete their terms is their initial resentment at their incarceration. It is evident that there is a common sense of angst, alienation, and of injustice that many interviewed and observed former foreign fighters and religious authorities feel with the decision of state authorities to imprison them⁵⁰. For example, in his testimony to the court, the infamous radical ideologue stated that “it is better for you to think whether you imprisoned people justly or unjustly, instead of thinking of the question of re-socialisation or what not”.⁵¹ Another interviewee who has been sentenced with imprisonment stated that “jailing people makes them more extremist, because this does not solve any problems [...] they have imprisoned us as if we are the most dangerous people, but this is unjust”.⁵² The same resentment is expressed by those foreign fighters that decided to return to Kosovo very early on as the conflict in Syria was unfolding. For instance, Besnik Limoni, who spent approximately one week in Syria before deciding to return, said:

“I have voluntarily told the state authorities all my account in Syria; I have admitted having gone there, and I was open with my story. I regretted to have done so, as I saw that the situation is not as ideal as they made it to seem, and decided to return because I saw I made a mistake. But now, they don’t want to hear about it; just by the simple fact that I travelled there, they want me in prison. I do not know why they do this to me. I was

⁴³ Kursani, S. (2015) *Report Inquiring into the Causes and Consequences of Kosovo Citizens’ Involvement as Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq*. Policy Report. Occasional Paper. Pristina, Kosovo: Kosovar Center for Security Studies. Available from:

http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Report_inquiring_into_the_causes_and_consequences_of_Kosovo_citizens_involvement_as_foreign_fighters_in_Syria_and_Iraq_307708.pdf. Xharra, B. & Gojani, N. (2017) *Understanding Push and Pull Factors in Kosovo: Primary Interviews with Returned Foreign Fighters and their Families*. Pristina, Kosovo: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Available from: http://unckt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/UNDP_Push-and-Pull-Factors_ENG.pdf

⁴⁴ Interview with high-official at the Correctional Services of Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo

⁴⁵ Interview with high-official at the Correctional Services of Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo

⁴⁶ Interview with high-official at the Correctional Services of Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo

⁴⁷ Interview with high-official at the Correctional Services of Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo. The same view has been shared by an expert working with inmates from an International NGO based in Pristina, Kosovo.

⁴⁸ Name has been changed to protect identity

⁴⁹ Interview with high-official at the Correctional Services of Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo

⁵⁰ This report does not make any suggestions on whether state actions against these individuals are just or unjust; it aims to convey these individuals’ perspectives with regards to their current status.

⁵¹ Court proceeding PKR 54/15, May 20, 2016

⁵² Interview with Nijazi Krasniqi (not the real name), imam Gjilan, Kosovo.

open with them. Now they are using my entire story against me. Do they think I am going to be a better person in jail?”⁵³

1.3.2. The returnees

As for the possible threat emanating from future potential returnees, there are divided opinions among the interviewed stakeholders. For some of the stakeholders in Kosovo’s state institutions, the concern lies with the fact that the Islamic State is losing territory and is, perhaps, going to rescind soon, and that many may seek to return. This has also been highlighted as an imminent risk by a KIA official interviewed, who suggested that “the threat in Kosovo depends directly on the fate of ISIS in Syria/Iraq, because now that they have lost territory, the risk is that a network of organisations may be created in different parts there and the risk may continue”.⁵⁴ The Islamic State’s losses may lead the foreign fighters there “to try and plan to commit attacks in their country of origin. Here we cannot rule out that members of the Islamic State originating from the Balkans can commit attacks also in Kosovo”.⁵⁵ A Prosecutor from the Special Prosecution of Kosovo who handles cases of foreign fighters also expressed concerns relating to returnees: “we should not ignore the real risk, which is the ideological risk. Except for a few, the majority do not regret what they have done. When they return, they return with the mission to spread the ideology and indoctrinate others”.⁵⁶ Similarly, a Kosovo member of the Parliament in the Committee on Internal Affairs, Security and Oversight of the Kosovo Security Force, claimed that the biggest risk with returning foreign fighters is their ability to spread the ideology, and mobilise to commit terrorist attacks “not in big groups, but smaller groups”.⁵⁷

Some other stakeholders in Kosovo’s state institutions offer an alternative viewpoint on the risks posed by returnees. A security adviser at the Kosovo Parliament believes that the returnees do not present any particular threat,⁵⁸ reasoning that “the very fact that they returned means that they have decided to return and reintegrate; they have regretted what they have done and we as a country should be there to provide support, to reintegrate them through rehabilitation programmes, employment and similar programmes”.⁵⁹ Another interviewed prosecutor who has investigated many cases of foreign fighters, does not believe that the returnees he has interacted with will reengage in future violent extremist threats. He describes individuals he has interacted with as “quiet and cooperative”, suggesting that:

“They cooperate with us very well. As a prosecutor that prosecuted them and suggested to imprison them, I can tell you that I have seen X amount of cases with criminals, who threaten and offend me, but this never happened to me when dealing with the returnees from Syria, no never. They are quiet, they accept the charges against them, and I think they do this simply because they regret what they have done and want to go back to their families and normal lives as quickly as possible”.⁶⁰

While the perceived “quiet cooperation” does not necessarily suggest that such individuals may no longer pose a threat, this was the prosecutor’s belief when comparing these individuals’ with other ordinary criminals that he has interacted with. Similarly, an interviewee from the Center for Social Welfare in the municipality of Kacanik, also stated that he knew of one person from his

⁵³ Interview with Besnik Limoni (not the real name), former foreign fighter Pristina, Kosovo

⁵⁴ Interview 1 with high-level official at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Pristina, Kosovo.

⁵⁵ Interview 2 with high-level official at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Pristina, Kosovo.

⁵⁶ Interview with Prosecutor 1 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

⁵⁷ Interview with a Member of Parliament in the Committee on Internal Affairs, Security and Oversight of the Kosovo Security Force, Pristina, Kosovo.

⁵⁸ Interview with the Security Advisor at the Kosovo Assembly, Pristina, Kosovo.

⁵⁹ Interview with the Security Advisor at the Kosovo Assembly, Pristina, Kosovo.

⁶⁰ Interview with Prosecutor 3 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

village who has returned from Syria, and suggested that “I do not think that he poses any sort of risk or threat to our community”.⁶¹ The high-level official working at the Municipality of Hani i Elezit was of the opinion that certainly there are those who should be indicted because of the possible risk they pose; however he maintained that “the fact that many individuals returned voluntarily, speaks of their regret, and that they disagree with the cause of the Islamic State”.⁶² This official speaks from his personal contact with some of the returnees who he has tried to help, and shared that some of the returnees personally wrote to him expressing their regrets, and remained of the opinion that perhaps there are many more people who never travelled there that should be in jail, than those who chose to return, and openly expressed their regrets.⁶³

Other aspects to consider with potential returnees that were not raised by any of the interviewed stakeholders, but deserve attention, are the profiles of those that remain in the conflict zones, and the very likelihood of those currently in Syria and Iraq to actually return. First, the majority of those that remain in conflict zones are non-combatants (not directly engaged in fighting); there is an estimated number of 47 women and 92 children, or a total number of 139 non-combatants; and there is an estimated number of 66 men, who are potential combatants,⁶⁴ that remain in conflict zones.⁶⁵ Therefore, the majority (around 70 per cent) of the Kosovo citizens that remain in conflict zones are non-combatants.

The second aspect is the likelihood of the 66 potential combatants to return. It could be credibly assumed that of these 66 potential combatants, some have already lost their lives, or perhaps been captured during the recent incursions by the Iraqi and Syrian governments, other groups, and the international coalition aiding the anti-Islamic State incursions that took place more intensively in the last part of 2017.⁶⁶ Additionally, a few dozens of those that may still be alive are very unlikely to return *en masse*. In an interview with a high-level official at the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, referring to one of the conversations he had with a returned foreign fighter, he opined that a high number of returnees is highly unlikely.⁶⁷ In another interview with a foreign fighter who returned to Kosovo from Syria, and who was subsequently arrested, he shared that he felt he made a mistake in returning, perceiving his detention by Kosovo authorities as an injustice against him.⁶⁸ When this former foreign fighter was asked his opinion on what other foreign fighters should do, he said “either go to Syria to never return, or never go there, because I can see now what is happening to me. I never knew that the state would arrest and imprison me, so there are only these two options that I would suggest to the others”.⁶⁹ He also gave an insight to views of those still in conflict zones:

“We connect via internet with the remaining foreign fighters, and they told me that the moment I was sentenced with several years of imprisonment, they tell me why should we

⁶¹ Interview with the official at the Center for Social Welfare, Kaçanik, Kosovo.

⁶² Interview with high-level official at the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, Hani i Elezit, Kosovo

⁶⁴ This is not to say that all women are non-combatants or that all men are combatants, but the estimated number of 66 men could safely be assumed to be combatants, and while there may be a few women that are combatants, there may also be a few men that are non-combatants. So the estimated number is a safe assumption for the number of combatants.

⁶⁴ This is not to say that all women are non-combatants or that all men are combatants, but the estimated number of 66 men could safely be assumed to be combatants, and while there may be a few women that are combatants, there may also be a few men that are non-combatants. So the estimated number is a safe assumption for the number of combatants.

⁶⁵ These numbers are extrapolated from the most updated data given in a narrative form by the Kosovo Police in September 2017 (this report works with the March 2017 UNDP, and some earlier stated updates from the author, numbers because they are more complete) presented in Xharra, B. & Gojani, N. (2017) Understanding Push and Pull Factors in Kosovo: Primary Interviews with Returned Foreign Fighters and their Families. Pristina, Kosovo: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Available from: http://unkt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/UNDP_Push-and-Pull-Factors_ENG.pdf. These numbers are extrapolated in the following fashion: 72 men who died and 117 men who returned are subtracted from the total of 255 men that left Kosovo, giving a total of 66 men that possibly remain there. Two women that died and 6 women that returned are subtracted from the total 55 women that left Kosovo, giving a total of 47 women that possibly remain there. Thirty-six children that were born there are added to the 57 of the total number of children that left Kosovo and 1 child that died out of natural causes is subtracted from this number, giving a total number of 92 children that possibly remain there.

⁶⁶ There is already an account which suggests that a men foreign fighter from Kosovo, who was reported and thought to be dead, is actually captured by the Assad forces. Discussion with Albulena Neziri (not the real name) – the wife of the said foreign fighter, Pristina, Kosovo.

⁶⁷ Interview with high-level official at the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, Hani i Elezit, Kosovo

⁶⁸ Interview with Visar Trimi (not the real name), former foreign fighter, Ferizaj, Kosovo

⁶⁹ Interview with Visar Trimi (not the real name), former foreign fighter, Ferizaj, Kosovo

come back then? Facing imprisonment? We rather remain here or go to another state rather than sit in Kosovo's prisons".⁷⁰

Two assumptions can be drawn from the above discussion: one is that there is no longer a high number of combatants remaining in conflict zones (the majority are non-combatants; however, this is not to suggest that there is no risk whatsoever); and the other is that those remaining are quite unlikely to return. The problem remains with the return of non-combatants (mostly women and children), who, while unlikely to pose any immediate threat to society or state institutions, will undoubtedly face significant difficulties of re-integration and re-socialisation.

2. DRIVERS AND FACTORS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

This research suggests that the driving factors for the emergence of the foreign fighter phenomenon cannot be explained by making macro-level statements either on country, or even on local-levels of analysis. The number of those who chose to become foreign fighters, or violent extremists, is insignificant in relation to the entire population at both country and local (municipal) levels; any statements on such levels could risk wrongly generalising across an overwhelming majority of people of (perhaps) very similar backgrounds to violent extremists, who never embraced such ideas. This section of the report examines possible factors, that have been identified from interviews, general observations, informal conversations with those involved in the conflict or their families, databases, and other sources.

2.1. EDUCATION AS A (NON)FACTOR

Poor education was a topic that emerged frequently during interviews as a possible driver of violent extremism and the development of the foreign fighter phenomenon. However, a further analysis beyond the interviews suggests that education is not a given and straight-forward driver of violent extremism. This is partly due to the fact that education is a broad concept, and different stakeholders hold differing interpretations of educational influence. For example, when speaking about education as a driving factor, some imply the level of education as a factor, while others note the quality of education as a factor. Or in some other cases, when interviewees mentioned education, they were more broadly referring to the approach within the educational institutions and the awareness raising activity among individuals within educational institutions about different phenomena.

Refusing the theory that economic development of a country could be a driver of violent extremism, one of the interviewed prosecutors from the Special Prosecutor's Office dealing with foreign fighters suggested that education is a key component in the explanation of how a person becomes an extremist fighting in Syria.⁷¹ He stated that "we are witness to the fact that even people from very well-developed countries went to Syria, so the argument about economy 'falls into the water'; these people are pushed by a religious ideology, and that education is a good place to start for both understanding and preventing the phenomenon".⁷² Initially, it was not clear

⁷⁰ Interview with high-level official at the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, Hani i Elezit, Kosovo

⁷¹ Interview with Prosecutor 3 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

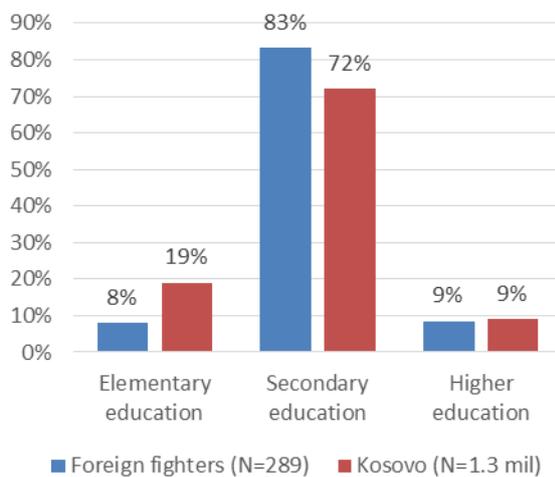
⁷² Interview with Prosecutor 3 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

whether this argument was referring to the level of education that an individual attains, but it was later clarified that he was suggesting that the educational institutions are a place where people (should) be able to access “adequate information about different extremist ideologies”.⁷³ A high-level official at the Directorate for Education in the Municipality of Pristina provided a similar opinion, that “education and awareness are the most important factors; every kind of extremism comes from inadequate information about the phenomenon”, also implying that such awareness should be raised by educational institutions among other sources.⁷⁴

Nonetheless, an analysis of more macro-level education data suggests that education does not appear to be in any way a predictor of why somebody is driven by extremist ideologies or the decision that one might take to become a foreign fighter. This can be illustrated with two analyses:

Firstly, the level of educational attainment among foreign fighters compared to the country level educational attainment reveals no correlation in any way between low level educational attainment, and the emergence of the phenomenon. When setting the education levels of individual foreign fighters against the Kosovo average, foreign fighters appear to have attained a slightly higher level of education. As presented in Figure 4, on average, the secondary level of education is around 10 per cent higher among foreign fighters than the Kosovo average. The figure also clearly shows that this difference is most likely due to the fact that there are more people who remained with an elementary level of education among Kosovars on average, than is the case among foreign fighters. Furthermore, there is no difference between foreign fighters and the Kosovo average when it comes to the higher educational levels.

Figure 4. Education attainment (foreign fighters vs Kosovo average)



Source: Data extrapolated from Xharra, B. & Gojani, N. (2017) *Understanding Push and Pull Factors in Kosovo: Primary Interviews with Returned Foreign Fighters and their Families*. Pristina, Kosovo: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Available from: http://unckt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/UNDP_Push-and-Pull-Factors_ENG.pdf.

⁷³ Interview with Prosecutor 3 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

⁷⁴ Interview with high-level official at the Directorate for Education in the Municipality of Pristina, Pristina, Kosovo

An interviewee from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare claims that while the level of education does not provide further insight into drivers of the phenomenon, it is the system of education itself, and how young people are engaged within the system that matters.⁷⁵ He claims that “here, pupils go to school and learn, but at the same time they are not in an environment which stimulates critical thinking and pupils’ self-confidence”.⁷⁶ He continues by suggesting that “pupils in schools are not encouraged to challenge ideas; simply they do not have the space to freely express themselves which is very important for creative/innovative thinking”.⁷⁷

Secondly, when setting the number of foreign fighters on per capita basis for each municipality against education indicators such as (i) the number of people who do not attend school; (ii) the number of people with no education whatsoever; or (iii) the number of illiterate population, for each municipality, it becomes clear that such educational parameters do not predict the emergence of the foreign fighter phenomenon. To illustrate with some examples:

- while the municipality of Hani i Elezit is ranked first on the list of 30 municipalities for the number of foreign fighters on per capita basis, it is ranked tenth on the number of people with no school attendance, 19th on the number of people with no education, and 15th on the number of illiterate population when compared to other municipalities (see Annex 1);⁷⁸
- while the municipality of Obiliq is ranked 5th on the list of 30 municipalities for the number of foreign fighters on per capita basis, it is ranked only 17th on the number of people with no school attendance, 15th on the number of people with no education, and 12th among 30 municipalities on the number of illiterate population (see Annex 1).⁷⁹ Or to illustrate it in another way:
 - the municipality of Mamusha, is ranked first on the number of people that do not attend school, but has no foreign fighter that emerged (see Annex 1);⁸⁰
 - the municipality of Shtime is ranked first on the number of people with no education whatsoever, but has very few foreign fighters on per capita basis that emerged from this municipality, compared to others (see Annex 1).⁸¹

A few former foreign fighters identified during the research process had completed advanced higher education degrees. One example is Albert Berisha, who has a degree in International Relations from the University of Tirana, and keen to continue his PhD degree abroad.⁸² Albert is one of the former foreign fighters who has expressed regret to have joined the conflict in Syria. Upon his return, Albert also established a non-governmental organisation to help other returned foreign fighters reintegrate back into the society.⁸³ An interviewed prosecutor from the Special Prosecutor’s Office in Kosovo, also provided an example of Sokol Morina,⁸⁴ a foreign fighter he is

⁷⁵ Interview with an official from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Pristina, Kosovo

⁷⁶ Interview with an official from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Pristina, Kosovo

⁷⁷ Interview with an official from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Pristina, Kosovo

⁷⁸ Data on education indicators are taken from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics

⁷⁹ Data on education indicators are taken from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics

⁸⁰ Data on education indicators are taken from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics

⁸¹ Data on education indicators are taken from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics

⁸² Interview and a number of other informal meetings with Albert Berisha, a former foreign fighter, Pristina, Kosovo

⁸³ *Kosovari i kthyer nga Siria, në mision për të rehabilituar të radikalizuarit e tjerë*. (24 October 2017) Reporter.al. Available from: <https://www.reporter.al/kosovari-i-kthyer-nga-siria-ne-mision-per-te-rehabilituar-te-radikalizuarit-e-tjere>

⁸⁴ Name has been changed to protect identity.

prosecuting himself, and suggested that “Sokol is really intelligent and has a degree in French language; he speaks three foreign languages, English, French, and a bit of Arabic”.⁸⁵

Education, at least expressed in terms of level of educational attainment and other indicators tested above, does not inform a theory that could explain the emergence of the phenomenon. What could be discerned from the discussion above is that education may play a role when it comes to individuals’ decision to regret their decisions, and readiness to reintegrate, such as the examples of Albert Berisha and Sokol Morina mentioned above. The interviewed prosecutor of the case of Sokol Morina, also suggested during the interview that “Sokol is totally regretful” for joining the conflict, and the prosecutor himself may be looking to parole Sokol.⁸⁶ These two examples of educated foreign fighters cannot serve to create a robust theory, though it serves as an indication that warrants further research and testing.

2.2. SPECIFIC SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS AS FACTORS

2.2.1. The mixed role of general socio-economic aspects

Violent extremists’ and foreign fighters’ socio-economic conditions is another aspect that came up from most of the interviewed stakeholders in discussing possible explanations for the phenomenon.

Further analysis beyond the first-hand interviews suggests that individuals’, or rather their immediate familial socio-economic conditions, may play some role in influencing the phenomenon, though it is not a standalone pivotal factor. Some interviewees spoke of higher level structural economic factors on a municipal level as possible driver of violent extremism. For example, an interviewee from the Center for Social Welfare in Kacanik, a municipality that saw one of the highest numbers of travellers to Syria on per capita basis, stated:

“We are a very poor municipality, there is a high level of unemployment and the municipality also has a restricted budget. And I think this has played a major role in why people from our municipality have joined these [terrorist] organisations. They were lured by recruiters with promises of a job and financial security”.⁸⁷

In the focus group held in the municipality of Hani i Elezit with religious conservative practitioners, unemployment and poor socio-economic conditions of the municipality came up frequently as a preferred explanation. In the words of one participant of the focus group: “this system created disappointment for the youth here, and poor economic opportunities have left people nowhere but to seek alternatives”⁸⁸ Another participant inferred towards a similar theory, by suggesting that “we need to increase wages for citizens and have sports facilities, culture, and room for youth to speak out, to debate on various phenomena; something that makes them active in the community”.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Interview with Prosecutor 3 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

⁸⁶ Interview with Prosecutor 3 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

⁸⁷ Interview with the official at the Center for Social Welfare, Kaçanik, Kosovo.

⁸⁸ Focus group with religious conservatives, Hani i Elezit, Kosovo

⁸⁹ Focus Group with religious conservatives, Hani i Elezit, Kosovo

While these claims may seem to be intuitive, when examining socio-economic indicators, such as (i) the number of people who receive social assistance; (ii) the number of people with no fixed jobs; and (iii) the number of people with fixed jobs for each municipality, it becomes clear that such economic parameters are not reliable predictors for the emergence of the foreign fighter phenomenon. To illustrate:

- while the municipality of Hani i Elezit is ranked first on the list of 30 municipalities for the number of foreign fighters on per capita basis, it is ranked 23rd on the number of people with no fixed (no permanent) jobs (see Annex 2);⁹⁰
- only in the case of Gjilan, which ranks 4th on the list of 30 municipalities for the number of foreign fighters on per capita basis, some socio-economic conditions may matter, because it is ranked first on the number of people with no fixed (no permanent jobs) (see Annex 2);
- the municipality of Kacanik, for which the above interviewee was speaking is in fact listed 27th (quite low) on the number of people with no fixed (no permanent) jobs, but has seen a higher number of foreign fighters on per capita basis (see Annex 2).⁹¹

It is also interesting to note that Kacanik and Obiliq, which belong to the top five municipalities for the number of foreign fighters on per capita basis, appear high on the list of municipalities that receive the most social welfare by the state (see Annex 2).⁹² This can have two, perhaps opposing, interpretations. The first is that receiving more social assistance means that these municipalities are worse off by default than the others – which could be an indicator that some socio-economic conditions on municipal level may play some role when analysing the emergence of the phenomenon. The second is that receiving more social assistance means that these municipalities are not left behind by the state, and such assistance should be filling the needed socio-economic gaps. There is no other data available at present that could further inform and strengthen this line of inquiry. It remains to be concluded that structural socio-economic aspects on a municipal level are a predictor of this the phenomenon, as there are only a few cases that serve to explain it.

A high number of interviewees have opined that more immediate socio-economic conditions, i.e. on individual or family level (and not higher structural level) can be a factor influencing the decision to become a foreign fighter. One of the interviewed prosecutors that dealt with several cases of foreign fighters asserted that “for sure, there are a lot of people that left Kosovo to become foreign fighters because of their economic and material problems – as such they became easily manipulated by others”.⁹³ She also suggested that it could be the case that “their psychology changes based on the conditions in which they live and where they live – because I have cases where the entire family left” to go to Syria.⁹⁴ The high-level official from the Ministry of Interior shared that while he does not have immediate sight of detailed information on the socioeconomic background of foreign fighters or returnees, he believes that it plays an influential role in their decision making: “considering their conditions, I don’t doubt that economic aspect is quite a frequent parameter that comes up and has been identified to have impacted some of the families and has made them vulnerable to indoctrination”.⁹⁵ An interview with a high-level official

⁹⁰ Data on socio-economic indicators are taken from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics

⁹¹ Data on socio-economic indicators are taken from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics

⁹² Data on socio-economic indicators are taken from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics

⁹³ Interview with Prosecutor 2 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

⁹⁴ Interview with Prosecutor 2 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

⁹⁵ Interview with high-level official at Kosovo’s Ministry of Interior, Pristina, Kosovo.

at the Correctional Services of Kosovo gave insight into the family circumstances of an infamous foreign fighter, Enver Sadiku⁹⁶, who is about to finish his term in prison: “when we visited Enver’s family, I can tell you that they were living in terrible conditions”.⁹⁷

Some interviewees felt that the socio-economic argument was a particularly unclear and indefinite explanation when considering influencing factors for those travelling abroad to becoming foreign fighters. For example, another prosecutor from the Special Prosecution of Kosovo stated that the socio-economic aspect may have been an issue affecting decision-making for some foreign fighters, but not a theory that could be applied to all, because “some of these people I met were poor, and some others were not”.⁹⁸ Another prosecutor offered the key point that there are many foreign fighters originating from economically developed countries, which weakens the theory of socioeconomic conditions as a driving factor.⁹⁹ In addition, a high-level official working at the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, a municipality which ranks high on the number of foreign fighter on per capita basis, mentioned a case of a person who had a job, but took the decision to leave his position to go to Syria.¹⁰⁰

From the interviewed stakeholders, the argument of poor socio-economic conditions influencing the decision to become a foreign fighter remains mixed. This is not a surprise, as there are indeed violent extremists (those that support such ideas), as well as foreign fighters that have been observed during this research who have had poor socio-economic backgrounds, while others from different conditions. As such, no confident conclusion can be made from interviews and observations throughout the research process in all the areas visited for interviewing and observation purposes (see sections on methodology). However, these conditions, in conjunction with other factors, should be explored further.

2.2.2. Stuck in poorer strata of the society and issue of (un)employment (in)stability

To further examine the various socio-economic arguments put forth by the interviews, the analysis proceeds in two ways. First, the socio-economic conditions of foreign fighters (for whom such information exists) is put against the Kosovo average socio-economic conditions. When doing so it becomes clearer that the socio-economic conditions of an average foreign fighter from Kosovo seem to be leaning towards below the average of that of an average Kosovo citizen. This is especially the case for the category encompassing people with good living conditions, in which only 7 per cent of foreign fighters belong, compared to 24 per cent of Kosovo’s average (see Figure 5). It appears that the average foreign fighter, unlike the average citizen in Kosovo, lives with average socio-economic conditions leaning much more towards being poor, with lesser chances to climb to the better/richer category of socio-economic conditions. The same data (presented in Figure 5) also suggests that inequality¹⁰¹ is much higher among the average Kosovo citizen than among foreign fighters from Kosovo. So, while inequality may be lower among the communities where foreign fighters originate, they remain in the poorer strata.

⁹⁶ Name changed to protect identity

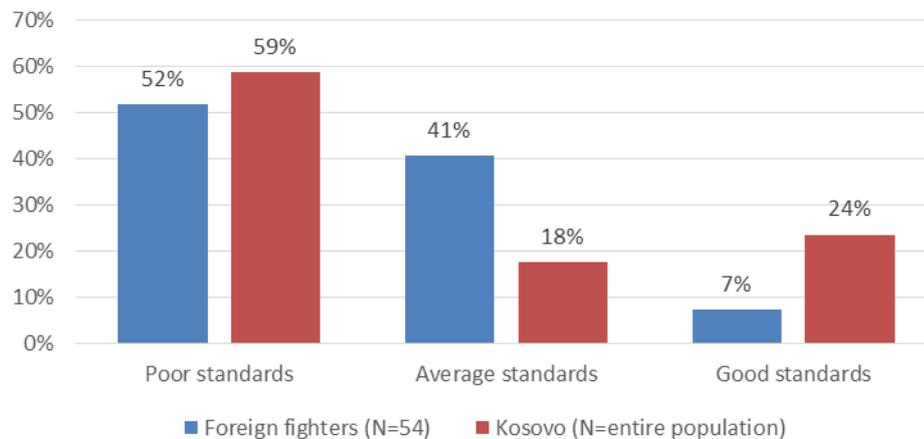
⁹⁷ Interview with high-official at the Correctional Services of Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo

⁹⁸ Interview with Prosecutor 1 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

⁹⁹ Interview with Prosecutor 3 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with high-level official at the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, Hani i Elezit, Kosovo

¹⁰¹ Inequality here refers to the difference between the number of individuals falling in the “poor standards” category and those falling in the “good standards” category.

Figure 5. Socio-economic conditions (foreign fighters vs Kosovo average)

Source: The socio-economic data on foreign fighters are taken from the following court proceedings: PRP KR nr. 406/2014, August 13, 2014; PPS nr. 25/2015, May 7, 2015; PPS nr. 48/2014, December 4, 2015; PKR 54/15, May 20, 2016; PPS nr. 48/2015, March 16, 2016; PPS nr. 26/2015, May 7, 2015; PPS nr. 56/2016, December 1, 2016; PPS nr. 115/2014, December 29, 2015; PKR nr. 754/15, January 19, 2016; PAKR nr. 225/2016, June 10, 2016. The socio-economic data on Kosovo in general are taken from: The World Bank's Distribution of Income or Consumption by Quintile, 2013

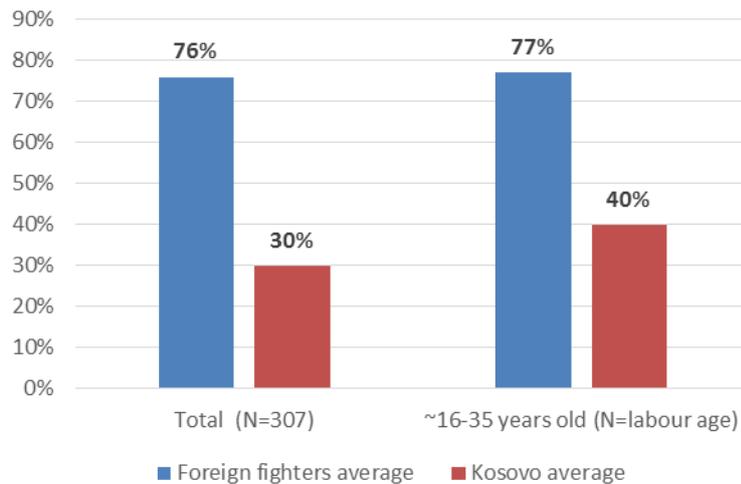
Second, when the unemployment rate among foreign fighters (for whom such information exists) is put against the Kosovo average, it becomes clear that the unemployment rate among foreign fighters is more than double the rate of the Kosovo average unemployment rate (see Figure 6). The Kosovo average unemployment rate is 30 per cent, while among foreign fighters it is 76 per cent (see Figure 6). Given that the majority of foreign fighters fall under the younger age-group, this suggests that while the gap between the unemployment rate among the younger foreign fighters and the younger Kosovo average is slightly smaller, the difference still appears to be double (see Figure 6).

Moreover, even among those few foreign fighters that were employed, it appears that the nature of their employment is unpredictable and unstable at best. Among 30 foreign fighters that stated they had prior employment,¹⁰² the majority suggested that they worked in temporary job types such as: car wash, auto mechanics, temporary construction worker, farmer, waiter, hairdressers and similar jobs that evidently are neither permanent, nor stable or predictable at best. Only one of these 30 examined profiles claimed that he worked in a family business, and six of them were students.¹⁰³ None showed to have had a permanent/fixed contract whatsoever, though we do not rule out cases of other foreign fighters or extremists who may have had more stable jobs (but research so far suggested that such cases are in fact a rarity among those who decided to become foreign fighters or join violent extremist groups).

¹⁰² Analysis of the following court proceedings: PRP KR nr. 406/2014, August 13, 2014; PPS nr. 25/2015, May 7, 2015; PPS nr. 48/2014, December 4, 2015; PKR 54/15, May 20, 2016; PPS nr. 48/2015, March 16, 2016; PPS nr. 26/2015, May 7, 2015; PPS nr. 56/2016, December 1, 2016; PPS nr. 115/2014, December 29, 2015; PKR nr. 754/15, January 19, 2016; PAKR nr. 225/2016, June 10, 2016.

¹⁰³ Analysis of the following court proceedings: PRP KR nr. 406/2014, August 13, 2014; PPS nr. 25/2015, May 7, 2015; PPS nr. 48/2014, December 4, 2015; PKR 54/15, May 20, 2016; PPS nr. 48/2015, March 16, 2016; PPS nr. 26/2015, May 7, 2015; PPS nr. 56/2016, December 1, 2016; PPS nr. 115/2014, December 29, 2015; PKR nr. 754/15, January 19, 2016; PAKR nr. 225/2016, June 10, 2016.

Figure 6. Unemployment rate (foreign fighters vs Kosovo average)



Source: The most recent unemployment data on foreign fighters are taken from the Anti-Terror Directorate of the Kosovo Police provided in: Xharra, B. & Gojani, N. (2017) *Understanding Push and Pull Factors in Kosovo: Primary Interviews with Returned Foreign Fighters and their Families*. Pristina, Kosovo: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Available from: http://unckt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/UNDP_Push-and-Pull-Factors_ENG.pdf. The unemployment data on Kosovo are taken from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics.¹⁰⁴

While it certainly appears that there are some economically advantaged individuals that embrace the violent extremist ideologies, this research suggests that violent extremists belong predominantly to poorer socio-economic backgrounds than others in Kosovo. Analysis of the socio-economic background at individual level (unemployment rate) and at close family level (socio-economic standards) has provided some insight into the drivers of the phenomenon, but importantly that the socio-economic argument alone cannot explain it. As the interviewed high official from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare maintained, while the economic factor is arguably the most important one:

“This does not mean that this is the only factor; this does not mean that this is the factor that always explains extremism, but many studies say that some of the factors are the quality of life, social status, people’s expectations are not completed, you can tell even their frustration about how a society or a country is governed”¹⁰⁵

There are many individuals and families in Kosovo that exist in poorer socio-economic standards who never succumbed to radicalisation or chose the route to Syria. An interviewed Imam in Kacanik stated that he was certain that none of the foreign fighters (and non-combatants) went to Syria because they thought they might enrich themselves, “a number of them went because of faith, meaning because they were influenced by an irresponsible person”.¹⁰⁶ The Kacanik based imam also suggested that those who influenced individuals to become foreign fighters, “exploited individuals’ poor socio-economic backgrounds, intra-family problems, and similar aspects”, but that they were also influenced by “the media and the government stance on the conflict in the earlier stages when they were supporting the opposition against Assad, and thus many thought they are going for solidarity”.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, a high level official at the municipality of Kacanik

¹⁰⁴ Note that the methodology on how unemployment rate is registered in Kosovo Agency of Statistics may differ from the way the Anti-Terror Directorate of the Kosovo Police have registered them. Nonetheless, the difference is stark, and it can safely be read as telling.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with an official from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁰⁶ Interview with imam in Kaçanik, appointed by the BIK – Islamic Community of Kosovo, Kaçanik, Kosovo.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with imam in Kaçanik, appointed by the BIK – Islamic Community of Kosovo, Kaçanik, Kosovo.

mentioned the case of Hetem Dema, who ended up becoming a suicide bomber in Syria.¹⁰⁸ This official of Kaçanik said that “Hetem Dema’s case is very interesting, because I knew him from before, and as people say, he could not tread an ant, and when he joined the conflict in Syria we were very surprised. I would say that the economic factor was number one. Usually people who were involved in this conflict were economically poor, like it is the case with Hetem Dema, and certain groups exploited them”.¹⁰⁹ Just like the previous interviewee, he also mentioned the role of the media, who were conveying that many fighters are going to “overthrow a tyrannical regime”.¹¹⁰

The next section of the report continues to inquire into aspects that, when considered in conjunction with the individuals’ and families’ socio-economic background, could offer further explanation towards understanding the drivers of the phenomenon.

2.3. DETACHMENT FROM THE ESTABLISHED SOCIAL FABRIC AS A FACTOR

Understanding the embrace for violent extremist ideologies, such as that of the Islamic State, that has drawn individuals to conflict zones, is incredibly complex and multifaceted. That is, in the case of Kosovo, individuals do not simply become radicalised by those seeking to influence and target vulnerable groups – which certainly happens in some cases. The process can also materialise in an almost opposite way, whereby individuals may in many cases be seeking outlets through which they can express their plight of belonging to a social group giving them a sense of purpose or a cohesive sphere in which they can belong to and identify with. These could well turn out to be radical (or other) outlets.

2.3.1. Seeking an outlet to identify with

When speaking about a radical group which was present in the municipality of Hani i Elezit (and which later became evident to be responsible for major recruitments of foreign fighters), a high-level official at the Municipality of Hani i Elezit described this group as very cohesive, yet completely and purposefully detached from the established social fabric, creating a strong separate identity of its own. This official stated that “these people believe they are a special strata of the society, and that it is only them who are the true believers in God, and all the others who do not belong to the group are disbelievers”.¹¹¹ The interviewed official further described how such a group usually acted in the municipality:

“In the mosque, they do not pray with the other regulars. I went to a mosque myself once for the *sabah* prayers, and all of us did what we usually do following the regular ritual. I was observing this group of young people, and noticed that they are not starting the prayers with us, they left without praying, and as soon as we finished, they come back and did the prayers for themselves. I noticed that they want to differentiate themselves from the others, and want to feel and be distinguished as a special group”¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Interview with high-level official at the Municipality of Kaçanik, Kaçanik, Kosovo

¹⁰⁹ Interview with high-level official at the Municipality of Kaçanik, Kaçanik, Kosovo

¹¹⁰ Interview with high-level official at the Municipality of Kaçanik, Kaçanik, Kosovo. Kursani, S. & Arbër, F. (2017) *The Foreign Fighter Phenomenon in Kosovo: Covering a Blind Spot* in “Between Salvation and Terror: Radicalisation and the Foreign Fighter Phenomenon in the Western Balkans”, edited by Vlado Azinović. Sarajevo: University of Sarajevo and Atlantic Initiative. Available from: http://www.atlantskainicijativa.org/bos/images/BETWEEN_SALVATION_AND_TERROR/BetweenSalvationAndTerror.pdf

¹¹¹ Interview with high-level official at the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, Hani i Elezit, Kosovo

¹¹² Interview with high-level official at the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, Hani i Elezit, Kosovo

There are many of those who embrace violent extremist ideas, some of who became foreign fighters (violent) while others not (not-yet-violent), who belonged in such religious social groups that embraced and propagated violent extremist ideologies. However, there are many indications that belonging to a group which (in this case) embraces violent extremist ideas was more important than the religious doctrines that such groups were propagating. For example, a prosecutor from the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, who has prosecuted several foreign fighters, stated that “most of the people that I prosecuted did not have even the basic information about religion and all they knew about religion was some basic information from some preachers and from some media that they were following online”.¹¹³ This is interesting, as the same view was put forward by a number of interviewed religious authorities (imams) in Kosovo.¹¹⁴

From a number of ISIS documents (on six Kosovo originating foreign fighters who had travelled to Syria in 2013) that became public in Kosovo, it is evident that none of the six had any previous religious knowledge.¹¹⁵ These documents, called “Mujahed data”, were an entry form (similar to a regular application form) with 23 sections for each foreign fighter that seeks to join the organisation.¹¹⁶ One of the sections asks the “freshmen” foreign fighters when they join the Islamic State to also fill information on their religious knowledge, in which they can choose “basic”, “average” or “high” religious knowledge. The report states that all “six Kosovar recruits checked the basic box. It seemed that the six fresh recruits did not have much religious understanding before stepping into the conflict”.¹¹⁷ The same report also provides data that the “freshmen” foreign fighters have filled in on their previous employment. This data shows that none of these foreign fighters had a stable or permanent job (reinforcing the standpoints in the previous section of this report on employment profiling). Those who stated they had been employed in Kosovo before their departure, included positions such as construction worker, building technician, painter, and butcher.¹¹⁸

While the religious violent extremist idea that exists in some social settings may serve as an outlet that attracts some individuals and vests in them a feeling of belonging, the question arises, as to why some individuals are attracted to, and often consciously decide to join and belong to such groups? There are several assertions that can be drawn from a number of interviews. A prosecutor from the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, stated that “the risk here comes from the society itself; if we continue to stigmatise and starve the society; if the society distances itself from certain individuals or their families, then there is the risk that they become radicalised even more against the society”. This prosecutor suggested that “finding comfort by belonging to [alternative] social groups that can either be radical or criminal, becomes understandable”.¹¹⁹ Similarly, an interviewee from the Ministry of Labour and Social welfare, suggested that “many of those who left, were disappointed and frustrated with their position in the society, and people with such frustration often take unprecedented actions”.¹²⁰ This official believes that “a number of them [foreign fighters] had an illusion that something good might come out of their decision to travel to Syria [...] while some others may have seen it as an escape from their own present lives,

¹¹³ Interview with Prosecutor 3 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

¹¹⁴ Interview with imam in Kaçanik, appointed by the BIK – Islamic Community of Kosovo, Kaçanik, Kosovo. Interview with imam in Mitrovica, appointed by the BIK – Islamic Community of Kosovo, Mitrovica, Kosovo. Interview with imam in Peja, appointed by the BIK – Islamic Community of Kosovo, Peja, Kosovo.

¹¹⁵ Hopkins, V. & Triest, V. (14 March 2016) Exclusive: Kosovo’s ISIS recruits. *PristinaInsight*. Available from: <http://pristinainsight.com/exclusive-kosovos-isis-recruits>

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. Or another example that can show that strict interpretation of religion may often be a second-hand matter when individuals join such groups, is the case of Sadat Topojani, who has been arrested and charged for participating in the Syrian conflict and recruiting others in southern part of Kosovo. In one of the court proceedings where Sadat’s case is presented, it appears that Sadat has taken some 15,000 Euros loan from a commercial bank on his behalf. While the purpose of this report is not to engage in religious interpretations, it is worthwhile mentioning that even from a thin strict interpretation of Islam, taking a loan from a non-Islamic commercial bank represents a sin – which is something very important for the more dedicated and more conservative religious practitioners who would discourage such a deed.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Prosecutor 3 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

¹²⁰ Interview with an official from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Pristina, Kosovo

[...] and a systematic exposure of such individuals to radical ideologies or social settings may certainly play a role”.¹²¹

2.3.2. Pre-radicalised troubled mind and the concept of an identity vacuum

The above discussion points to a certain feeling of alienation that individuals have and feel vis-à-vis the society or their immediate families, and as a result, their plight for belonging to a social setting which may fill the identity vacuum that seems to pre-exist within some of these individuals. This can also be supported by evidence gathered from the open discussion with some foreign fighters themselves. The section below suggests that the problem is multifaceted, and transcends the fact that these individuals do not (physically) belong to a group, i.e. having a job, or being part of a certain social group; whatever social group they may belong to at a vulnerable moment, the said group may not fill the identity vacuum they desperately seek to fill.

This can be exemplified by the case study of Besnik Limoni, a religious Muslim practitioner from Pristina who became increasingly interested in the Syrian conflict when it began to be highly publicised in 2013¹²². Besnik took the decision to travel to Syria and participate in the conflict for a few weeks at the end of 2013. After giving an account of wanting to help the Syrian people against a tyrannical regime, Besnik in fact revealed that for some time he had been following imams that would preach a more conservative Islam, compared to the majority liberal oriented imams.¹²³ The problem, according to Besnik, was that the conservative imams who he was following were constantly speaking against violence and protest, and that he “began feeling that they are speaking against my heart [...] and that they must be wrong”.¹²⁴ “Are they not seeing what is happening in Syria?” Besnik asked rhetorically.¹²⁵ Besnik’s perspectives were further influenced by his frequent use of social media, through which he was absorbing other religious interpretations that resonated, and hit the “right button of what my heart was feeling” – that actually joining the conflict is a just thing to do, especially when serving a religious just cause.¹²⁶

Another case study is that of Sadik Demi, also a participant in the Syrian conflict during 2013, and a religious practitioner from the municipality of Skenderaj. He had felt a sense of detachment from his social surroundings since his mother had died, around the same period that he decided to travel to Syria.¹²⁷ Sadik said that while he already had a job, and was considering a transition to a new job, he had the want to ‘get away’, because, as he stated: “something was troubling me, and I needed to get away, that’s it, as simple as that”.¹²⁸ Sadik returned from Syria and was detained; his testimony in the court while he was being charged suggests that he consciously went to imam Zekirija Qazimi (one of the most notorious radical interpreters in Kosovo) to ask for guidance and information with regards to his possible travel to Syria.¹²⁹ When asked in the interview, what usually drives him to choose one imam over another as a religious interpreter, Sadik answered, “this depends on where your heart rests better; it is as simple as that. Some imams you like, and some you don’t”, and continues with an analogy: “this is like music to your ears; there is some music you like, some you don’t”.¹³⁰ The discussion with Sadik, apart from what is presented here, also appears to suggest that a radical ideology may not work as a one

¹²¹ Interview with an official from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Pristina, Kosovo

¹²² Interview with Besnik Limoni [not the real name], former foreign fighter, Pristina, Kosovo

¹²³ Interview with Besnik Limoni [not the real name], former foreign fighter, Pristina, Kosovo

¹²⁴ Interview with Besnik Limoni [not the real name], former foreign fighter, Pristina, Kosovo

¹²⁵ Interview with Besnik Limoni [not the real name], former foreign fighter, Pristina, Kosovo

¹²⁶ Interview with Besnik Limoni [not the real name], former foreign fighter, Pristina, Kosovo. He eventually sought and found the circles that would facilitate what his “heart was feeling” and arranged his travel to Syria.

¹²⁷ Interview with Sadik Demi [not the real name], former foreign fighter, Pristina, Kosovo

¹²⁸ Interview with Sadik Demi [not the real name], former foreign fighter, Pristina, Kosovo

¹²⁹ Court proceeding PKR 54/15, May 20, 2016

¹³⁰ Interview with Sadik Demi [not the real name], Pristina, Kosovo

directional spear into one's mind; other individual and social level circumstances may facilitate his agency as an individual to choose his own interpretation, a radical "music to his ears".

The discussion with other foreign fighters provides further evidence, that in addition to actively seeking a radical outlet themselves, and upon finding such an outlet, one may become strongly embedded with it and the "new" identity which they acquire. For example, Visar Trimi, a participant in the Syrian conflict from Hani i Elezit, who is a follower of Zekirija Qazimi and a close associate to the infamous Lavdrim Muhaxheri, admits that he was actively looking into Lavdrim's whereabouts, because he had already set his mind to participate in the conflict.¹³¹ Visar says that "I always wanted to find somebody that was in Syria so that they can help me with the details on how to get there, and to help me find other Albanians that are fighting there".¹³² This shows a level of personal conviction to reach Syria, rather than being purposefully targeted and influenced by radical imams. Additionally, what is interesting about Visar's account is the comfort he finds with the more radical interpretation of religion and the social groups that embrace it. For instance, when asked about all the imams that belong to the official Islamic Community in Kosovo (in which many religious conservatives also belong), Visar unequivocally refers to all of them using his analogy of pancakes; "all of them are like pancakes, you know what pancakes are, right? You can flip them on either side based on daily political circumstances", suggesting such imams often change their minds on matters of religion, and implying a lack of religious integrity.¹³³ He mentions a few imams he was initially following, who were in support of the Syrian opposition and the war against the regime, but suggests that "they changed their position and all of them became peaceful – it is hypocritical, don't you agree with me? How can I follow them?".¹³⁴ From an analysis of Visar's account, it can be deduced that he was consciously looking for a radical interpretation, as the "right" interpretation.

Similarly, an interview with Betim Nixha, another foreign fighter from Ferizaj, explored what drives him to follow one and not another religious interpretation on the matter of the Syrian conflict (or other matters). He shared that he does not follow imams in Kosovo, because according to him "they are like swingers; they tell you something one day, something else another day, this and that, and they are cowards – when they arrested them, they all got scared and deleted all their videos and documents".¹³⁵ Though there is no first hand evidence to support this claim, the above discussion would imply nonetheless that, should a radical imam with radical followers change his mind and all of a sudden become peaceful, the followers would be likely to adhere to their radical stance and abandon the imam to find another one that "sings the music to their ears".

These deductions are further supported by some of the views expressed during the focus group discussions. During the focus group in Pristina, a non-extremist Muslim practitioner who said he follows a non-violent conservative imam in Mitrovica, was asked about whether Islam justifies violence, and if so to what extent it does, and he stated that: "I personally like the interpretation of imam Enis Rama, who is not a radical and has a more 'soft' approach. I do not listen to radical imams. If we have a hypothetical example where we can choose teachers in schools, we choose the ones that we like the most"¹³⁶ Just as the (pre)radicalised individuals who would persist in adhering to radical interpretations even if their favourite imam becomes peaceful, so it could be implied from the non-radical participant of the focus group from his account, that he would more

¹³¹ Interview with Visar Trimi [not the real name], former foreign fighter, Ferizaj, Kosovo

¹³² Interview with Visar Trimi [not the real name], former foreign fighter, Ferizaj, Kosovo

¹³³ Interview with Visar Trimi [not the real name], former foreign fighter, Ferizaj, Kosovo

¹³⁴ Interview with Visar Trimi [not the real name], former foreign fighter, Ferizaj, Kosovo

¹³⁵ Interview with Betim Nixha [not the real name], former foreign fighter, Ferizaj, Kosovo

¹³⁶ Focus group with students, Pristina, Kosovo.

likely stick to the “soft interpretation”, even if his favourite imam becomes a radical. This could be because the choice of who one follows comes a preconditioned religious interpretation. This theory was further exemplified through the focus group with conservative religious practitioners in Hani i Elezit, where one participant suggested that “people who are extremists, go and find extreme arguments in religion and adopt violence on behalf of religion and apply it as it suits them around their environment”.¹³⁷

The case of Arben Hasani is an example that may serve to illustrate the state of mind, or the preconditions, in which violent extremist individuals may be searching for an outlet. Arben Hasani was a foreign fighter who joined the conflict with nine other members of his family. While in Syria, Arben wrote once on his Facebook account:

“Those of you who are not in the Sham, you are not secure, you have no pride, you are all mocked and despised, underestimated; don’t you understand, escape and come here, you live with pride, you fight for Allah, you fight for Islam, you fight to save yourselves, [...] come to the blessed Sham”.¹³⁸

The reasons for Arben to have felt a lack of pride, mockery or insecurity, prior to joining the conflict is beyond the purposes of this research. Nonetheless, this can be indicative of a state of mind of an individual seeking an alternative to their present (not-yet-radical mind) and social circumstance. As another religious conservative practitioner articulated during the focus group discussion in Hani i Elezit: “it is important that people do not feel inferior, and it is important that they are not marginalised, because these people perceive such feelings as if they are living in some extreme environment, something which gives enough space for them to get radicalised”.¹³⁹

In summary, something common among the interviewed travellers to Syria is their detachment from the established social fabric. A pre-radicalised troubled mind which seeks an outlet to identify with seems to exist prior to their decision to join either a radical group at home, or their decision to travel to Syria. Cohesive groups, usually radical, which may be religious or non-religious, seem to be attractive for such individuals, as these groups appear to be filling the identity vacuum (also a common experience among these subjects).

The following section of the report explores another factor, of family ties, that in conjunction with the previously pointed elements, may play a role in exacerbating the phenomenon.

2.4. CLOSE BONDS: YOUNGER GENERATION FAMILY TIES AS A FACTOR

“We had a case, where the father was an atheist and his son was all the way on the other side – a radical Muslim. To us, this was very surprising. [...] We had a case, where the father back in the days was sentenced in jail for Marxism-Leninism, and his son was a radical Muslim.”¹⁴⁰

There seems to be a significant disconnect between younger generation (individuals who have shown signs of violent extremism) and older generation family members. An interviewed

¹³⁷ Focus Group with religious conservatives, Hani i Elezit, Kosovo.

¹³⁸ Pamje të familjes Hasani nga Kosova që gjenden në ISIS (FOTO+VIDEO). (30 January 2015) *Telegrafi*. Available from: <https://telegafi.com/pamje-te-familjes-hasani-nga-kosova-qe-gjenden-ne-isis-fotovideo/>

¹³⁹ Focus Group with religious conservatives, Hani i Elezit, Kosovo.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with high-level official at the Municipality of Kaçanik, Kaçanik, Kosovo

prosecutor directly involved in prosecutions of foreign fighters pointed to this generational disconnect: “children are getting back to the middle ages, while parents are European; families had no idea what their children were up to”.¹⁴¹ Many interviewees have indicated that parents, except perhaps only in very few cases, neither knew what their children were involved in, nor supported their viewpoints and activities. A high-level official from the KIA stated that “families [hinting at parents] did not support the kind of ideology their kids were involved in, and we have cases that families themselves reported their children to the authorities”.¹⁴² The generational disconnect is one aspect. The other is that close bonds between younger generation of close and extended family members significantly facilitates individuals’ attraction to violent groups.

Further research into close bonds, especially family connections, has been motivated by theories put forward in various literature, but most importantly, by observations during field work and consultation of court proceedings, detailing siblings/relatives relations in cases of violent extremists and foreign fighters. The recent UNDP commissioned report suggests that the tight-knit kinship relations among foreign fighters is highly significant, as potential enablers of the phenomenon.¹⁴³ A further investigation into the matter reveals that such relationships are more present than generally believed or stated. For instance, from a random sample¹⁴⁴ of around 90 individuals involved either in violent extremist groups and actions or foreign fighters themselves, whose relationships were studied closely for the purposes of this research:

- Around 70 per cent of them were in close or extended family relations (see Annex 3)
- Close to 40 per cent were from the same nuclear family, either as siblings, spouses, or entire families of usually younger couples with children (see Annex 3)
- Among the sample of 90 individuals, there were three groups of 11 individuals with first cousin relations, and five groups of 20 individuals who were either relatives, or were involved in long-term friendships since elementary or high school years (see Annex 3).

Clear-cut statements on how these close bonds may have facilitated violent extremism or the foreign fighter phenomenon cannot be made, but a few theories can be credibly drawn. Individuals tend to be more easily impacted ideologically by other young members of the close or extended family; close and extended family members, as well as long-time friendships of the younger generations provide a more trusted social base when an individual decides to engage in a violent act. An interviewed official from the Ministry of Labour and Social welfare claimed that these individuals “are a victim of people who they live with”.¹⁴⁵ He further stated that it is clear that these individuals do not become radicalised by their parents (since their parents do not support their ideas), but “the connections and education starts with the family, and there are a lot of complex factors and specific situations that are at play”, and further goes on to state that “sometimes it is the ‘accidental’ circumstances in which these young people happen to be in”.¹⁴⁶

These “specific” and “accidental” circumstances may well be connected with the previously discussed drivers. For many of them, it may relate to the socio-economic background of the

¹⁴¹ Interview with Prosecutor 1 at the Special Prosecution of Kosovo, Pristina Kosovo.

¹⁴² Interview 2 with high-level official at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Pristina, Kosovo.

¹⁴³ Xharra, B. & Gojani, N. (2017) Understanding Push and Pull Factors in Kosovo: Primary Interviews with Returned Foreign Fighters and their Families. Pristina, Kosovo: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Available from: http://unckt.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/UNDP_Push-and-Pull-Factors_ENG.pdf

¹⁴⁴ This is not a sample which has been drawn statistically. This is considered a random sample by the fact that these 90 individuals have not been purposefully picked. Rather, they are the ones that feature either in several court documents, media, observations during research, and other sources, such as close contacts with former violent extremist ideologues.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with an official from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁴⁶ Interview with an official from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Pristina, Kosovo

entire family as well as the identity vacuum in which the younger generations may find themselves, especially in cases where the socio-economic background may not necessarily be poor. For example, there is the family of Genc Krasniqi¹⁴⁷, who has been involved in violent extremist groups in Hani i Elezit.¹⁴⁸ The case is mentioned in the interview with the high-level official of the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, who claimed that Genc was previously employed, and his father works at the cement production facility (the main employer in the municipality).¹⁴⁹ This official suggested that Genc, who has a degree in economics, “is a smart man, and I know that nobody could fool around with him. I certainly believe that his brother who went to Syria influenced him”, and continues to state that “his brother was a *jammát* of Zekirija Qazimi”^{150, 151}. This points to the notion that family members of the younger generation can be drawn into conflict or violence by another member who has already participated in the conflict or violence. Discussion during a focus group in Pristina with a dozen participants of the younger generation revealed further examples, such as the case of a family in Kacanik. One of the members of this family was in constant contact over the phone with one other member of the same family members who was in Syria at the time - the latter encouraging the former to join him.¹⁵²

To summarize the drivers of the phenomenon violent extremism and how these drivers interact, there appears to be:

- a combination of: (i) individual/family level social-circumstance, (ii) identity vacuum of the younger generations members of the family who have a heightened feeling of alienation, or simply lack a sense of belonging to a strong and cohesive social group; (iii) close ties between siblings, relatives, or longer friendships exacerbates the phenomenon; and that
- the concept of the identity vacuum and close intra-family ties (among the younger generation) may play the same role in those few cases where socio-economic conditions are not as severe as with most individuals who become violent extremists.

3. AT RISK COMMUNITIES

3.1 AGE-GROUP

Identifying communities at risk, logically, derives from the analysis above, though this section includes additional evidence from further interviewed stakeholders. The main community at risk, evidently, appears to be the younger generation of the population, some of whom may show the vulnerabilities stated in previous sections. This is shared by all the interviewed stakeholders regarding the problem. For instance, an interviewed KIA official suggested that “extremism usually touches the younger age-groups and those with tough social conditions”.¹⁵³ Likewise, the high-level official working for the Directorate of Education in the municipality of Pristina asserted that “if you look at them, they are all young, and it is the young people, which the state

¹⁴⁷ Name changed to protect identity

¹⁴⁸ Genc Krasniqi is also a person who has been arrested during the police operation which foiled the planned attack in Albania during Albania – Israel football match.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with high-level official at the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, Hani i Elezit, Kosovo

¹⁵⁰ Zekirija Qazimi has served as an imam in one of the mosques in Gjilan, and has been found guilty on several terrorism related charges, including recruitment of individuals to join the fight in Syria. Overwhelming evidence was presented in court to support the prosecutor’s claims, but also this is evidenced by our informal meetings and conversations with former foreign fighters.

¹⁵¹ Interview with high-level official at the Municipality of Hani i Elezit, Hani i Elezit, Kosovo

¹⁵² Focus Group with students, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁵³ Interview 2 with high-level official at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Pristina, Kosovo.

institutions and families do not pay much attention to” that can mostly be influenced by the extremist groups.¹⁵⁴ These assertions are also indicated in the “Kosovo Daesh Tracker Analysis” provided by Moonshot CVE platform which tracks user experience in online space, indicating that the consumers of violent extremist online content in Kosovo are those between 18 and 34 years old.¹⁵⁵ The vulnerability of this age-group correlates with the findings of this report, on the age-group distribution of those who travelled to Syria or Iraq as foreign fighters.

An interesting observation from the available data of online users is that the age-group younger than 18 years of age does not seem to show interest in such content (Daesh propaganda), despite the fact that they are also heavy internet users.¹⁵⁶ This is arguably not surprising, because it could be interpreted that individuals younger than 18 years of age are already engaged in schools, are more tightly linked to their families (parents), and are engaged in other activities. These are aspects that usually become scarce in Kosovo as they grow older, and may expose them to earlier discussed questions of socio-economic problems and identity issues of belonging to social circles with stronger purpose and identities. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the age younger than 18 should be ignored as a possible community at risk. As an interviewee from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare noted:

“We can talk about the age-group of 18-28 as more prone to radicalisation, but the process does not happen overnight. It is a process whereby these individuals slowly detach from the other part of society, which is a several years process. Perhaps this process can start even three to four years earlier, or sometimes ten years earlier, which means that these individuals at the time may be something between eight to 18 years of age when the process starts to kick in”¹⁵⁷

Such assertions on communities at risk should be treated with caution, as they are too general to be able to reliably indicate specific communities at risk. This is because, while the identification of younger age-groups as a possible community at risk is quite intuitive and in line with the findings of this report (and more widely), at the same time, the younger age-groups are too broad of a community to claim that they all are at risk. For example, while there around 400 individuals who, at some point within a period of four to five years became foreign fighters, and assuming that there are perhaps several hundreds of others who embrace various violent extremist ideologies – such groups are very marginal in proportion to the society or even the younger generations which number hundreds of thousands in Kosovo. A specification that can be made with regards to the young age-groups is their individual level characteristics. For instance, in a number of interviews with some religious authorities from the Islamic Community in Kosovo (BIK), being a lonely attention seeking young individual increases the chances for them to fall prey to more radical ideologies.¹⁵⁸ A Mitrovica based imam stated that:

“Usually I observe some young people from my own *jammāt*. I notice that there are some ‘explosive’ characters who always want to show-off when we discuss something. They want to constantly seek my attention and the others’ around. And I can tell you that I am mostly worried about them, because they are not there to really learn about religion, but simply want to show-off and usually are destructive. I am sure these kinds of young people are more vulnerable. I know if we don’t give him attention, he will escape to

¹⁵⁴ Interview with high-level official at the Directorate for Education in the Municipality of Pristina, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁵⁵¹⁵⁶ Moonshot CVE Infographic *Moonshot*. April 2017

¹⁵⁶¹⁵⁷ Moonshot CVE Infographic *Moonshot*. April 2017

¹⁵⁷ Interview with an official from the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁵⁸ Interview with a high-level official at the Kosovo Islamic Community (BIK), Pristina, Kosovo. Interview with imam in Mitrovica, appointed by the BIK – Islamic Community of Kosovo, Mitrovica, Kosovo. Interview with imam in Peja, appointed by the BIK – Islamic Community of Kosovo, Peja, Kosovo.

suspicious groups that will give him the attention he is seeking. It is very difficult, to tell you the truth. You don't know what to do with them.”¹⁵⁹

Additional interviewed stakeholders, while all agreeing that it is the younger generations that are more at risk of radicalisation, provide further insight to the profile of young people that may be at risk. For example, one Pristina based imam suggests that “we cannot say that all young people are at risk” – the most vulnerable group among the young people are those that are less informed about issues of religion and generally stay ignorant¹⁶⁰ on that matter, which makes them more vulnerable to be attracted to groups that share more extreme ideologies.¹⁶¹ He suggests that the period from 18 to 25 years old is a “dangerous” age to be, because this is the period when people become more explorative and curious about certain realities, and if they happen to remain uninformed, they become more susceptible to being influenced by extremist groups.¹⁶² Another Pristina based imam shares similar views on communities at risk, but adds that the reason the younger age group is more vulnerable is because some of the young people are simply more euphoric in their personalities, which leads them to jump into quick conclusions about certain religious interpretations without having a slight knowledge about the religion they belong to.¹⁶³

The Pristina based imam, further claims that it is very unlikely for a person older than 30 to be vulnerable to radicalisation, because at that age a person is in a state in which they already have formed their opinions about matters that one explores at a younger age.¹⁶⁴ He is convinced, therefore, that a person of an age of 30 or older cannot be attracted by the opinions of another person of a younger age.¹⁶⁵ This may, perhaps, also be linked to the need to look at the authority that one person can have over another usually of a younger age.¹⁶⁶ According to a sociologist at the University of Pristina interviewed for this research, in some rural areas, there are the so called “charismatic leaders”¹⁶⁷ who enjoy a “social authority” over other, mostly younger, people.¹⁶⁸

3.2 GEOGRAPHY

While this report has explored individual level characteristics and elements that can be analysed as factors affecting the phenomenon, there are also geographic specifications to consider. This has been largely derived from the data generated from the “Kosovo Daesh Tracker Analysis”, which suggests that younger people from Mitrovica and Pristina show higher frequency of online searches for ISIS related content.¹⁶⁹ There is a shared commonality between these two locations, in that they are both highly politicised spaces; being politically charged, both of these cities also

¹⁵⁹ Interview with imam in Mitrovica, appointed by the BIK – Islamic Community of Kosovo, Mitrovica,

¹⁶⁰ Reference to “ignorance” by this and a few other interviewees does not suggest that these individuals necessarily choose to remain ignorant on issues of religion. Rather, the reference is made more to the possibility of these individuals being trapped into “ignorance” on matters of religion or other matters

¹⁶¹ Interview with Dardania based Imam in Pristina, appointed by the Islamic Community in Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁶² Interview with Dardania based Imam in Pristina, appointed by the Islamic Community in Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁶³ Interview with Pristina based Imam, appointed by the Islamic Community in Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Pristina based Imam, appointed by the Islamic Community in Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Pristina based Imam, appointed by the Islamic Community in Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Sociologist from the University of Pristina, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁶⁷ A Weberian perspective

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Sociologist from the University of Pristina, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁶⁹ Moonshot CVE. (2017) Kosovo Daesh Tracker Analysis. *Moonshot*.

correlate with the distribution of most political incidents that have occurred in Kosovo in the past ten years.¹⁷⁰

The Pristina based imam provides an interesting observation to why Pristina, as the capital, could be a region in which young people are more susceptible to radical groups. He suggests that social dynamics in the capital are constantly changing. “Back in the days, an imam knew personally 80 percent of his followers in the mosque, while today, as an imam, I know less than 30 percent of my followers in the mosque I serve”.¹⁷¹ According to his observation, many people from other areas, rural and urban, have moved to the capital where they study or work, and are less connected to the community.¹⁷² He notices this in the differences observed in the attendees of the religious service in the mosque during the working days and during the weekends, suggesting that “in the weekend, I know almost all of my followers in the mosque, because all the others have gone back hometowns during the weekend”.¹⁷³

4. LINKS TO ORGANISED CRIME

There are no previous studies that have explored the (possible) nexus between organised crime and violent extremism. The inquiry into this topic during this research process did not reveal any such link. The interviewed stakeholders from various security agencies in Kosovo, admits that many individuals who become violent extremists have had a criminal record in the past, but the research did not reveal any indications of structured cooperation between these individuals and criminal organisations.¹⁷⁴ A high-level official of the KIA interviewed for this research purported no such links between these phenomena in Kosovo “whatever aspects of organised crime you are mentioning [such as drugs and weapons], these are a continuation of propaganda against Kosovo – but there is nothing true there”.¹⁷⁵ Additionally, analysis of some of the court proceedings involving violent extremists in Kosovo led to similar conclusions: evidence revealed that many violent extremists were heavily reliant on friendship and family ties for (petty) cash support.¹⁷⁶

There are two recent cases of potential relevance, of a local businessman (Fatos Rizvanolli case) in Kosovo, and the case of policemen (Goran Drazic case) in Serbia. In the first case, a local businessman Fatos Rizvanolli, was found to have allegedly assisted some foreign fighters with logistics and coordination of their travel. According to the police report in March 2016, the suspect:

“[Fatos Rizvanolli] has continuously used its businesses with the aim to financially and logistically support the persons involved in organising and recruitment of terrorism, including also the persons known for spread of extremism ideology throughout Kosovo,

¹⁷⁰ Kursani, S. (2017) *Kosovo Risk Assessment Report Since Independence: February 2008 – June 2017*. Report. Pristina, Kosovo: Kosovar Center for Security Studies, November 2017. Available from: <http://www.qkss.org/en/Reports/Kosovo-Risk-Assessment-Report-since-independence-February-2008-June-2017-1012>.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Dardania based Imam in Pristina, appointed by the Islamic Community in Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁷² Interview with Dardania based Imam in Pristina, appointed by the Islamic Community in Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁷³ Interview with Dardania based Imam in Pristina, appointed by the Islamic Community in Kosovo, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁷⁴ Interview 1 with high-level official at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Pristina, Kosovo., and informal discussion with members of the Anti-Terror Unit of the Kosovo Police

¹⁷⁵ Interview 1 with high-level official at the Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Pristina, Kosovo.

¹⁷⁶ Analysis of the following court proceedings: PRP KR nr. 406/2014, August 13, 2014; PPS nr. 25/2015, May 7, 2015; PPS nr. 48/2014, December 4, 2015; PKR 54/15, May 20, 2016; PPS nr. 48/2015, March 16, 2016; PPS nr. 26/2015, May 7, 2015; PPS nr. 56/2016, December 1, 2016; PPS nr. 115/2014, December 29, 2015; PKR nr. 754/15, January 19, 2016; PAKR nr. 225/2016, June 10, 2016.

as well as persons who have travelled or have attempted to travel in the conflict area [sic].¹⁷⁷

According to a former violent extremist informant, Fatos Rizvanolli has indeed also aided a religious social group that embraced violent extremist ideologies to pay the rent for premises in Pristina where they would gather outside the radar of state authorities or institutionalised religious communities.¹⁷⁸

The other case of note is of a number of Serbia based police officers, who allegedly were selling a type of “chemical weapons” to Syrian jihadists through Kosovo.¹⁷⁹ According to these reports, in April 2017 the traffic police officer Goran Drazic from Veliko Gradiste in Serbia was arrested with a few other people under the suspicion of carrying 25 kg of mercury being transported to the Institute of Nuclear Sciences “Vinca”.¹⁸⁰ According to these reports, the suspected individuals were planning to transport the mercury (apparently an amount significant enough to produce a type of chemical weapon) to Kosovo, from where, allegedly, it was intended to be transported to terrorist groups elsewhere.¹⁸¹ Though such allegations come from the media citing internal sources within the investigation team in Serbia, it is difficult to independently verify the purpose of this operation. Nonetheless, despite these two cases which may as well be particularly isolated cases of certain individuals aiming to profit from violent extremism, there appears to be no indicative or robust evidence of a direct link between organised criminal groups and violent extremists.

5. TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

Research on the problem of transnational cooperation and violent extremism in Kosovo has been previously researched (a study conducted in 2015) by the author of this report.¹⁸² No new findings were revealed through interviews conducted for this research.¹⁸³ Therefore, drawing from previous useful sources and the 2015 study, for the purposes of this report, transnational cooperation can be analytically summarised in the framework presented in Figure 7 below. Transnational cooperation in the diffusion of violent extremist interpretations on the one hand, and for proselytisation of more conservative religious interpretations on the other, occurred on both international and regional levels, and more often than not, they occurred separately, through different actors and more often than not, with different (ideological) goals.

¹⁷⁷ The Protector. (2016) *The Generation of Success: The 53rd Generation of Kosovo Police Cadets Graduated*. Kosovo Police Protector, Volume IX, no. 6/2016, p. 23.

¹⁷⁸ Informal conversation with Azem Kadriu, former violent extremist, Pristina, Kosovo

¹⁷⁹ *Serbët që u shisnin armë kimike xhihadistëve, përmes Kosovës*. (14 April 2017) Gazeta Metro. Available from: <http://gazetametro.net/serbet-ge-u-shisnin-arme-kimike-xhihadisteve-permes-kosoves/> and *Ovo je srpski policajac uhapšen zbog šverca žive, potencijalni kupci - TERORISTI?!*. (14 April 2017) Blic Online. Available from: <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/ovo-je-srpski-policajac-uhapšen-zbog-sverca-zive-potencijalni-kupci-teroristi/851ejn5>

¹⁸⁰ *Ovo je srpski policajac uhapšen zbog šverca žive, potencijalni kupci - TERORISTI?!*. (14 April 2017) Blic Online. Available from: <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/ovo-je-srpski-policajac-uhapšen-zbog-sverca-zive-potencijalni-kupci-teroristi/851ejn5>

¹⁸¹ *Serbët që u shisnin armë kimike xhihadistëve, përmes Kosovës*. (14 April 2017) Gazeta Metro. Available from: <http://gazetametro.net/serbet-ge-u-shisnin-arme-kimike-xhihadisteve-permes-kosoves/> and *Ovo je srpski policajac uhapšen zbog šverca žive, potencijalni kupci - TERORISTI?!*. (14 April 2017) Blic Online. Available from: <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/hronika/ovo-je-srpski-policajac-uhapšen-zbog-sverca-zive-potencijalni-kupci-teroristi/851ejn5>

¹⁸² See pp. 30-56 in: Kursani, S. (2015) *Report Inquiring into the Causes and Consequences of Kosovo Citizens' Involvement as Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq*. Policy Report. Occasional Paper. Pristina, Kosovo: Kosovar Center for Security Studies. Available from:

http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Report_inquiring_into_the_causes_and_consequences_of_Kosovo_citizens_involvement_as_foreign_fighters_in_Syria_and_Iraq_307708.pdf

¹⁸³ Updates were sought from old and new sources, such as: The Islamic Community in Kosovo, different security institutions of Kosovo, individual liberal and conservative imams, former foreign fighters, former Middle-Eastern based NGO employees. Except for repeating the previously provided information, there was no update.

Figure 7. Levels and forms of transnational cooperation

	VIOLENT EXTREMISM	RELIGIOUS PROSELYTISATION
International level	<p><u>Actors:</u> Non-state actors (individuals) based in the MENA, more predominantly in illegally functioning more extremist groups in Egypt</p> <p><u>Ideological purpose:</u> Embrace for violent extremism and calls for jihad (usually abroad) – when conflicts abroad (MENA) exist. Often explicit calls for violence, and participation in foreign conflicts.</p> <p><u>Funding:</u> Not evidenced</p> <p><u>Channels:</u> Personal contacts between some Macedonian citizens of Albanian ethnic background when based in Egypt in contact with other similar religious ideologues (late 1990s – mid-2000s)</p>	<p><u>Actors:</u> State actors from the MENA, namely Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Emirates</p> <p><u>Ideological purpose:</u> Proselytization into more conservative religious interpretations. Clearer ideological divide from violent extremist ideologues. Explicit calls for a more conservative practice of religion, and often explicit calls to non-violence.</p> <p><u>Funding:</u> Support for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Locally established NGOs dealing with religious matters - Building of new and reparation of old mosques - Non-religious aspects, such as medicine, hospitals, and schools (especially the first five years after the 1999 conflict) <p><u>Channels:</u> More institutional - usually legally registered NGO's in Kosovo, especially during the first ten years after the conflict of 1999.</p>
Regional level	<p><u>Actors:</u> Non-state actors (individuals) based in Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania. Note: the linguistic background matters when considering transnational cooperation on regional level, as people of the same/similar linguistic contact remain more often in contact</p> <p><u>Ideological purpose:</u> Same as above (at international level)</p> <p><u>Funding:</u> Not evidenced</p> <p><u>Channels:</u> Not institutionally organised Personal contacts: mostly between 2005 to 2015 Electronic communication: mostly after the conflict in Syria began and after dozens were arrested</p>	<p><u>Actors:</u> Non-state actors (individuals and NGOs) based in Macedonia, Kosovo, and Albania. Note: the linguistic background matters when considering transnational cooperation on regional level, as people of the same/similar linguistic contact remain more often in contact</p> <p><u>Ideological purpose:</u> Religious proselytisation</p> <p><u>Funding:</u> Does not appear to exist at regional level</p> <p><u>Channels:</u> Institutionally organised; usually part of official Islamic communities (Kosovo and Macedonia), while outside official Islamic Community, yet institutionally organised separately (in Albania). Personal contacts: mostly between 1999 to present day Electronic communication</p>

Transnationalism in the diffusion of the more violent interpretations of religion, occurred through non-state actors – predominantly by a handful of Albanian speaking individuals from Macedonia (and some from Kosovo) who had spent some time in the MENA region (most notably in Egypt

during the late 1990s and early 2000s). In the case of Kosovo, there is no evidence that would suggest that state actors from the MENA were involved in promoting or diffusing violent extremist ideology recently associated with the Islamic State or similar actors, attracting individuals from Kosovo to join the conflicts in Syria or Iraq. There are however cases of a few individuals (predominantly Albanian speaking persons from Macedonia and some from Kosovo) who, through personal contacts, associated with groups in the MENA which for a much longer period (since the 1970s), worked in breeding and spreading a more revolutionary ideology against the established regimes in the MENA. The ideology (that is discussed in depth in the above-mentioned report) is based on the Takfiri doctrine, which calls in excommunicating Muslims should they not adhere to Islamic religion based on their strict interpretations.¹⁸⁴ Upon their return to their home countries in the Balkans, cooperation continued on a regional level, most predominantly with a few individuals from Macedonia and Kosovo who worked in providing a more violent interpretation of religion. This occurred largely between the mid-2000s until the early phases of recent conflicts in Syria and Iraq.

On the other hand, transnationalism in the diffusion of more conservative (non-violent) interpretations of religion occurred through state-actors in the MENA, or NGOs associated with these states. Compared to the transnational cooperation in the diffusion of violent interpretations, cooperation in proselytisation of the conservative interpretations and practices occurred in a much more structural and institutional form. Often those engaged in such cooperation would also be integrated in the established institutions of the official Islamic Community. Except for some internal frictions and disagreements, there is no evidence that the diffusion of a more conservative form of religion necessarily or purposefully led to the diffusion of violent extremist ideologies – though some select cases may not be ruled out.

CONCLUSION

This report has inquired into five general themes: (1) the forms and threats of violent extremism; (2) drivers and factors of violent extremism; (3) communities at risk; (4) the nexus between organised crime and violent extremism; and (5) transnational cooperation. The research has employed a combination of methods and explored primary and secondary sources, and finds that:

- The emergence of the foreign fighter phenomenon has had an impact on the general narrative on how state institutions, especially those dealing with matters of security, view threats stemming from violent extremism. While the foreign fighter phenomenon represents one form of threat in the country, the report also found other forms of violent extremism which manifest both politically and ethnically. The latter two categories have been often more consequential in terms of fatalities and overall risks to the population and state institutions. Despite this, violent extremism is almost solely viewed within the confines of Islamist religious threats, among representatives of state institutions.

¹⁸⁴ This is discussed in depth in: Kursani, S. (2015) *Report Inquiring into the Causes and Consequences of Kosovo Citizens' Involvement as Foreign Fighters in Syria and Iraq*. Policy Report. Occasional Paper. Pristina, Kosovo: Kosovar Center for Security Studies. Available from: http://www.qkss.org/repository/docs/Report_inquiring_into_the_causes_and_consequences_of_Kosovo_citizens'_involvement_as_foreign_fighters_in_Syria_and_Iraq_307708.pdf

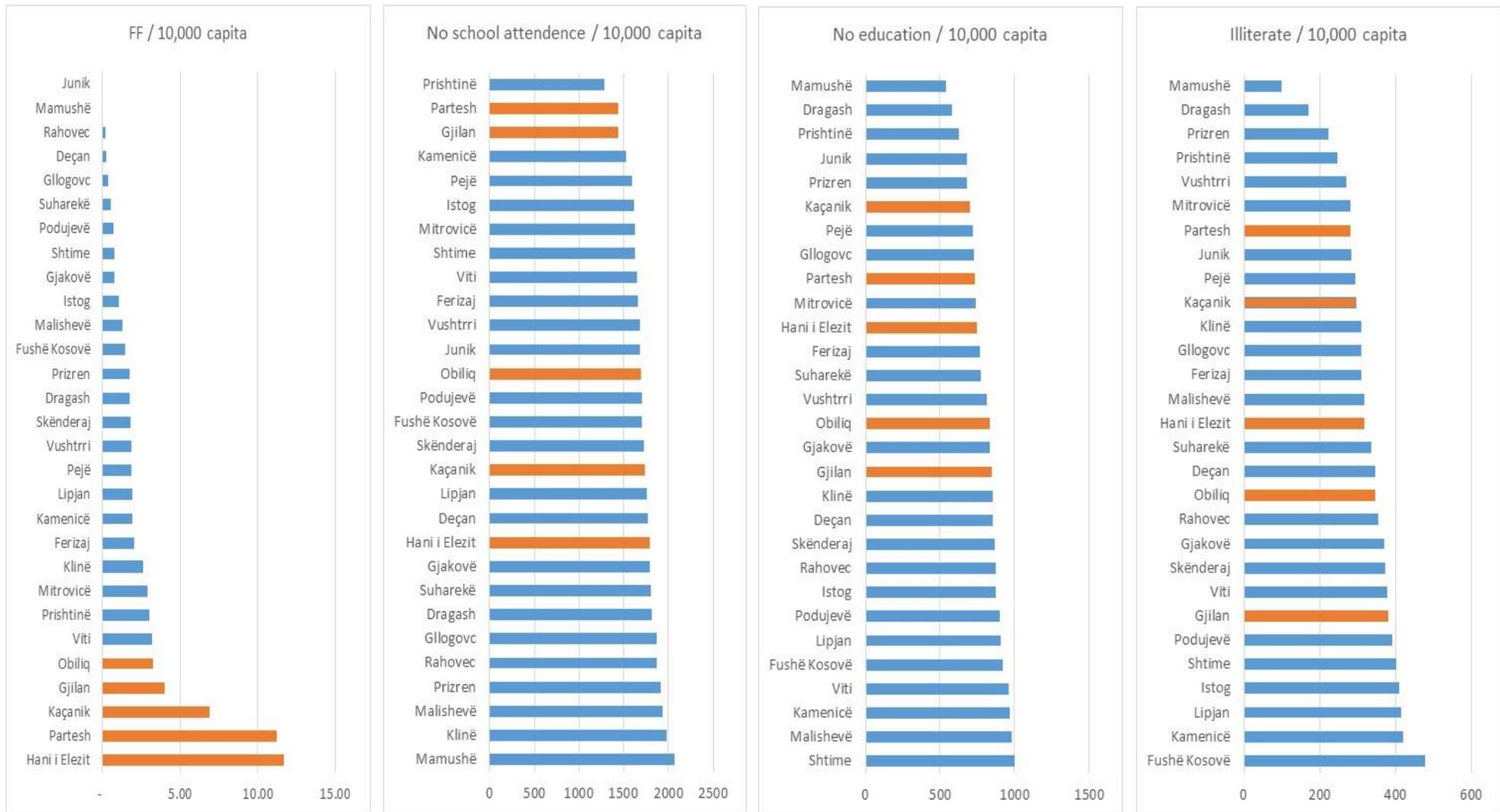
- Two emerging risk groups to consider are the imprisoned violent extremists, and potential returnees. This report proffers that the problem with the imprisoned individuals is two-fold. First, the possible risk posed inside the prisons in influencing other inmates has not seemingly been effectively addressed by state actors, yet remains an identified concern within state institutions. Second, there are several (former) violent extremists who will soon be completing their terms in prison – as yet there is not an adequate policy in place for the next steps following their release. As for the potential returnees, while there is a risk, it appears to be much lower than generally thought. This is because the majority of those that are still in the conflict zones are non-combatants such as women and children. However, there are particular difficulties that must be considered with such non-combatant potential returnees, and their reintegration.
- There is no typical profile of violent extremists, as violent extremists can be found in social categories that range from poorly educated to well educated, and those that come from poor socio-economic backgrounds to more economically well-off individuals. So, despite some commonalities, such as generally (though not always) being young, it is evident that it is difficult to describe a typical violent extremist. However, some correlations can be found and possible theories drawn, but more research is needed to better understand the various interplay of factors.
- Unlike many claims in previous research, educational parameters, such as the level of education, illiteracy rate, school attendance, seem to be poor predictors of the emergence of violent extremism. Although the drivers and factors behind the rise of violent extremism are incredibly complex, this research draws some more common factors found among violent extremists that interact in conjunction with one another. These include:
 - younger individuals' detachment from the established social fabric – they are often caught in an 'identity vacuum', often dangerously exacerbated with a pre-radical mindset seeking belonging into stronger and cohesive social groups that potentially fill the identity void;
 - close and extended family bonds between younger generations – for example, the overwhelming majority who have left Kosovo to travel to Syria are either siblings, young couples (spouses), close relatives, or long-time friends in a closer community;
 - individuals who are found in poorer socio-economic conditions have a higher probability to seek refuge in more cohesive violent extremist groups with whom they can identify. This is also the case with those who are employed, but in temporary or unstable jobs. While there is a tendency also for individuals in richer categories to seek such a refuge, this happens to a lesser extent.
 - more than half of violent extremists with whom the state has been involved, either through investigations or detainment, have had previous criminal convictions. While their criminal past is not identified as a driver, it is an important indication of a certain characteristic that is common among these individuals, that may play a role in tandem with the above mentioned factors.
- Communities most at risk of violent extremism are younger individuals that are between 18 and 25 years old. While this age-group in Kosovo includes a much broader group than those that may actually be at risk, a further specification that this report makes is that in

In addition to belonging to the above-mentioned age group, these individuals are also likely to show signs of social alienation and detachment from the established social setting. Moreover, the capital Pristina is identified as a geographic specification for at risk communities. The capital is and has been a highly politicised and polarised area among different political and social elites, which may have exacerbated the sense of alienation among the younger generations with a plight for belonging.

- There appears to be no evidence of a structural nexus between organised crime and violent extremism, despite isolated cases where individuals have attempted to profit from the phenomenon.
- Transnational cooperation has occurred on two different levels. On the international level, the influences of more violent extremist ideologies have been brought to the region in a non-institutional and non-state form by some individuals who have spent time in the MENA region, predominantly in Egypt with illegally organised groups sharing similar ideologies. This occurred primarily during the early 2000s when some of these individuals have returned to Macedonia where they continued with more violence-inducing forms of religious interpretation, such as those related with the specific *Takfiri* doctrine of strictly excommunicating other Muslims. On the regional level, some of these individuals, through personal contacts, managed to also penetrate Kosovo. This has occurred mostly in non-institutional forms through private organisational efforts, such as meetings, discussions, and lectures. The often-cited institutionally organised and usually legally registered Middle Eastern NGOs that have operated in Kosovo as a source of violent extremism, seem to have been more focused on proselytisation efforts of more conservative interpretations of Islam, rather than direct calls for violence.

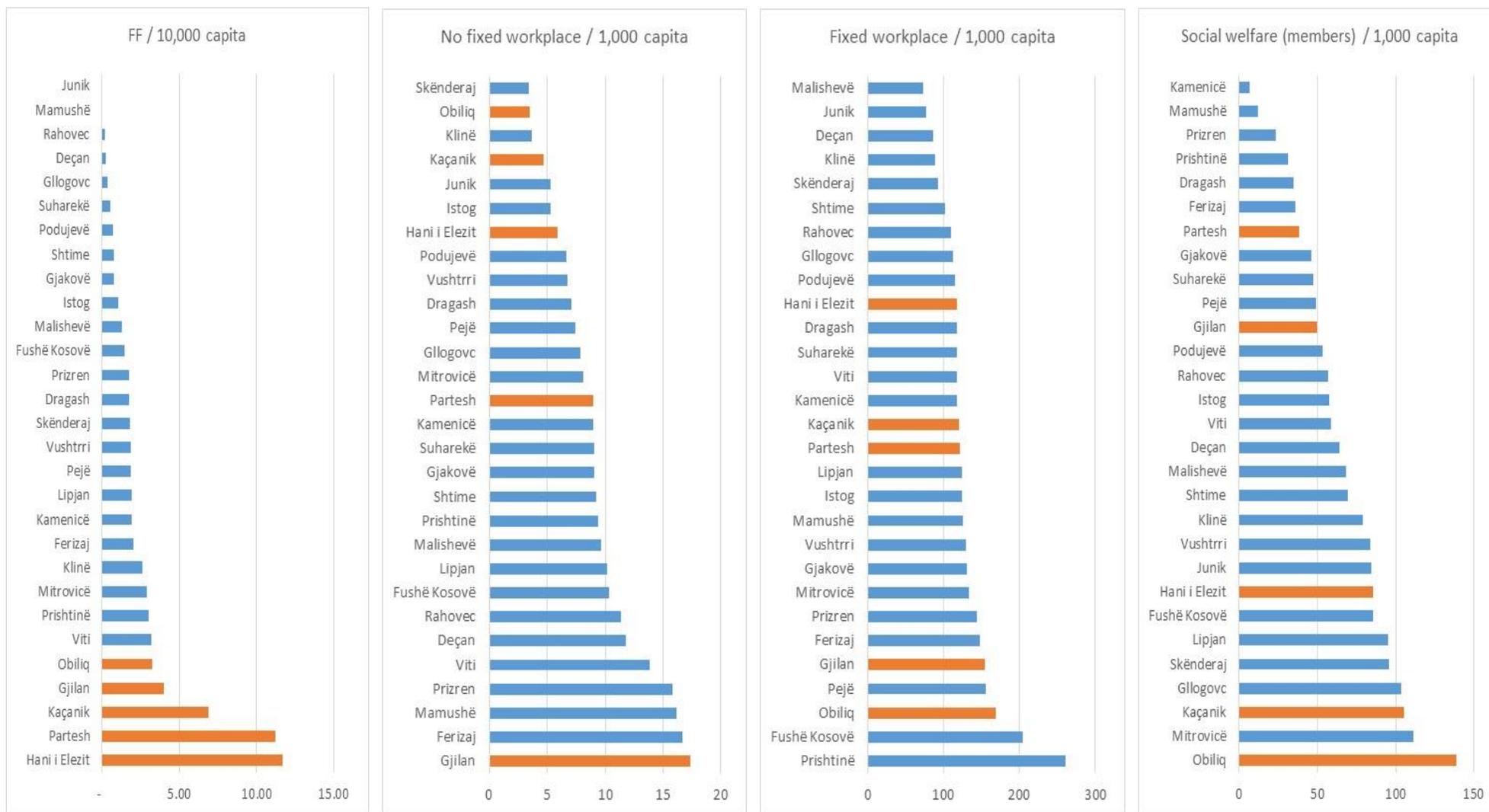
ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND EDUCATION INDICATORS FOR EACH MUNICIPALITY



Source: Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2013) and data from Anti-Terror Directorate of Kosovo Police

ANNEX 2: FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND ECONOMIC INDICATORS FOR EACH MUNICIPALITY



ANNEX 3: VIOLENT EXTREMIST CIRCLES' CLOSE BONDS SCHEME

The following is the scheme of close bonds according to relationship of individuals involved in or suspected of being violent extremists or foreign fighters themselves. They are grouped by the municipality in which they belong, or a case in which they were involved in. Names of the individuals are removed. They are presented here according to the following three categories: men, women, or children. This also helps the reader in better grasping the relationship between these individuals.

Vitia municipality

1	Man	Siblings
2	Man	

Ferizaj municipality

3	Man	Siblings	Spouse	Family with children
4	Man			
5	Woman			
6	Child			
7	Child			

Hani i Elezit municipality (1)

8	Man	Siblings	First cousins
9	Man		
10	Man		
11	Man		
12	Man		

Klina municipality

13	Man	Spouse	Siblings	Family with children
14	Man			
15	Woman			
16	Woman			
17	Man			
18	Child			
19	Child			
20	Child			
21	Child			
22	Child			

Gjilan municipality

23	Man	Siblings	Spouse
24	Man		
25	Man		
26	Woman		

Skenderaj and Mitrovica municipalities

27	Woman	Siblings	Spouse
28	Man		
29	Man		Spouse
30	Woman		

Peja municipality

31	Man	Spouse
32	Woman	

Kacanik municipality (1)

33	Man	Siblings	First cousins
34	Man		
35	Man		
36	Man		

Skenderaj municipality

37	Man	Siblings	Relatives
38	Man		
39	Man		
40	Man		
41	Man		
42	Man		

Badovc case

43	Man	Relatives
44	Man	
45	Man	
46	Man	

Kacanik municipality (2)

47	Man	First cousins
48	Man	

Hani i Elezit municipality (2)

49	Man	Relatives
50	Man	

Pristina municipality

51	Man	Siblings	Spouse	Family with children	Relatives
52	Man				
53	Man				
54	Man	Spouse			
55	Woman				
56	Child	Family with children			
57	Child				
58	Child				

Hani i Elezit Municipality (3)

59	Man	Longtime friendship
60	Man	
61	Man	
62	Man	

ANNEX 4: INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

List of interviewees by institution and position where applicable

	Institution	Position	Place
1	Kosovo Intelligence Agency (KIA)	High-level official 1	Pristina, Kosovo
2	Kosovo Intelligence Agency (KIA)	High-level official 2	Pristina, Kosovo
3	Kosovo Assembly	Security Advisor	Pristina, Kosovo
4	Special Prosecution of Kosovo	Prosecutor 1	Pristina, Kosovo
5	Special Prosecution of Kosovo	Prosecutor 2	Pristina, Kosovo
6	Special Prosecution of Kosovo	Prosecutor 3	Pristina, Kosovo
7	Ministry of Interior	High-level official	Pristina, Kosovo
8	National Security Council (NSC)	Official at the Secretariat of NSC	Pristina, Kosovo
9	Correctional Services of Kosovo	High-level official	Pristina, Kosovo
10	Committee on Internal Affairs, Security and Oversight of the Kosovo Security Force	Member of the Committee	Pristina, Kosovo
11	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare	Official	Pristina, Kosovo
12	Directorate for Education in the Municipality of Pristina	high-level official	Pristina, Kosovo
13	Municipality of Hani i Elezit	High-level official	Hani i Elezit, Kosovo
14	Municipality of Kacanik	High-level official	Kacanik, Kosovo
15	Center for Social Welfare	Official	Kacanik, Kosovo
16	Islamic Community of Kosovo	High-level official	Pristina, Kosovo
17	Islamic Community of Kosovo	Imam	Gjilan, Kosovo
18	Islamic Community of Kosovo	Imam	Kacanik, Kosovo
19	Islamic Community of Kosovo	Imam	Mitrovica, Kosovo
20	Islamic Community of Kosovo	Imam	Mitrovica, Kosovo
21	Islamic Community of Kosovo	Imam	Peja, Kosovo
22	Islamic Community of Kosovo	Imam (Dardania based)	Pristina, Kosovo
23	Islamic Community of Kosovo	Imam (main mosque)	Pristina, Kosovo
24	Religious group	Activist	Shtime, Kosovo
25	Religious group	Activist	Kacanik, Kosovo
26	Saudi based NGO	Former employee	Pristina, Kosovo
27	Former foreign fighter	Visar Trimi [not the real name]	Ferizaj, Kosovo
28	Former foreign fighter	Vigan Gashi [not the real name]	Ferizaj, Kosovo.
29	Former foreign fighter	Nijazi Krasniqi [not the real name]	Gjilan, Kosovo
30	Former foreign fighter	Besnik Limoni [not the real name]	Pristina, Kosovo
31	Former foreign fighter	Albert Berisha	Pristina, Kosovo
32	Former foreign fighter	Sadik Demi [not the real name]	Pristina, Kosovo
33	Former foreign fighter	Enes Kastrati [not the real name]	Hani i Elezit, Kosovo
34	Former foreign fighter	Betim Nixha [not the real name]	Pristina, Kosovo
35	Local media	Journalist	Pristina, Kosovo
36	Local NGO	Expert in security field	Pristina, Kosovo
37	Local NGO	Expert in security field	Pristina, Kosovo
38	International Organisation in Kosovo	Expert in security field	Pristina, Kosovo
39	Political party in Kosovo	Political activist	Pristina, Kosovo
40	University of Pristina	Sociologist	Pristina, Kosovo
41	University of Pristina	Sociologist	Gjilan, Kosovo

List of focus groups by target group and location

1	Group of young people	10 participants	Pristina, Kosovo
2	Group of religious conservatives	9 participants	Hani i Elezit



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