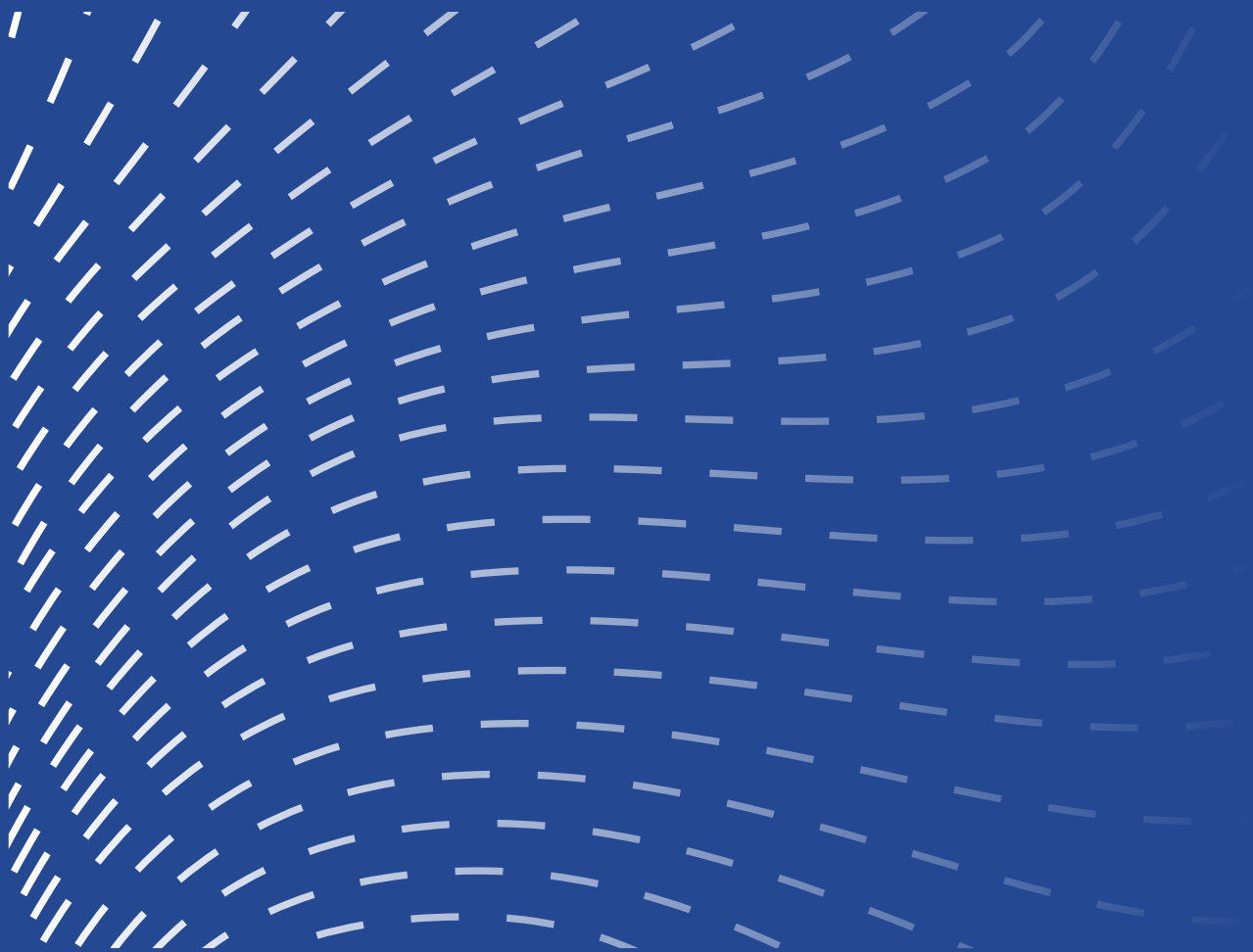# The country needs assessment to

Identify key needs for Prevention of Violent Extremism, Repatriation and Rehabilitation

in Albania

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Violent Extremism, Repatriation and Rehabilitation in Albania

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The country needs assessment to identify key needs for Prevention of Violent Extremism, Repatriation and Rehabilitation in Albania

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List of Abbreviations

CVE	Counter violent extremism
CVE Centre	National Coordination Centre for Countering Violent Extremism Albania
EU	European Union
CSO	Civil society Organisations
GCERF	Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund
INSTAT	National Institute of Statistics
IDM	Institute for Democracy and Mediation
KMSH	Albanian Muslim Community
LPSC	Local Public Safety Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
P/CVE	Prevention and countering of violent extremism
PVE	Prevent violent extremism
PVN	Peace Volunteering Network
R&R	Repatriation and Rehabilitation
SPAK	Special Anti-Corruption Structure
TDH	Terre des hommes
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VE	Violent extremism
VERLT	Violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism
WB	Western Balkans

Executive Summary

This report draws final findings and recommendations for the "Country Needs Assessment for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Repatriation and Rehabilitation in Albania" project. Needs and challenges are identified through a range of activities that led to the report from a triangulation of experience, empirical and normative data. Majority of findings are based on interviews and focus groups with institutions and professionals, as well as from the survey with the community members. The results show that institutions in Albania have a list of needs that should be addressed to meet the challenges ahead in Repatriation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration on one hand and Countering Violent Extremism on the other. The three pillars of information include a) desk research: reading the literature and policy that has been in use thus far to identify good practices, gaps and ineffective arrangements; b) expertise and experience of institutions and practitioners in the field either interviewing practitioners and experts on specific issues of concern and c) by researching on a pool of knowledge of individuals working with the receiving end of the process of R&R d) community perception by making survey with community members in hot spot areas to provide a list of recommendations for institutions that can be gathered as following:

- Institutions in Albania (Albanian central institutions, Government, Ministries and other rule of law and policy agencies) need to upgrade coordinating mechanisms around the Center for Violent Extremism in order to enhance effective repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration as well as counter violent extremism. Expert interviews, focus groups and survey confirm the lack of information circulation among mechanisms dealing with the violent extremism from the start to the end and lack of communication with the receiving community. his upgrade should consist of legal, administrative, policy reforms and communication which will lead to a shorter timeframe to reach targets of reintegration and more effective countering and prevention of political extremism.

- A "whole of government approach" is needed in preparation of the staff to deal with new situations on the ground. This approach involves all parties in training efforts to build knowledge from different angles, build a systematic approach as well as create synergies between central and local government, civil society, receiving community, international organizations as well as the media.

- The institutions involved in the Repatriation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration & Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism should work with external partners to monitor and evaluate procedures, practice and best-case scenarios in order to improve services incrementally while on duty. This is important as each case of repatriated individuals and families are different cases and the cultural aspect of rehabilitation and reintegration depends on these adjustments and improvements. Institutional and legal framework can remain the same, but implementation, approach, solutions can be more tailor made.

- Create a system of information circulation amongst involved agencies with regulated access for each party separately to the parts of data and dossiers of the repatriated cases within the legal framework and practice. This (online) system will reduce administrative time in dealing with cases and increase contact hours, effectiveness and consequently the results of Repatriation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration as well as Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism. This will also provide a good basis for communication and outreach in the hot spot areas and help prevention of violent extremism.

- There is a need for political support of the process and this support should be manifested from political leadership, religious leadership, civil society, individuals with prominent influence in one level but also family, friends, school community and others involved in the receiving community. Affected populations in hotspot areas in Albania have a perception that religion and political extremism are most prominent and lack of economic perspective is one of the main push factors.

- A blueprint plan should be created and utilized by involved agencies to use it as a guideline for planning, and implementing Repatriation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration as well as Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Albania. This plan should contain checklists, best practices, communication information and contact lists for involved institutions in the process. A solid foundation is the perceptions of affected communities in hotspot areas who have good understanding (information) but lack official communication from the central and local government.

- Finally, there is a need for involvement of civil society on a larger scale with support either as monitors or even participants in preparing the receiving community, delivering information to schools, youth centers, local organizations and persons with influence in their context. Involving civil society will widen the foundation, create resilient society and helping Repatriation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Albania.

Methodology

The objective of need assessment at national level is to provide a concise analysis of the Violent Extremism context in Albania and assess the barriers and opportunities to long term prevention and R&R support in Albania.

The report is driven by three main questions:

1. What are the main drivers and forms of violent extremism in Albania?
2. What are the adequate mechanisms to prevent, combat and mitigate effects of violent extremism in Albania?
3. What is the perception of community and the best practices, cases, and useful examples of strengthening the community's acceptance of returnees?

These research questions provided a comprehensive understanding of the needs and challenges related to the prevention of violent extremism and the repatriation and rehabilitation of individuals involved in extremism in Albania. In-country data collection and need assessment uses a mixed methodology of qualitative and quantitative data collection, having the exploratory methods. Using the preliminary research results and knowledge from desk review, the questionnaire was prepared and the results of the survey are contextualized with the qualitative findings. As respondents largely differ, we expected contradicting views between the survey on one hand and focus groups and interviews on the other hand. However, findings reveal these discrepancies and their usefulness in identifying gaps in practice and institutional work.

- **Desk research** is conducted to draw the panorama of the current political and institutional context, identifying the main forms of violent extremism on the one hand and the State's main actors involved in P/CVE. Bottlenecks identified in the desk research were brought up in semi-structured interviews and focus groups to see best ways forward as suggested by administration personnel who deal with repatriated persons from conflict zones on a daily basis. This interrelation of desk research with the empirical research provided particular entry to processes and helped the team to identify particular needs for a comprehensive whole of government training approach in countering violent extremism and identification of other challenges.

- **30 in depth interviews** are conducted with the main competent institutions/actors for P/CVE and frontliners. In depth interviews helped to collect qualitative data, understand institutional perspectives, policies, actions, challenges, and future perspectives. In-country interviews are done with the relevant stakeholders: line ministries and subordinate agencies, the CVE Center, Penitentiary System, Armed Forces, Community police, local governments (municipalities of Tirana, Shkodra, Durres, Elbasan, Pogradec, Kukes, Cerrik)*, religious leaders. Interviews were anonymized while doing them to respect privacy and comply with EU standards of GDPR but

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also to make sure that administrative staff does not get identified and face any consequences for voicing culprits in the process. Interview findings were used to generalize arguments for areas of study in focus and while quotes can be used to factualize such findings, we decided against it to keep the report in policy terms and avoid academic and journalistic jargons. The full anonymized data set will be provided in readable format for the decision-making team of GCERF.

- 5 on side **focus groups** are organized with teachers, security officers of the schools, community policing officers, child protection unit officers and psychologists which find out about and analyze the impact they have on R&R process. Focus group results were analyzed in context of interview findings as well as in relation to the desk research findings. This data interaction only started to take shape after preliminary results were discussed by the PVN team of researchers

- The **survey** collected quantitative data with the aim to understand the aspects of the drivers of violent extremism; the main community concerns regarding safety and security; the current perception of RFTF family members, and the reintegration process; what elements have contributed to positive examples of community acceptance of returnees, etc.
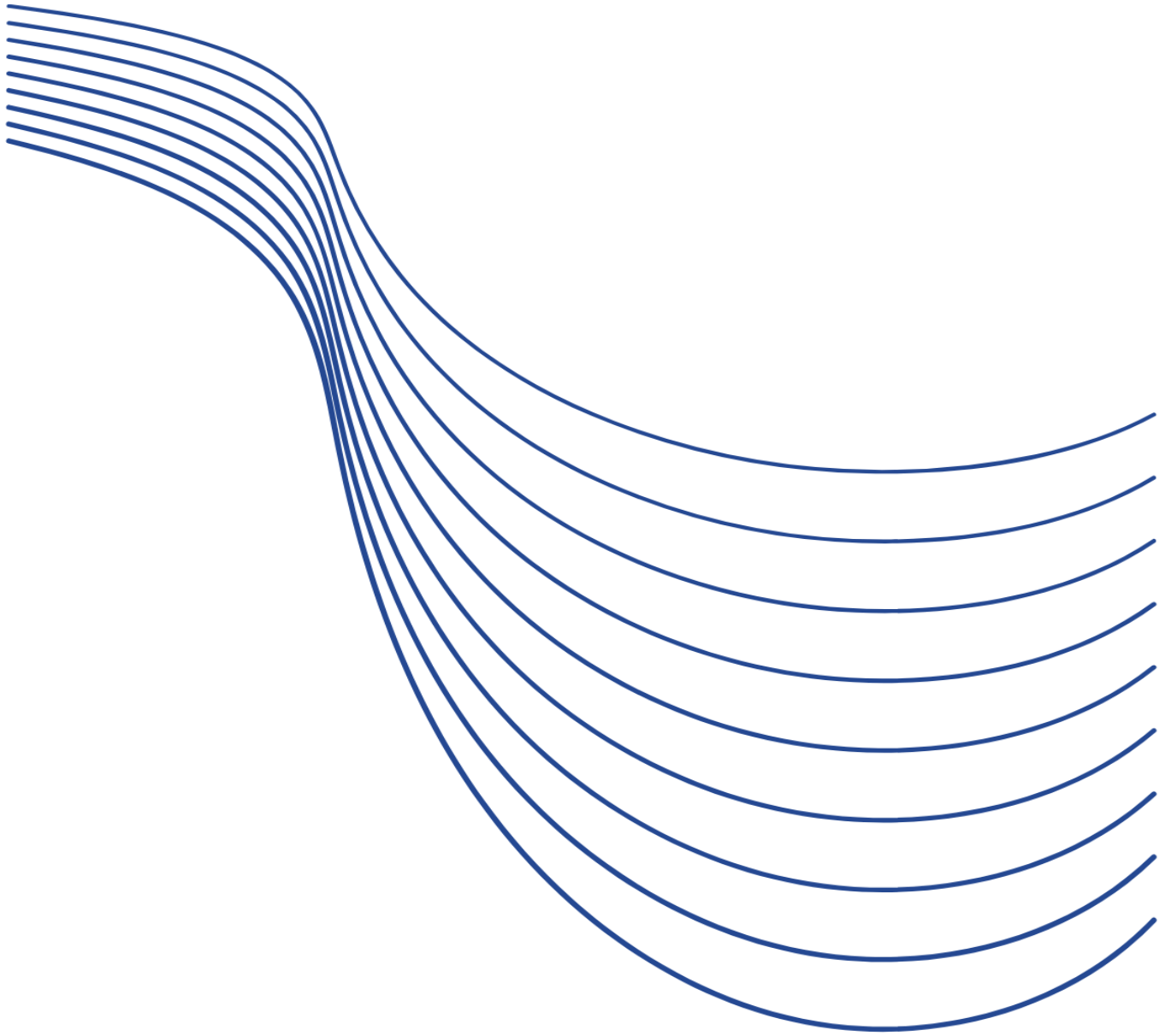
1. Introduction

1. INTRODUCTION

World is challenged by Violent Extremism globally. Albania as a small country in southeastern Europe was challenged by violent extremism in many ways but most prominent violent extremism in Albania took the shape of religious violent extremism in the last decades and in particular with the start of violent conflicts in the Middle East in the last decades. With the end of IS, many foreign fighters were reported dead while their families remained at large in the mercy of local warlords and other foreign fighters. Albania and Kosovo often collaboratively repatriated families of foreign fighters who consist of mostly women and children who are identified as citizens of Albania and Kosovo. Interviews with psychologists and case managers tackled aspects of the family status of returnees, especially while outlining administrative and legal measures applied for the custody of minors and DNA examinations when personal identification documents are missing for the returnees (Interviews with psychologists and case managers)

With the identification of family members in Syria and Iraq, the process of repatriation is organized as a form of collaborative efforts of police and military security sector personnel and the civilian administration. From the direct interviews with the CVE Center allowed to understand that confidential processes are carried out for the identification of future Albanian returnees. Such processes are detailed and described in the Confidential DCM which is produced for each group of repatriated Albanian citizens.

For the first part, security personnel make sure of identifying risks and threats and

create their own dossier of information but the real difficult process starts once the repatriated families qualify for reintegration back into society (Interviews with CVE center).

GCERF in collaboration with all institutions involved in repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals returned from conflict zones is assessing processes and capacities of institutions to deliver services that are required from repatriation to full reintegration into the social life of these individuals.

Many challenges are met throughout this process especially in the rehabilitation and reintegration part as these scenarios were not forecasted neither in normative conceptualization of legal framework nor in the policy of the administration of the institutions in Albania. The Albanian Government responds to these challenges in close collaboration with international community organizations as well as national civil society. In due course challenges are met both in the level of collaboration between central government institutions and local government institutions in a vertical collaboration as well as in horizontal collaboration of inter-ministerial cooperation and division of labor. To ease these challenges and address the culprits of repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration, the Center for Violent Extremism was

created at the national level whilst many actions to reform the legal framework took place from 2015 and onwards. Along with legal reform, duties and responsibilities were added to job descriptions of security sector personnel and civil administration who were unprepared and untrained for these challenges. Another challenge remain integration in the community and community resilience, from the survey done in the community 73% of respondents have heard about violent extremism or radicalism; 23% of them think there is a tendency for VE in Albania; and 49% think that maybe this could be a risk. 60% of respondents express readiness to report violent extremism and radicalization to the police, provided that they encounter it. 47% of respondents of the survey think that employment is the best way to accept returnees and for integration to function. Respondents have mixed feelings about living with the returnees in their own community. When asked how would they feel about returnees living in their community, 37% declared neutral which is a reflection of the statistic on the lack of knowledge and information. Some 30% does not agree that returnees live in their community and 20% agree entirely.

The most vulnerable groups to radicalization are considered young people and children, mainly those from marginalized and disenfranchised groups. These data indicate the need to strengthen the community and young people, especially in the hot spots.

To evaluate culprits, challenges and opportunities for planning ahead, GCERF, in partnership with PVN has designed and implemented a nationwide needs assessment

based upon a scientific mixed methodology. The mixed methodology includes data collection in two main strands of investigation:

a) desk research in existing literature, reports and legal frameworks as documented in governmental, non-governmental, and other documentation whereby procedures and lines of work are evaluated, critically reviewed and

b) empirical research with different fragments of administration, such as survey with affected population, in-depth semi-structured interviews with the middle and senior management of the process of repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration and focus groups with professional services such as teachers, psych-social workers and others who provide counseling, advise and help to the institutions and repatriated individuals.

This report contains 4 main parts:

1) In the first part of this report, PVN has professionally reviewed documentation and policies from the start to the end of the process of repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of persons from conflict zones and found institutional and regulatory gaps that lead to delayed process and other culprits in the process.

2) The second part of the report provides an approach of generalizing empirical findings from qualitative research and presenting perceptions of quantitative surveys. The interview analysis provides information that is contextualized with the desk research and produces particular information

that generates problems and identifies needs for wellbeing of the process of countering violent extremism.

3) The third part of the report analyzes the quantitative results and illustrates the perceptions of the affected community and those who are at the end of the process of reintegration, such as teachers, psychologists, doctors and others, providing a mirror of the situation in which reintegration occurs. This important information is the foundation of the reintegration process, as identified by both interviews and focus groups, but lacks policy work in the desk research part. Key to successful reintegration (data from the focus groups) is the support that repatriated individuals receive from this community in their home, street, school, doctors and possibly around the environment where they are returned. It is of crucial importance to work more with the receiving community in benefit of successful repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration, as well as in prevention of violent extremism.

4) Last but not least, the recommendations and conclusions of the report lay out a whole range of interventions for institutions involved in the process of repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration of returned from conflict zones as well as for better workflow of countering violent extremism. Recommendation and advice are shaped on institutional basis and often overlaps in a similar manner, which is proof of the need for better coordination and collaboration

of the institutions in the sector of countering violent extremism. Recommendations and conclusions are mainly based on the findings from the survey, interviews, and focus groups
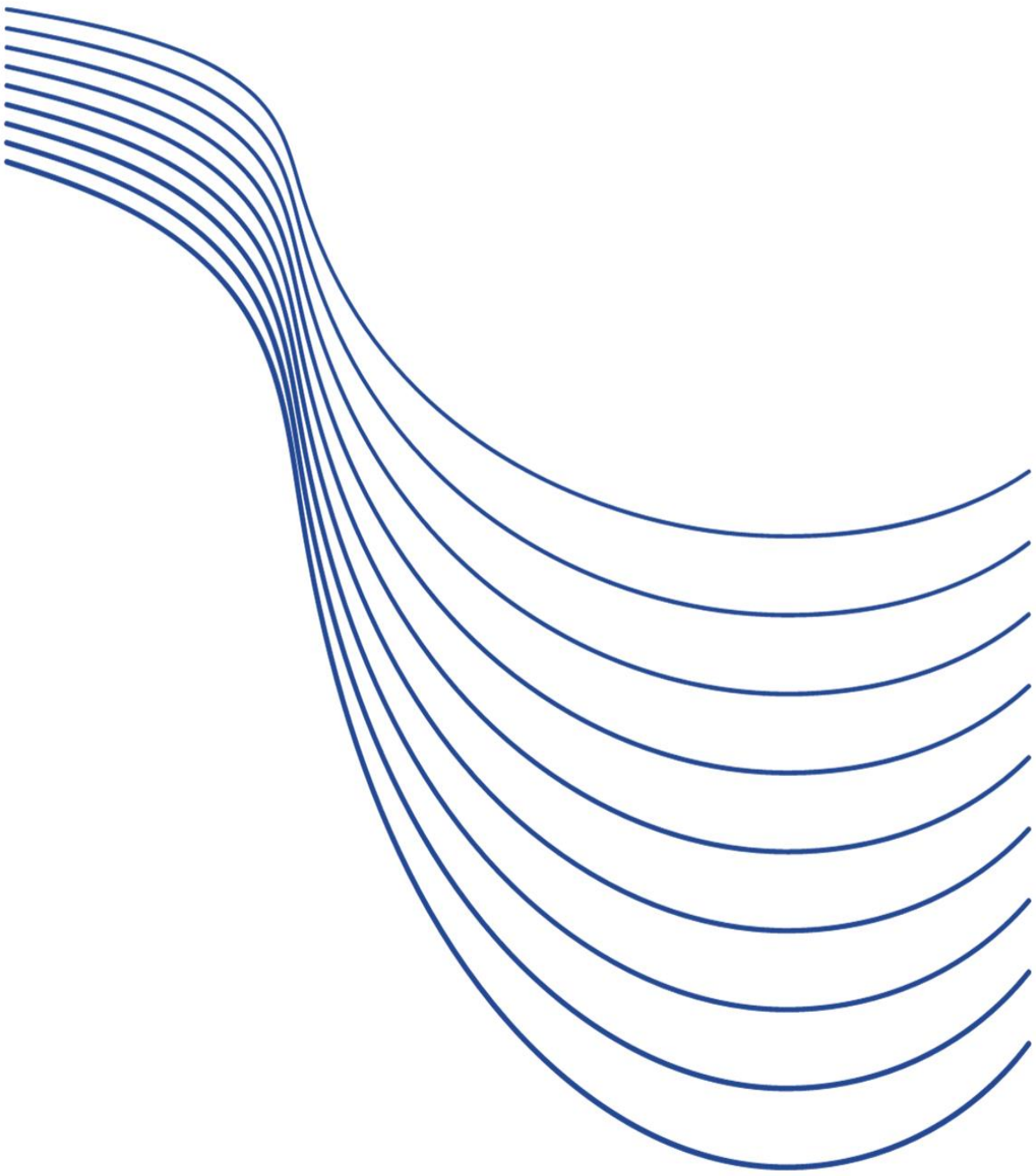
2. Violent Extremism in Albania

2. VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN ALBANIA

2.1 Context of violent extremism in Albania

From 2012 to 2015, around 144 Albanians traveled to Syria and Iraq to join the war, but this number dwindled to none by the end of 2015 (Anne Speckhard, 2021). In 2021, the police referred to the specialized prosecutorial bodies 10 cases of terrorist acts and funding involving 14 suspects (Vrugtman, Leonie, 2019) Still, no convictions were rendered that year for terrorism. In this light, the Albanian government sought and obtained legislative approval to modify the Criminal Code (Article 265/a, b, c) concerning the involvement of its citizens in foreign armed conflicts (Albanian National Cross-cutting Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and the Fight against Terrorism 2022-2025)

As Albania dealt with the initial repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration operations, the surrounding circumstances and political landscape underwent significant changes. The primary concern back then, and to some extent still today, is the task of de-radicalization and reintegration of these returnees in Albania.

The danger posed by these returning fighters lies in their potential affiliations with extremist factions in Europe or the region, the connections to radicals in conflict areas, and the prospects of using social media to rally support for their cause(s) and share

routes to Syria. Concurrently, these returnees elevate the threat of domestic and even regional terrorism, given their training and proficiency with weapons and explosives.

The emergence of violent extremism ultimately resulting in terrorism may be driven by several factors:

- Albania's strategic geographical location, coupled with ethnic-driven tensions and disputes in neighboring areas. This makes our country vulnerable to external influences and regional conflicts, and potentially a fertile ground for extremist ideologies to take root. Potential exploitation of free movement of citizens. Indeed, this freedom facilitates cultural exchange and economic growth, but it might inadvertently offer extremists the opportunity to move seamlessly across borders and spread their radical beliefs. Individuals with extremist views entering Albania under the disguise of regular immigration represent a real concern. Fleeing conflict zones, they may seek refuge in Europe and particularly in Albania, thereby introducing and perpetuating extremist ideologies.
- Modern technologies, particularly the Internet and social media platforms are conduits for the dissemination of extremist views. Digital tools enable swift propagation of radical ideologies and allow for recruitment and radicalization, reaching vast audiences with hardly any barriers.

- From a geographical standpoint, observations indicate that this phenomenon predominantly exists in Elbasan, Pogradec, Librazhd, Bulqizë, Cërrik, Kukës, Dibër, Kavaja and the rural areas adjacent to these cities. Factors contributing to this concentration might include early exposure to radical ideas, insufficient education and theological understanding, socio-economic challenges, experienced bullying, mental health issues, and enticements of financial aid.
- The ideas related to religious radicalization and violent extremism emerged in Albania due to global shifts and events. These extremist concepts pose a risk on national security, because the real peril of radicalization and extremism - whether driven by ideology, religion, or nationalism - lies in their ability to fuel and promote terrorist endeavors.

2.2 Perceived threats

According to the Albanian National Cross-cutting Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and the Fight against Terrorism 2022-2025, and information during the interviews, Albania confronts several potential threats, including:

- **Online Radicalization:** A significant concern arises from the widespread influence of the Internet. Propaganda materials available online play a pivotal role in spreading radical and extremist ideologies. Often targeting young individuals, these platforms indoctrinate and recruit them to serve the interests of terrorist organizations.
- **Cyber Terrorism:** Using technological advancements and increasing reliance on digital platforms, cyber-terrorism poses a substantial challenge. This threat is more than just conventional hacking; it focuses on undermining national security elements, compromising sensitive information and disrupting critical infrastructure.
- **Irregular Migration Routes:** Albania is geographically positioned along migratory paths. This may be exploited by foreign terrorist fighters who mingle with irregular migrants on their route to EU countries.
- **Foreign Nationals with Contested Allegiances:** There are foreign individuals residing in Albania, who sought refuge for humanitarian reasons. However, some may harbor dissent against the ruling powers back home making their presence a potential security concern.
- **Ethnic-based Nationalist Groups:** Certain ethnic-driven nationalist organizations exhibit a tendency towards violence, and may instigate inter-ethnic disturbances and conflicts. There are instances where these groups are backed by other nations to further political objectives, thereby complicating regional dynamics.
- **Terrorist Activities on Home Soil:** The threat of terrorism is not just external. There is always the looming danger of attacks conceived in Albania by members of terrorist outfits, dormant cells, or even sympathizers and supporters motivated to undertake violent actions based on their radical beliefs.

Consequently, addressing and mitigating the threats of radicalization and violent extremism that might escalate to terrorism is a top priority for the Albanian government. This issue is part of the EU recommendations for Albania in the annual progress reports and a key priority during Albania's tenure as non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for 2022-2023.

2.3 Legal framework

Albania's legislative efforts in combating terrorism have been extensive and responsive to both national and international situations. However, the EU Commission's screening report in 2023 indicates that Albania's legal framework is only partially aligned with EU standards. Notable gaps include the definition of a terrorist organization, criminalizing actions like illegal data interference, and provisions for victim assistance, support, and compensation. Critical infrastructure protection also requires amendments, including the adoption of security plans and alignment with the latest EU framework. Additionally, Albania lacks specific legislation addressing the online dissemination of terrorist content and the regulation of explosive precursors.

Key areas for improvement include allocating adequate resources, enhancing inter-agency and international cooperation, and strengthening case management and referral mechanisms. Albania has ratified numerous international conventions and protocols on terrorism and joined UN initiatives, ratifying 12 of them. It has also implemented 21 cooperation agreements with various countries for security and information exchange in combating terrorism.

Albania has had operational and strategic agreements with Europol since 2013, contributing to the exchange of data and intelligence. It participates in international networks like the European Network of Fugitive Active Search Teams (ENFAST) and the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT). Furthermore, Albania is a member of the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe (PCCSEE) and has bilateral agreements with numerous countries, covering various security areas, including the fight against terrorism.

Albania is implementing the EU Joint Action Plan on Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism for the Western Balkans and the recommendations of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). The Counter-Terrorism Directorate of the Albanian State Police, along with other intelligence and security agencies, plays a lead role in counterterrorism efforts. Community policing personnel contribute to preventive and early-warning initiatives.

The Coordination Centre for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE Center), now under the Ministry of Interior, focuses on capacity building, coordinating CVE activities, and overseeing the implementation of the Strategy against Violent Extremism and Terrorism 2022–2025. The Center plays a crucial role in the rehabilitation and reintegration of citizens repatriated from conflict zones, ensuring comprehensive psychological support.

However, Albania's legal framework for countering violent extremism is primarily at the strategic and administrative levels,

lacking a comprehensive legal basis with the CVE Center as an authority with executive powers. This gap hinders effective institutional coordination, impacting the efficiency of case management efforts.

The EU Commission emphasizes the need for better coordination between counterterrorism and CVE actors, establishing necessary information management systems, and considering a joint national threat assessment. It also highlights the importance of strengthening case management and referral mechanisms for returnees and individuals at risk of radicalization.

In terms of legislation, Albania has ratified several important international conventions and protocols, including:

- "European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism," ratified by law no. 8642, dated 13.7.2000.
- "International Convention on the Prohibition of Terrorist Bombings," ratified by law no. 8836, dated 22.11.2001.
- "International convention for the fight against the financing of terrorism," ratified by law no. 8865, dated 14.03.2002.
- "Council of Europe Convention on the Cleanup, Search and Confiscation of Organized Crime and Terrorist Financing Procedures," ratified by law no. 9646, dated 27.11.2006.
- "Amending Protocol to the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism," ratified by law no. 9230, dated 13.5.2004.
- "European Convention for the compensation of victims of violent crimes," ratified by law no. 9265, dated 29.7.2004.

- "International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear (Nuclear) Terrorism (2005)."

These legislations signify Albania's commitment to international standards in combating terrorism and violent extremism, despite the need for further alignment and enhancements in specific areas.

2.4 Strategic framework

Strengthening the rule of law and national security are intrinsically linked to expanding human and logistic resources in law enforcement agencies, refining the legal structures, ensuring fundamental human rights and freedoms, and intensifying collaboration among domestic institutions and at international scale.

Albania has been recognized for its comprehensive framework regarding the prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE). This assessment was outlined in a 2022 report accompanying a European Commission communication covering the period June 2021-June 2022 that drew upon a diverse array of sources, including the Albanian government, EU Member States, European Parliament reports, and various international entities. It highlighted Albania's commendable progress in aligning with the EU, especially in the Joint Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkans.

In February 2023, Albania adopted the National Strategy for Development and European Integration 2021-2030 (NSDEI 2021-2030). Regarding the fight against violent extremism this strategy outlined

several policy objectives such as developing a preventative approach through an early warning system and increasing institutional capacities to reduce the consequences of the phenomena of violent extremism and terrorism.

The National Security Strategy was last adopted in 2014. Although it has no expiration date, this document has not been renewed ever since. Although a pivotal document which bears the weight in outlining the necessary vision and measures to counteract national security threats, Albania hasn't finalized the efforts to update the last remaining puzzle to the national strategic framework of the country.

The Cross-sectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and the Fight against Terrorism 2022–2025 and the related Action Plan 2023-2025 approved by the Decision of the Council of Ministers No.81, dated 14.02.2023, and the Joint Action Plan Countering Terrorism in the Western Balkans 2023-2024 represent the main strategic documents encompassing the obligation of Albania towards the priorities set to fight violent extremism, terrorism and all the forms they may take as well as the need to impellent the obligations stemming from international engagements implemented by the UN Security Council, the EU Strategy against terrorism and the EU Convention and its Additional Protocol for the prevention of terrorism, where the FTF phenomena are addressed. The Cross-Sectoral Strategy 2022-2025 combines the national agenda of EU integration, which is mainly related to the fulfillment of the obligations of Chapter 24 in the field of the

war against terrorism, with the sustainable economic and social development of the country, including the connection with the Sustainable Development Goals.

At a national level, the Cross-sectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and the Fight against Terrorism 2022–2025 is included under the first pillar of the Albanian National Strategy for Development and Integration: Good Governance, Democracy, and the Rule of Law. It constitutes the strategic document that defines the national vision for the creation of a society without terrorist threats, with the image of a safe country based on European standards that respect basic human rights and freedoms for the period 2022–2025, while supporting aspirations for integration into the European Union. The vision of the strategy is based on the vision of the National Strategy for Development and Integration: "Albania with a society without trafficking, organized crime and terrorist threats, with the image of a peaceful country with European security standards."

The National Intersectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Fight Against Terrorism 2023 - 2025 was adopted in February 2023. This strategy has four main pillars 1) Prevention, 2) Investigation of terrorist activities, 3) Reaction, Rehabilitation and Reintegration, 4) Defense. It combines Albania's EU integration commitments under Chapter 24 with national development goals, including alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals. As a centerpiece of the National Strategy for Development and Integration, it projects the vision of a terrorism-free society that upholds

European standards and human rights.

This is the first time terrorism and violent extremism are coupled into a single strategic document, as it hasn't been the case before. Additionally, it is worth noting that the NSDEI was adopted later then the National Intersectoral Strategy for Prevention of Violent Extremism and Fight Against Terrorism, thus resulting in the bottom-up approach when it comes to the interlinkage between the two. The same goes regarding the National Security Strategy. It is worth noting that the new PVE-CT Strategy makes reference only to the old National Strategy for Development and Integration 2015-2020 and not the new one.

The new PVE and CT Strategy is also interlinked and complementary to other 16 strategic (sectoral) documents. Through the co-ordination the 2023-2025 Intersectoral Strategy to Prevent Violent Extremism and Counter Terrorism with national strategies, particularly the 2021-2025 Organized Crime and Serious Crimes strategy, is crucial. This is because many countries have witnessed a concerning trend of terrorist groups aligning with criminal organizations. Through activities like money laundering, terrorists can conceal and legitimize their illicit gains. Drug trafficking and cultivation serve as lucrative income sources for terrorists, funding activities such as training, acquiring logistics, technology, and infrastructure.

Furthermore, the Republic of Albania, as a member of the global coalition against DAESH/ISIS, has not only demonstrated its commitment but also taken on specific responsibilities and obligations outlined in this strategy.

The CVE Center heavily relies upon Local Public Safety Councils (LPSCs) as a pivotal preventive but also rehabilitative, and reintegration mechanism within the context of countering violent extremism (CVE) in Albania (CVE Centre Annual Report, 2022) These councils function as consultative and decision-making bodies at the local level, addressing a spectrum of security concerns, including the mitigation of terrorism and violent extremism. The Cross Sectoral Strategy on Community Safety for the period 2021-2026 mandates the establishment of LPSCs across all 61 municipalities. Such issues heavily affect the implementation of the PVE and CT strategy due to its reliance on LPSC.

Additionally, the sectoral strategies mentioned are set on a short to medium term, which means the vision, objectives and measures outlined in them are subject to amendments in the next two-three years.

2.5 Factors engaged in PCVE in Albania

The institutional framework is detailed based on the central and local governmental bodies engaged in the Action Plan for the Prevention of Radicalisation 2023-2025 implementing the Cross-sectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and the Fight against Terrorism 2022–2025.

2.5.1 Ministry of Interior

The main competences and duties of the Ministry of Interior are centered on empowering communities and public

institutions to effectively identify and report instances of violent extremism and radicalism. As part of their strategic approach, the Ministry is responsible for the approval of essential documents that streamline responses to threats. This includes the endorsement of a Protocol and an administrative act which distinctly define the institutions responsible and the timelines to be adhered to when implementing measures for the management and treatment of radicalized individuals and violent extremists. This structured approach ensures a cohesive and timely response to potential threats, ensuring the safety and security of communities.

-   The Coordinating Center Countering Violent Extremism (CVE Center)

The main competences and duties of the CVE Center encompass a wide range of activities aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism. These include data collection and analysis on individuals associated with radicalization, offering preventive training, preparing evaluation reports on reintegration, assessing risks in various areas including funding and online radicalism, and developing community rehabilitation procedures. The Center also focuses on strengthening national and local coordination, establishing networks to address mental health concerns related to extremism, enhancing infrastructure security, and researching influences leading to radicalization.

Furthermore, the CVE Center plays an active role in outreach and public engagement. This involves publishing annual reports, organizing workshops, forums, and training

sessions, and actively engaging with both traditional and online media to raise awareness. To remain technologically updated, the Center has initiated the integration of advanced analytical software for data processing related to radicalization. Emphasis is also placed on the legal framework's consolidation, developing rehabilitation and reintegration programs, training various stakeholders on radicalization implications, and fostering collaborative workshops to enhance inter-agency cooperation.

-   Albanian State Police

The main competences and duties of the Albanian State Police revolve around empowering communities and public institutions to swiftly identify and report instances of violent extremism and radicalism. One of the primary strategies is to conduct institutional capacity assessments to pinpoint professional, technical, and infrastructural needs tailored to the challenges posed by violent extremism.

2.5.2 Ministry of Health and Social Protection

Primarily, the Ministry is entrusted with evaluating socio-health indicators pertinent to the surge of violent extremism and radicalism in high-risk areas and groups. This encompasses those at the brink of radicalization, identified radicals, and those who might revert to such extremist tendencies. This process is collaboratively undertaken with local actors. Secondly, the Ministry is responsible for crafting guidelines tailored for healthcare, public health, and social protection professionals. These guidelines are aimed at spotting individuals

who are susceptible to radicalization, and this is executed as part of a unified multi-sectoral protocol. Moreover, the Ministry organizes informative and awareness-raising events with a broad spectrum of stakeholders across various institutions, both locally and regionally. The intention behind these events is to pinpoint early indications of radicalism and violent extremism. Lastly, the Ministry handles case management, encompassing initial evaluations, comprehensive assessments, formulating intervention plans, and monitoring the implementation of these plans for individuals showcasing early signs of radicalization. Furthermore, the Ministry ensures that these cases are reported to the CVE Center.

- State Agency for Children's Rights and Protection

The Albanian State Agency for Children's Rights and Protection, operating under the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, holds a pivotal role in safeguarding children's rights and well-being in the country. In the context of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE), the agency's responsibilities can be surmised to encompass proactive initiatives, including organizing educational campaigns about radicalization dangers, instilling lessons of tolerance in school curriculums, and engaging communities to recognize and combat extremist ideologies. Monitoring children who might be at risk and promptly alerting relevant bodies is also within their preventive framework.

When it comes to children returning from war zones, the agency's remit is to ensure their seamless reintegration into society. This involves providing vital psychosocial support to address traumas, facilitating their reentry into the educational system, and equipping families with resources and counseling to help in the readjustment process. Such endeavors underscore the agency's commitment to both preemptively address extremist leanings and care for those affected by conflict, in collaboration with other national entities and policies.

- State Social Service

The Albanian State Social Service, operating under the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, is dedicated to assessing socio-health indicators against an array of factors—static, dynamic, and circumstantial—related to the rise of violent extremism and radicalism. This involves pinpointing areas or groups with a heightened risk factor, such as those showing early signs of radicalization, confirmed radicals, and those who have demonstrated tendencies to revert back to extremist ideologies. To address this cascade training specifically designed for health care, public health, social protection personnel, and public administration staff are organized by this entity. These training sessions are aimed at familiarizing them with the recognition and implementation of guidelines pertaining to extremist behaviors and tendencies. Furthermore, they've fostered a 'Training of Trainers' (ToT) network focused on understanding the intertwined relationship between mental health and the phenomenon of violent extremism, exploring both its root causes and resulting consequences.

In addition, the Albanian State Social Service also emphasizes awareness-building. By

developing multifaceted informative sessions, they ensure a multi-sectoral approach, roping in diverse institutional actors at both local and regional levels. This collaborative strategy, under the guidance of the Ministry of Health and Social Protection, is pivotal for the early identification of signs pointing towards radicalism and violent extremism.

2.5.3 Ministry of Education and Sports

The main competences and duties of the Ministry of Education and Sports are centered on fostering a safe and proactive educational environment. Specifically, they aim to empower communities and institutional bodies to recognize and promptly report instances of violent extremism and radicalism. This involves undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of schools to discern potential threats of violent extremism. In tandem, they work to integrate counter-violent extremism (CVE) measures with ongoing initiatives, especially emphasizing the "Schools as Community Centers" program in areas deemed high-risk for radicalization. This integration is bolstered with backing from various stakeholders in the initiative. Furthermore, the Ministry is proactive in devising specialized interventions for students displaying early signs of radical tendencies and in equipping educators with the skills needed to identify and address such behaviors.

In addition to fostering a secure learning environment, the Ministry orchestrates awareness campaigns in pre-university educational settings that underscore the perils of radicalism and methods to combat violent extremism. Sessions, designed with a gender-inclusive approach, actively engage parents, community members, and students to discern initial symptoms of extremist behaviors. A holistic educational experience is provided for students at high risk, incorporating them into extracurricular and scholastic activities that delve deep into preventing radicalism in innovative manners. To achieve this vision, a comprehensive collaboration is fostered among educational institution heads, teaching staff, psychologists, and security personnel, ensuring they are well-versed in recognizing and mitigating potential threats. Beyond the educational framework, the Ministry facilitates inter-agency collaborations, offering a range of services spanning from social care to professional development. Of paramount importance is the psychological support rendered to children reintegrating from conflict zones and those identified with radical inclinations.

2.5.4 Ministry of Justice and School of Magistrates

The primary roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Justice, in conjunction with the School of Magistrates, are centered on upholding the rule of law and ensuring the effective administration of justice. A significant focus of their mandate is to enable communities and institutional bodies to recognize and report incidents associated with violent extremism and radicalism. Key to this initiative is the systematic training of staff within the prison system and the probation service. These individuals are educated on the early indicators of radicalization and violent extremism to ensure a proactive approach in identifying potential threats. Additionally, to aid those

susceptible to radicalistic tendencies within the prison and probationary systems, the ministry is working on designing tailored professional programs. Furthermore, it's crucial for legal professionals, like prosecutors and judges, to be well-versed with the nuances associated with radicalism, and hence, specialized training sessions are conducted to equip them with the knowledge and skills required to handle such cases.

In parallel to the training and professional development efforts, there is a strong emphasis on awareness and information dissemination. The ministry recognizes the importance of enlightening those within the prison and probation systems about the risks and implications of violent extremism and radicalism. Awareness campaigns and programs are rolled out, targeting individuals involved in or vulnerable to radical ideologies, briefing them on the preventive measures against radicalism and the broader efforts to counteract violent extremism. The overarching aim is not just to intervene and prevent but to educate and reform, ensuring that individuals within the justice system are aware, informed, and resilient against the threats of extremism and radicalism.

- Special Prosecution Office against Organised Crimes and High-level Corruption

The Cross-Sectoral Strategy outlines institutional duties and engagements, encompassing preventative measures against violent extremism. This includes the involvement of the Special Structure Against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK) as reinforced by law no. 41/2021, dated 23.03.2021. This law made several

amendments to law no. 7905, dated 21.3.1995, known as the "Criminal Procedure Code of the Republic of Albania". Notably, the investigative authority over acts bearing a terrorist motive was shifted from the general jurisdiction prosecution offices to SPAK. This transition underscores the need to integrate this new responsibility into the measures and activities stipulated in the action plan of the overarching strategy to combat terrorism. Furthermore, this emphasizes the enhanced role of the Special Prosecution Office against Organised Crimes and High-level Corruption in tackling such threats.

- Probation System and Probation Service

The primary roles and responsibilities of the Directorate of Prisons and the Probation Service center on the safe management and rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals and those under probationary supervision. A critical aspect of their mandate is to bolster communities and relevant governmental bodies with the tools and knowledge to detect and notify authorities about instances of violent extremism and radicalism. This encompasses a deep dive into understanding the roots and methods of radicalization within the prison and probation ecosystems. Continuous training programs are initiated to enhance the skill sets of prison and probation staff, enabling them to employ specific assessment tools that identify individuals at risk, effectively manage cases, and share critical information.

To complement these foundational measures, the directorate focuses on devising and implementing awareness sessions tailored for

the prison and probation audience, ensuring that they are cognizant of the dangers of violent extremism. Emphasizing rehabilitation, group counseling sessions are organized to engage inmates and probationary individuals, addressing concerns tied to extremist ideologies. Special attention is given to vulnerable segments, especially the youth, through vocational and employment training schemes, ensuring they have a meaningful path post-incarceration. In anticipation of the release of vulnerable demographics like children, juveniles, and women, protocols are put in place to ensure smooth transitions and referrals for problematic cases. Innovative strategies like pilot programs for deradicalization and the reintegration of radicalized youth post-release are in development. Moreover, collaborations with law students on a pro bono basis further amplify the directorate's efforts, providing invaluable insights and preventive measures against radicalism and violent extremism within the prison and probationary environments.

2.5.5 Ministry of Defense

The core responsibilities and roles of the Ministry of Defense revolve around ensuring the security and stability of the nation, particularly through the management and training of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Albania. A paramount goal within their remit is to capacitate communities and institutional bodies to recognize and report incidents or signs of violent extremism and radicalism. To stay ahead of the evolving nature of threats, it's vital to consistently review and modernize the training curriculum for the Armed Forces personnel. This ensures that they are well-equipped to

understand and tackle contemporary forms of radicalization and extremism.

- Armed Forces

Simultaneously, the Ministry places significant emphasis on sensitizing Military Forces personnel about the potential dangers of violent extremism. Through comprehensive educational initiatives, personnel are trained to discern early indicators of radicalization and to recognize which groups or categories might be more susceptible to such influences. This proactive approach not only empowers the military but also reinforces national security by preventing potential internal threats.

2.5.6 Ministry of Finance and Economy

The central roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Finance and Economy focus on steering the nation's financial and economic direction. A key goal within this framework is to enable both communities and official entities to detect and report instances or signs of violent extremism and radicalism. In an effort to reintegrate radicalized individuals and those returning from war zones, the ministry recognizes the need to address the biases these individuals often face, particularly in the realm of employment. By fostering understanding and acceptance in businesses and the broader community, the goal is to create a more inclusive environment where these individuals can contribute constructively.

To further this reintegration effort, the ministry has formulated protocols to weave these individuals into active labor market programs. This includes a myriad of offerings, from employment services and

incentive schemes to dedicated professional training. The process aims to be comprehensive, providing personalized job application support for these groups. Recognizing the potential in entrepreneurship, the ministry also offers specialized training courses both online and offline to equip these individuals with the skills needed to establish and grow a business. Furthermore, in an effort to provide a holistic support system, priority is also given to families with radicalized members in housing programs, ensuring they too receive the necessary aid to build stable lives.

2.5.7 Local Self-Government Units

The main competences and duties of the Local Self-Government Units, specifically the Social Services Office in the Municipality, are aimed at empowering communities and public institutions to swiftly identify and report instances of violent extremism and radicalism. Their roles encompass the execution of the national exit program for beneficiaries of economic aid, giving priority to regions most susceptible to the phenomenon of radicalization and violent extremism. This involves adhering to the outlined strategies in the provided link which spans from 2020-2022 and further renewals of this plan. Furthermore, they are tasked with the formulation of a case management protocol tailored for incidents of violent extremism at the grassroots level. In addition, the municipality's Social Services Office plays a pivotal role in supporting radicalized individuals by assisting them with the application processes and documentation required for social housing programs. This comprehensive approach ensures that individuals at risk or affected by radicalization are given the necessary support and resources to reintegrate into society.

- Child Protection Units and Referral and Needs Assessment Units at Administrative Units' level

Child Protection Units (CPUs) play a crucial role in preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) in Albania, particularly concerning the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals, including children, who may have been involved in conflict zones. Currently the CPUs are Case Managers for all returnees in Albania.

Their primary responsibilities include:

Assessment and Identification: assessments are conducted to identify children and families who have returned from conflict zones or are at risk of involvement in violent extremism. These assessments help determine the specific needs and risks of each child and family.

Resocialization Planning: development of individualized resocialization plans for children who have been involved in conflict or extremist activities.

Community Engagement: engagement with local communities to build trust and cooperation.

Collaboration with Other Agencies: close collaboration with various government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and international partners involved in PCVE efforts.

Education and Enrollment: cooperation with local educational institutions to enroll children in appropriate classes and provide support for their educational needs. This includes setting up inter-subject commissions

to assess the educational and psycho-social needs of returnee children.

Legal Framework Compliance: addressing any potential legal issues or repercussions related to the children's involvement in conflict or extremist activities.

Psychological and Health Support: guaranteeing access to medical and psychological support.

Documentation and Identity: CPUs assist in the process of equipping returnee children with necessary identity documents, especially when they were born outside the territory of Albania or when their identification documents are no longer valid.

Monitoring and Follow-Up: regular assessments to track progress and address emerging issues, ensuring that the children's evolving needs are met effectively are conducted.

Interinstitutional Coordination: coordination and monitoring of the work of interinstitutional technical groups. These groups consist of representatives from various agencies and sectors and are called upon to assess cases with medium, high, or immediate risk, ensuring a comprehensive approach to addressing the needs of returnee children.

2.5.8 Albanian Investment Development Agency

The Albanian Investment Development Agency holds the primary responsibility of fostering investment opportunities and facilitating economic growth within the country. One of their significant aims is to equip both communities and official entities with the tools and knowledge to detect and

alert about instances of violent extremism and radicalism. This goal intertwines with the broader mission of the agency to ensure stable and prosperous economic development.

In line with this, the agency is championing initiatives to enhance the understanding within the business community regarding the importance of incorporating at-risk individuals in Public-Private Partnership (PPP) ventures. The idea is to better the economic circumstances by tapping into the dedication and commitment of these individuals, thus serving dual purposes – economic growth and social reintegration.

2.5.9 National Authority for Electronic Certification and Cyber Security

The National Authority for Electronic Certification and Cyber Security (AKCESK) is a public body, which functions under the authority of the Prime Minister, pursuant to Law No. 9880/2018 "On Electronic Signature", Law No. 107/2015, dated 1.1.2015 "On electronic identification and trusted services", Law No. 2/2017 "On cyber security". The authority aims to ensure reliability and security in electronic transactions between citizens, businesses and public authorities, by increasing the effectiveness of public, private services and electronic commerce; establish minimum technical standards for data security and information society networks/systems in accordance with international standards in this field, in order to create a secure electronic environment.

AKCESK has undertaken against the phenomenon of violent extremism the obligation to report denunciations to the

unique portal for signaling websites with illegal content. The illegal/harmful content reporting service aims to help children and young people to report illegal/harmful content encountered while surfing the Internet. The reports will be treated with complete confidentiality by the Responsible Authorities to evaluate the case, as well as to take immediate measures against these contents.

2.6 International and regional organizations and initiatives

2.6.1 International Organizations

Several international organizations, actors, and stakeholders were involved in the prevention of radicalization and countering of violent extremism in Albania. The specific activities and initiatives conducted by these organizations encompass the following:

- Community Engagement and Awareness Programs: These entities have initiated projects aimed a.t actively involving communities and raising awareness to tackle the fundamental causes of radicalization.
- Support and Counseling for Returnees: They have offered assistance and guidance to individuals who have come back from conflict zones, aiding in their rehabilitation and reintegration into Albanian society.
- Capacity-Building Programs: These organizations have introduced programs focused on enhancing the capabilities of various state institutions involved in preventing and countering violent extremism. This includes law enforcement agencies, probation services, and education departments.
- Observations and Assessments:

International organizations have conducted thorough evaluations and assessments to gauge the effectiveness of Albania's efforts in P/CVE. These evaluations have served as a valuable tool for refining strategies and aligning them with internationally recognized best practices.

Who	What
UNODC (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime):	UNODC has focused on strengthening Albania's response to terrorism within the criminal justice system. They've conducted comprehensive risk assessments to better understand potential threats. Additionally, UNODC has provided valuable training to law enforcement agencies, equipping them with enhanced capabilities to effectively combat violent extremism and terrorism.
UN Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women):	UN Women has emphasized gender-sensitive approaches in Albania's P/CVE efforts. Their work has included empowering women in various roles and actively engaging them in community-based preventive actions. By promoting gender equality and inclusivity, UN Women has contributed to a more comprehensive and effective P/CVE strategy.
OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe):	OSCE has played a pivotal role in Albania's efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism. They've initiated projects aimed at enhancing community resilience, fostering dialogue among different faiths, and strengthening the capacities of law enforcement agencies. These activities are vital for creating a cohesive and resilient society capable of withstanding extremist influences.
IOM (International Organization for Migration):	IOM has concentrated on migration management and social cohesion in the context of P/CVE in Albania. Their projects have focused on preventing radicalization among migrants and returnees. IOM's efforts aim to create a more inclusive and integrated society, reducing the risk of extremist ideologies taking hold.
EU-Funded Projects:	EU-funded projects in Albania, backed by the European Union, have been dedicated to preventing radicalization and promoting social inclusion. These initiatives often involve collaboration with civil society organizations, government bodies, and community leaders, creating a multi-faceted approach to P/CVE.
GCERF (Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund):	GCERF has supported Albania-specific initiatives aimed at preventing radicalization within local communities. They've provided funding for projects designed to engage community members actively and empower them to counter extremism,

	promoting community resilience.
UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund):	UNICEF has actively engaged in youth-focused programs in Albania to prevent radicalization. Their activities include educational initiatives, fostering youth engagement, and providing psychosocial support to vulnerable children and adolescents, ensuring they are less susceptible to extremist influences.
Hedayah:	Although not physically present in Albania, Hedayah offers valuable resources, research, and best practices. These resources serve as a valuable toolkit for local stakeholders and organizations involved in P/CVE, assisting them in their efforts to counter extremism.
US Embassy in Albania and US Small Grants Program for VE:	The US Embassy, through its Small Grants Program, has been a key supporter of community-based initiatives and projects aimed at preventing radicalization and countering extremism in Albania.
USAID (United States Agency for International Development):	USAID has provided critical support for various projects in Albania, focusing on P/CVE. Their initiatives include efforts to enhance community resilience and promote stability, contributing to a more secure and resilient society.
ICITAP and OPDAT (International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program and Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training)	These US government agencies have supplied technical assistance and training to law enforcement agencies and legal institutions in Albania. Their support has been instrumental in enhancing the capabilities of these institutions to investigate and prosecute cases linked to violent extremism, ensuring a more effective response to extremist threats.

Interventions in P/CVE by international bodies in Albania for 2023

Based on the updated reports and monitoring produced for 2023, the international organizations have been actively supporting P/CVE issues, mainly with the Coordination Center Countering Violent Extremism. These international organizations and initiatives have played diverse roles, including capacity-building, knowledge sharing, financial support, and project implementation, in Albania's efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism. The resulting projects and initiatives aim to enhance Albania's capabilities in addressing the complex challenges posed by extremism and terrorism.

Who	Role	Initiatives
US Embassy in Tirana and DASH:	Role: They have been actively engaged in discussions and working meetings with Albanian authorities to deepen cooperation in the fight against terrorism and extremism.	Initiatives: These interactions have resulted in enhanced collaboration between Albania's Ministry of the Interior and American structures responsible for Anti-Terrorism and Extremism. Round table discussions have been held to strengthen the joint fight against terrorism and extremism.
ICITAP (International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program):	ICITAP has been involved in senior-level meetings with Albanian authorities to discuss cooperation in the fields of counter-terrorism and prevention of violent extremism.	These discussions have likely led to collaborative initiatives aimed at enhancing institutional cooperation and capacity-building in the areas of counter-terrorism and PCVE.
GIZ (German Corporation for International Cooperation) and Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs:	They have organized training sessions related to financial investigations, focusing on best practices for interagency cooperation in the investigation of money laundering.	The training programs have likely improved the knowledge and skills of Albanian law enforcement agencies in combating financial aspects of terrorism and extremism.
Embassy of the Netherlands in Tirana:	The Embassy of the Netherlands has provided support and financing for the renovation and upgrade of institutions within the Albanian prison system.	The inauguration of the Institution for the Execution of Criminal Decisions in Pojska, Pogradec, which was renovated with Dutch support, demonstrates their commitment to improving the prison system and promoting rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.
Council of Europe:	The CVE Center has participated in activities organized by the Council of Europe, including regional meetings and projects.	The "Horizontal Instrument III" project aims to promote regional cooperation, networking, and knowledge exchange among penitentiary systems in the Western Balkans. It seeks to address strategic radicalization and violent extremism in prisons, among other related challenges.
International Organization for Migration (IOM)	IOM has been involved in discussions regarding the development of the ICRS system for electronic filing of files related to case management.	Collaboration with IOM may result in the implementation of the ICRS system, which could improve data management and information sharing related to PCVE efforts.

OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe):	OSCE has supported the establishment of a women's network and facilitated online meetings on the prevention and countering of violent extremism and radicalism leading to terrorism (P/CVERLT).	The women's network and online meetings serve as platforms for sharing best practices and experiences in P/CVERLT.
HOPE Project (Holistic Radicalization Prevention Initiative)	The CVE Center has participated in a high-level seminar organized by the HOPE Project in Sofia, Bulgaria, aimed at developing training programs and strategies for countering violent extremism.	The collaboration with the HOPE Project likely contributes to the development of PCVE strategies and recommendations in the Western Balkans.
GCERF (Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund):	The CVE Center participated in meetings and workshops organized by GCERF.	These engagements could result in collaborative projects and grants aimed at addressing vulnerabilities to violent extremism within Albanian communities.
Strong Cities Network:	The CVE Center has participated in regional activities focused on empowering youth to address extremism, hate, and polarization at the local level.	Participation in these activities may contribute to the development of local multi-stakeholder prevention mechanisms involving youth.
International Institute for Justice and Rule of Law:	The CVE Center participated in an international meeting on the repatriation of foreign terrorist fighters and displaced persons.	Albania's experience in repatriation and rehabilitation may have been shared to contribute to international efforts to address this global challenge.
US Department of State:	A high-level delegation from the US Department of State visited Albania to discuss bilateral cooperation in the fight against terrorism and extremism.	These discussions could lead to increased American support for Albania's PCVE efforts and the transformation of the CVE Center into a Counter-Terrorism and Extremism Agency.
UNICEF:	UNICEF has supported the setup of facilities for children's reception and interviewing in Albania.	UNICEF's support likely facilitates the proper handling and reintegration of children who are vulnerable to or affected by extremism-related issues.

Dutch Embassy in Albania	The embassy has engaged in discussions with the CVE Center regarding projects related to P/CVE	These discussions may lead to collaborative initiatives aimed at strengthening P/CVE efforts in Albania.

2.6.2 Regional Cooperation at the Western Balkans' level

Albania, much like its Western Balkan counterparts, has endeavored to curb the menace of violent extremism and the radicalisation that fuels terrorism in the region (P/CVELTR). These dedicated efforts are integral components of broader regional schemes and collaborative frameworks. Albania's role and contributions on the Western Balkans' regional stage concerning P/CVELTR issues can be delineated into several key facets.

A noteworthy feature is Albania's unwavering involvement in regional conferences, meetings, and workshops carefully tailored to tackle P/CVELTR concerns. The aforementioned events offer Albania an important forum for sharing insights, experiences, and best practices, cultivating a collective comprehension of the hurdles faced by the nation in conjunction with its neighboring Western Balkan countries.

Additionally, Albania participates in the coalition of the Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism Initiative, together with other countries from the region. This initiative, established to enhance regional cooperation, plays a crucial role in areas such as intelligence sharing, law enforcement, and the significant exchange of information regarding extremist threats.

Albania participates in regional projects and initiatives sponsored by the Western Balkans Fund, furthering their engagement. These endeavors frequently aim to enhance P/CVELTR initiatives and promote youth engagement and social cohesion, central aspects in countering the appeal of extremism.

Additionally, Albania forges strong partnerships with regional organizations, including the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). These alliances act as channels for addressing the complex array of challenges associated with P/CVELTR. These organizations frequently facilitate positive discussions and take lead in developing capacity at a regional level.

Albania actively participates in initiatives aimed at exchanging information and best practices, particularly in the field of P/CVELTR, aligning with its commitment to regional collaboration. Albania has shared valuable insights gained from the country's rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, community engagement initiatives and strategies for countering radicalisation within its prison systems.

Additionally, Albania has proactively participated in regional research projects and

studies aimed at exploring the dynamics of violent extremism and radicalisation. The information gained from these efforts greatly informs the development of policies and strategies at national and regional levels.

Civil society constitutes another essential area of involvement for Albania, where it collaborates with regional civil groups to promote community-led endeavors aimed at preventing extremism. These initiatives concentrate on cultivating tolerance, inclusivity, and community resilience for the sake of stability and security.

Albania's law enforcement and security agencies benefit from regional training programmes and capacity-building activities, enhancing their ability to tackle P/CVELTR issues.

Effective cross-border cooperation with neighboring countries is crucial in addressing security concerns, especially in preventing the movement of terrorists and facilitating the exchange of intelligence and vital information.

Lastly, Albania has a crucial role in enhancing regional resilience against radicalization and extremism. This necessitates a focused endeavor to empower the younger generation, augment educational prospects, and encourage community involvement, all of which are vital in combating extremist ideologies.

Albania's active participation in regional partnerships highlights its resolute dedication to address the challenges of violent extremism and radicalisation in the Western Balkans. Collaborating with neighboring countries and regional organizations, Albania seeks to enhance its ability to effectively prevent and counter these threats, thereby contributing to wider regional stability and security.

2.6.3 Regional Cooperation at the WB's level for 2023 (up to the latest updates)

Albania is actively and comprehensively addressing issues related to the prevention and countering of violent extremism (PCVE) in the Western Balkan region. This is evident through several initiatives, projects, and collaborations, underscoring Albania's commitment to regional stability and security.

Cooperation with the Regional Anti-Terrorism Advisor and Legal Advisor of OPDAT at the US Embassy highlights Albania's dedication to intensifying collaboration in the combat against terrorism and violent extremism in the Region. The objective of these talks is to incorporate and facilitate the participation of these significant figures in the efforts to thwart terrorism and extremism in the area.

Albania is actively engaged in regional workshops and programmes as well. The CVE Centre's involvement in the Western Balkans Regional Hub - Inaugural Workshop, arranged by the Strong Cities Network in Sarajevo, exemplifies its dedication to encouraging regional cooperation. This gathering united different parties, such as mayors, civic authorities, and experts from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. The conference aimed to exchange experiences and expertise in local Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) initiatives, identify shared challenges, and develop targeted solutions. Albania's participation in this

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regional collaboration demonstrates its proactive approach to enhancing city-led measures to mitigate hybridized and localized security risks.

Furthermore, Albania is an active member of regional organizations and networks committed to countering terrorism and PCVE. Attendance at meetings in Budva, Montenegro, concerning the Regional Network of CT-P/CVE National Coordinators (RNNC) of the Western Balkans and the IISG Regional Support Group for the Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism Initiative (WBCTi) underscores Albania's cooperation with its neighboring countries. These discussions offer a platform to jointly address terrorism and extremism.

Albania's engagement at the WB Region level is noteworthy, particularly its involvement in the meetings arranged by the International Organization for Migration as part of the "Building Institutional Capacities in the Western Balkans project. This initiative tackles the difficulties arising from the resocialization, reintegration, and rehabilitation of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and their families who have come back from conflict zones. Albania's engagement demonstrates its dedication to tackling the complex issues presented by foreign terrorist fighters in the area.

Additionally, Albania works closely with civil society groups, as evidenced by its involvement in the Final Regional Workshop hosted by the Young Women's Christian Association of Albania. This particular initiative aims to bolster women's local networks in order to combat violent extremism. The country's participation in the venture, which is backed by the American Embassy, highlights the importance of women and local communities in the fight against extremism.

Albania proactively addresses issues regarding PCVE in the Western Balkan region via engaging with international partners, participating in regional workshops and initiatives, collaborating within regional networks, involving international organizations, and cooperating with civil society. These combined efforts highlight Albania's proactive contribution to tackling the challenges associated with terrorism and extremism in the region as well as strengthening regional stability and security.

2.6.4 Latest initiatives performed in 2023 in cooperation with local actors/NGOs

In 2023, Albania demonstrated its commitment to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) through a series of initiatives and collaborations with various actors.

These initiatives and collaborations reveal Albania's multifaceted strategy for preventing and countering violent extremism in 2023. The approach involves government agencies, the private sector, civil society organizations, and international partners. The collaborations and initiatives thus demonstrate a noteworthy example of Albania's approach to this crucial issue. The country's comprehensive efforts to address violent extremism cut across several domains, including technology, cybersecurity, education, and psychosocial support.

The CVE Centre, in conjunction with the Vodafone Albania Foundation, held training

sessions for the Preventing and Monitoring Officers (PMFs) of the Administrative Units of Tirana. The main goal of this training was to introduce the "Bright Sky" application, which functions as a tool for tackling violent extremism. Furthermore, there were discussions related to the potential incorporation of a reporting function specific to cases of violent extremism. This endeavor emphasizes the integration of technology and public participation in Albania's efforts towards preventing and countering violent extremism.

Additionally, Albania played an active role in the "Challenges of Cyber Security in Albania" conference. This conference was a collaborative endeavor involving a range of stakeholders, including the National Authority for Electronic Certification and Cyber Security, OSCE Presence in Albania, USAID/DAI, and additional parties. The conference focused on strengthening cybersecurity measures within the country, addressing ongoing obstacles, and cultivating partnerships with specialists from the Diaspora. It emphasized the significance of protecting digital spaces from extremist activities.

The CVE Centre participated in presenting the National Report on Internet Safety for Children, highlighting Albania's dedication to addressing the online aspects of P/CVE. This initiative was coordinated by iSIGURT.al and the National Line for Safe Internet for Children. The emphasis on securing child safety in the digital realm corresponds with wider endeavors aimed at shielding susceptible individuals from extremist online influences.

The CVE Centre collaborated with the Institute for Democracy and Mediation to create training programmes for psychologists in the pre-tertiary education system. The aim was to equip these professionals with the capabilities and knowledge needed to detect, treat, and prevent radicalisation and violent extremism within educational institutions. This initiative exemplifies Albania's commitment to involving essential frontline actors, such as school psychologists, in its efforts towards preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE).

Additionally, the CVE Centre participated in a research visit to Kristiansand, Norway, organized by the International Volunteer Projects (PVN)/Albania. The main objective of the visit was to gain knowledge on Norway's successful strategy in preventing radicalisation and VE, while establishing partnerships with key stakeholders across Europe. This highlights Albania's determination in acquiring best international practices.

The CVE Centre partnered with Terre des Hommes (TdH) in a collaborative effort to host a reflective session, consisting of school psychologists who had completed professional development programmes. The objective of the gathering was to discuss the hurdles that children face when reintegrating into society after having spent time in conflict zones, whilst emphasizing their rehabilitation process. This demonstrates Albania's dedication to providing mental health assistance and reintegrating individuals impacted by violent extremism.

Additionally, the CVE Centre examined possibilities for cooperating with the Centre for Legal and Civic Initiatives (QNLQ) to discuss the provision of complementary legal

aid to citizens who have returned from conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. This collaboration emphasized Albania's commitment to addressing the legal and civic aspects of P/CVE.

Local organizations in Albania have been actively involved in projects related to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) and Rehabilitation and Reintegration (RRR) processes, particularly for individuals returning from conflict zones like Syria and Iraq. Here are some examples of projects conducted by local organizations in Albania:

Terre des Hommes Albania (TdH):
- ‹ Project Title: "Strengthening Women's Local Networks to Prevent Violent Extremism"
- ‹ Objective: Empower women and girls to play a central role in preventing violent extremism and promoting community resilience.
- ‹ Activities: Capacity-building programs, training, and awareness-raising initiatives targeting women and local communities.

Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM):
- Project Title: Various projects related to P/CVE and RRR.
- Objective: IDM has been involved in multiple projects aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism, often focusing on research, policy analysis, and capacity-building.

Center for Legal and Civic Initiatives (QNLQ):
- Project Title: Legal assistance and

support for individuals returning from conflict zones.
- Objective: Provide free legal assistance to citizens who have returned from Syria and Iraq, addressing their legal needs and helping with reintegration.

Shoqata Shqiptare e Inteligjencës Social Ekonomike (SHIS):
- Project Title: "Promoting Social Inclusion and Preventing Extremism among Youth"
- Objective: Engage young people in activities that promote social inclusion and prevent their radicalization or involvement in extremist activities.

Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC):
- Project Title: "Promoting Human Rights and Rule of Law in Countering Violent Extremism"
- Objective: Focus on human rights and rule of law aspects within P/CVE efforts, ensuring that rights are protected during the prevention and counteraction of extremism.

Albanian Institute for International Studies (AIIS):
- Project Title: Various projects related to security, terrorism, and extremism.
- Objective: AIIS has conducted research and analysis on security-related issues, including terrorism and extremism, contributing to policy development and awareness.

Center for Development and Integration (CDI):
- Project Title: "Building

Resilience and Preventing Violent Extremism among Vulnerable Communities"
- Objective: Targeting vulnerable communities, this project focuses on building resilience and preventing radicalization and extremism through various interventions.

Shkolla Politike e Këshillit të Evropës (School of Political Studies of Europe):
- Project Title: "Promoting Tolerance, Diversity, and Civic Engagement"
- Objective: Promote tolerance, diversity, and civic engagement as key components of P/CVE efforts, particularly among youth.

These local organizations have played a crucial role in implementing projects that address various aspects of PCVE and RRR processes. Their initiatives encompass awareness-raising, capacity-building, legal support, and community engagement.

2.7 Funding sources and needs in prevention of violent extremism and R&R

In the pipeline - the Evolution of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) Measures in Albania

1. Development of the "Standard Operating Procedure":

The CVE Center, in the aftermath of the action plan's implementation, has meticulously formulated the "Standard Operating Procedure". This pivotal document, intended for the initial rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals returning from the Syria-Iraq conflict zones, signifies a proactive measure towards reintegrating these individuals into society. After rigorous reviews and incorporation of feedback from relevant institutions, the document awaits the approval of the Minister of the Interior, marking a significant step in Albania's counter-extremism framework.

2. Collaboration with GCERF:

Marking a strategic alliance, the CVE Center's induction into the GCERF Board has yielded tangible outcomes. The creation of the "Technical Coordinating Mechanism" in January 2023 exemplifies a structured approach towards monitoring GCERF's interventions in Albania. Additionally, in a compassionate stride, the CVE Center, with GCERF's backing, has embarked on establishing a multidisciplinary center in Tirana. This center's mission is to render crucial services to children and families affected by the scars of violent extremism.

3. Regional Committees to Counter Radicalism:

Recognizing a gap in the national mechanism for timely identification and intervention in radicalization cases, an order of the Prime Minister established the "Regional committee for the prevention of radicalism and the fight against violent extremism" on October the 31st, 2023. This committee is expected to be soon gathered and become operational. This committee is anticipated to bolster Albania's responsiveness and efficacy in counter-radicalism endeavors This is a new mechanism that is very effective which

fills the existing gabs, where actors identify, gather and address the issues of VE. This committee is going to discuss local and regional issues which will be further addressed at central level. However this committee has not started its work, also it needs strengthen it with strategies and actions plan, to develop the capacities of main engaged actors. Its straitening ensure a collaborative framework involving central, regional, and local governments in efforts to counter violent extremism. Based on analysis CVE Teams considers the Committee to be fundamental since no regional coordinating mechanisms are in place in Albania based on an adopted piece of legislation. Based on the piece of legislation establishing the Committee prevention will be fostered at the regional level

4. Advanced Data-Driven Approach:

Information is pivotal in the fight against radicalism. The CVE Center, in collaboration with the International Organisation for Migration, has undertaken the onus of developing the ICRS system, an electronic database tailored for individuals returning from Syria and Iraq's conflict zones. Having completed the technical and legal assessments and having coordinated with both the Commissioner for Data Protection and the National Agency of Information Society, this state-of-the-art system is slated for deployment in the imminent six months.

5. Engagement with Prison Authorities:

The initial half of 2023 witnessed the CVE Center engaging in constructive dialogues with the General Directorate of Prisons. The discourse focused on curating a data management system to identify, monitor, and intervene in cases exhibiting radical extremist or terrorist tendencies within prison settings.

6. Role of Local Safety Councils:

The Local Safety Councils in Albania are recognized as the frontline defenders in PCVE efforts. Emphasizing the continuity of PCVE initiatives, these councils are tasked with not only perpetuating but also amplifying their preventive capacities. A significant facet of this mission includes addressing and neutralizing extremist content online.

7. Introduction of AKTE:

The Agency against Terrorism and Extremism in Albania (AKTE) represents a paradigm shift in Albania's counter-extremism measures. Distancing from mere violent manifestations to addressing extremist ideologies at their roots, AKTE's approach is inclusive and nuanced. AKTE's vision is to holistically counter and prevent radicalism, following established western standards, especially in the realms of de-radicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

8. Local Vigilance through KRPRLKEDH:

The establishment of the Regional Committee for the Prevention of Radicalism and the Fight against Violent Extremism (KRPRLKEDH) in proximity to each district is a testament to the decentralized approach Albania is adopting. This structure ensures that vigilance and preventive measures are localized and responsive.

9. New Competencies under the State Ministry for Local Government:

From September 2023 the Albanian Government has announced the establishment of a new State Ministry for Local Government and Arbjan Mazniku will hold the position of Minister of State for Local Government. The New State Ministry for Local Government, with its enhanced competences, is poised to play a pivotal role in the cooperation between the central and local government. This means that the Self-Government Units and other local government related services and units will see the inclusion of a new stakeholder whose competences and responsibilities will be further explored, as soon as a working agenda is revealed.
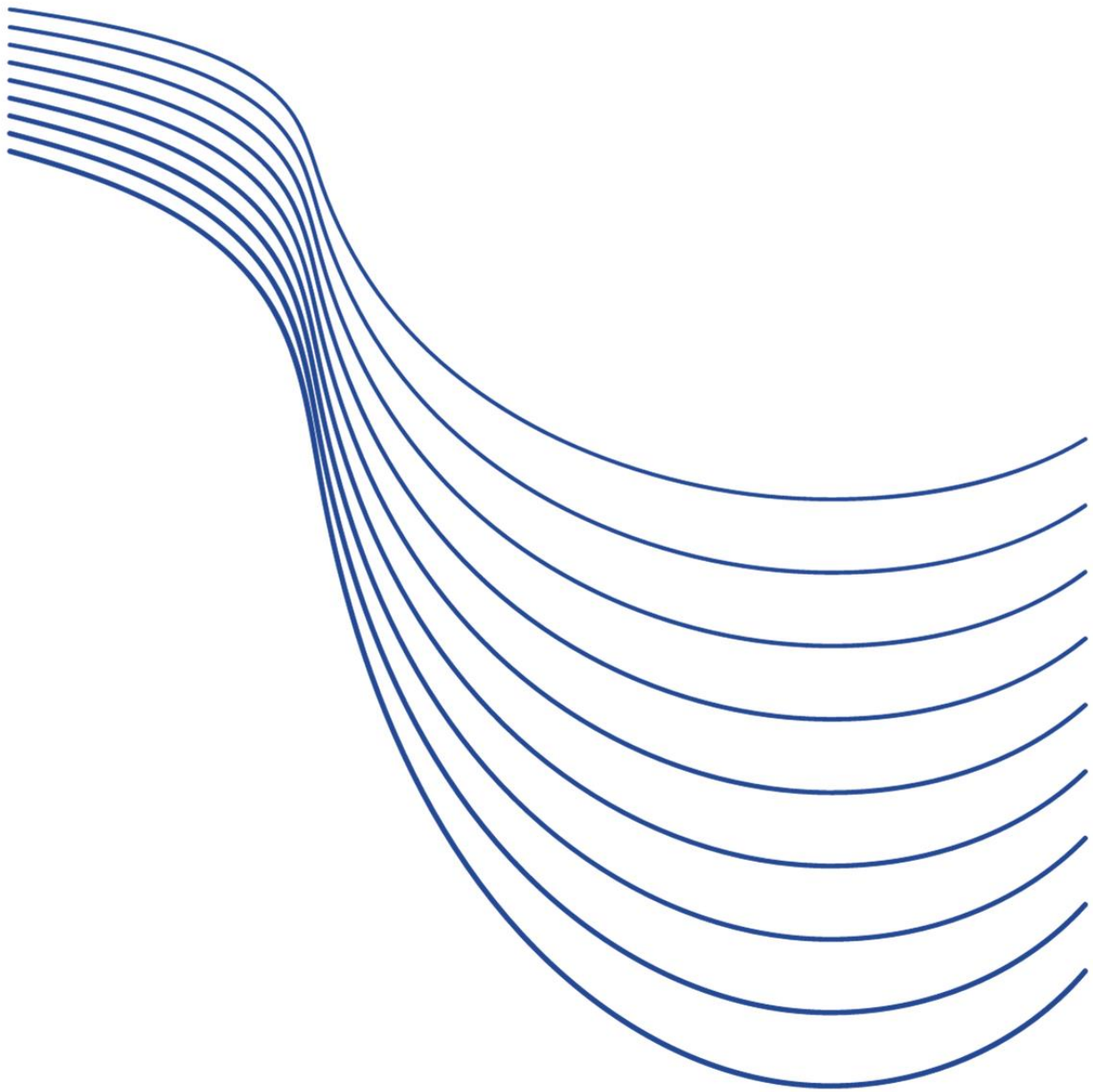
3. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

3. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Empirical findings of the assessment identify challenges and opportunities of work flow between institutions and other actors in Albania. The context for interviews puts them in a specific position of being in their work environment, however, most interviewees and focus group respondents gave the impression of honest and open answers during the interviews and focus group work.

Interviews represent administrative challenges and find pathways of work in reintegration of returnees from conflict zones in Albania but also flash out personal experiences that are very useful in setting strategies and vision for future work in the sector. Similarly, focus groups represent another way of empirical in depth understanding of the situation in Albania in regard to repatriation and reintegration of returnees. Administratively, similarities between focus group respondents and interviewees were found despite respondents being on different administrative and domain of work.

There are several major similarities and findings amongst interviewees and focus group respondents. One of the major findings is that there is an increased awareness and self-reflection of the need for reform and change in the system to make it work better. Commitments and dedication of civil servants and political appointees is fully compliant with expectations to perform their duties.

3.1 - Challenges and opportunities for prevention and RR of actors

3.1.1 Challenges at national and local level

Institutional collaborations
- **Strategy implementation :** One of the generic challenges across institutions, agencies and individuals was also the short term planning in policy documents and other approaches. There is a need to have a long term strategic goal and objective, along with pathways to reach those goals and objectives. This is reflected in the lack of cross sectoral strategy and the lack of financial budgeting from the government to implement the strategy actions. At the current state, only administrative costs are covered leaving many other activities such as training, visits, fieldwork and proactive work underfunded.

- **Clear institutional roles and willingness to collaborate:** In addition, the majority of the institutions remain challenged by the clear roles among them, collaboration at the institutional level, and coordination among them. The central and local stakeholders note the positive impact of the community and emphasize the need for better collaboration and sensitivity towards individuals and communities during the process of repatriation and reintegration.

There are institutions that consider VE a real risk, such as prisons, prohibitions, the armed forces, and schools, that lack information, in depth trainings and capacities to deal with cases and prevent VE.

- **Information flow and reporting:** A challenge remains information flow and reporting. Current procedures ensure one way communication and reporting but with many functions on the basis of good rapport between employees; however, sharing information and reporting on cases should be regulated with standard operating procedures and secondary legislation or executive orders. Data gathering functions very well but archiving and reporting is slow and without protocols. There is a particular need to improve reporting, archiving and information circulation.

- **Monitoring and evaluation**: Interviewees emphasize the challenge of lack of monitoring and evaluation of the countering violent extremism and prevention activities. This is a special challenge as there is a lack of lessons learned and pathways to improve services and effectiveness.

CVE Center

The Center for Violent Extremism in Albania has been created with the aim to combat, prevent and mitigate challenges of violent extremism. In addition to that, this center oversees repatriation and reintegration of returnees from conflict zones. Some of the challenges facing are:

- **Human resources:** During the first year of its functionality, the CVE Center faced and is still facing limited human resources and problems in coordination with other institutions.

- **National coordination:** Recently, the collaboration and coordination has improved but for its proper functionality, there is a need to have a more sophisticated national coordination of subordinates from the center, namely local coordinators. As the CVE Center collaborates intensively with third party organizations such as OSCE, UNICEF, GCERF, IDM, TDH, and there is a large quantity of communication from the CVE Center to beneficiaries and collaborating institutions, there is a need for content production and information campaigning materials.

- **Database and coordination of information:** A clear challenge identified by all respondents in interviews and focus groups is the lack of a unified system of information circulation. Each institution works out its own file system which is complicated, lacks access from institutions and all actors due to legal procedures and is ineffective. This system should be created with partial access for each institution and can limit sensitive data for other agencies according to authorizations. CVE could have such information and act as resource center and information crination for all ey actors in the field.

- **Financial sources:** For this, there is a need for better financial resources and management. In addition to communication, there is a need for the CVE Center to coordinate a holistic approach in training all staff involved to counter and prevent violent extremism. The training is sought to be comprehensive institutionally, so role play is involved with all institutions and individuals that are involved in repatriation and rehabilitation as well as countering and preventing activities. The CVE Center focuses on preventing violent extremism and rehabilitating and reintegrating returnees together with a line of institutions involved which are coordinated and subordinated by the CVE Center. With the latest changes on establishing the regional coordinators led by Prefect of the region, it comes a main need to strengthen the national and 12 regional coordinators

Community Policing

Community policing clearly remains a challenge. With the new changes the community policing prioritizes investigations and not prevention of violence or violent extremism. This will effect prevention needs as well as following up cases of repatriated individuals under rehabilitation and reintegration process. Clearly, the number of police dedicated to community policing is small and this will complicate prevention measurements. In addition, case officers (managers) and police community are overloaded with other duties and responsibilities of daily tasks, that rarely reflect on their repatriation, rehabilitation and

reintegration as well as countering and preventing violent extremism. Most times, their actions are not proactive but reactive to events and cases which affects the overall aim to work closely with the community to prevent violent extremism.

Challenges on local level

A challenge at the local level remains in coordination between municipalities and central institutions respectively, in defining roles and competence. So far, there is a lack of subordinative actions between two levels of power due to legal constraints. The policies are directed from central level government, whereas implementation is done via local level institutions. These actions depend on the willingness of the local government to allocate human resources and financial support.

The local government, particularly municipalities does not have a specified procedure or mechanism how to dirtily and manage cases, they lack knowledges. Different challenge is for Tirana municipality who is managing all the returnees. They have an ad hoc procedure, but they are overloaded and lack of human resources is a real challenge.

Local Public Safety Councils (LPSC)

The LPSC is seen as an effective tool for preventing radicalization, but there is a need for increased capacity and specialized institutions. The municipalities are working to establish a mechanism for preventing violent extremism, with a focus on hot spot areas but this is insufficient thus far. The

Pogradec municipality is highlighted as a showcase and has a case manager in every unit, but other municipalities have only one in total. Other municipalities have reported lack of trained personnel, lack of funding for activities and need for better coordination with central as well as international organizations. The involvement of the media, civil society, and the community is also crucial for success. The municipality has good cooperation with other local institutions, but there is a need for specialized services for reintegration.

Interviews identify the Local Public Safety Council (LPSC) weaknesses in the process of function. Legal and regulatory framework, communication, lack of training, and lack of coordination are identified weak links in the chain of actions that are required in the process of countering violent extremism. LPSC´s role, as identified in the first part of the report (page) requires strengthening in capacity development including equipment with operational procedures that cut down administrative burdens and time. Another weakness identified is the lack of resources both financial and human to address challenges. LPCS s have been developing both in human capacity and professionalization from 2016 when OSCE helped with establishing such institutions but only several municipalities have managed to functionalize LPCS s in lack of resources and human capacities. In addition, LPCS law is under discussions and receiving comments from different stakeholders, however it is not yet clear how the LPSC will function , also the Ministry is seeking for further expertise to make a comprehensive and implemented law. Despite LPCS being an essential mechanism for preventing violent extremism,

they lack significant attention from both central government and line ministries in the subject of countering and prevention of violent extremism.

Challenges of professionals

- **Specialized human resources and their supervision:** There is a need for supervision of professionals for the repatriated families as they face many challenges while working with this target group, such challenges which need to be discussed and analyzed among professionals, is a as well as having a psychological support and supervision. In a addition the civil society actors argue as a real challenges the lack of specialized and experienced human resources on dealing with returnees at all stages. The group's needs include simplifying professional language, building trust, and cutting down on civil procedures. Recommendations include increasing the capacity of professionals working with violent extremism cases and promoting tolerance and cooperation among institutions and individuals.

- **Staff changes:** In addition to all challenges, lack of long-term commitment of staff in positions proves to be challenging for institutions. Well trained individuals move from positions because of stress at work, difficulties to handle sensitive cases and other reasons. The process of training new staff takes a long time due to the lack of a training package ready for new staff that could be run systematically and on a need basis.

Challenges of the target group

In the process of repatriation and reintegration, the main challenge is **economic and psychosocial** sustainability of the target group. Working with returnees results in many challenges but key to addressing other challenges such as access to education, better integration with the receiving community and access to healthcare, depends on economic status.

Employment of returnees is identified as one of the main challenges because of cultural, religious and other reasons. Cultural reasons include the **stigmatization and prejudice** of mainly women who are repatriated with

children and religious barriers exist as well. There is a particular need for government sponsored programs in collaboration with the civil society to address economic integration of returnees. Along with this, there is a need for specialized services for reintegration through trust building, systemic support which should include psychological support as well. The importance of community perception and involvement in P/CVE efforts is emphasized, as well as the need for ongoing training and supervision for professionals working in this field.

Specialized services required for RR	Trust building	Community
	Psychological support	Institutional
	Fighting stigma	Social level

The need for specialized services for reintegrating individuals is highlighted, as well as the challenges of building trust and addressing the stigma associated with seeking psychological support is highlighted by many interviewees.

The challenge is the **demographics** of repatriated. Women and children make up the largest part of the repatriated population and besides lack of prosperity, they face other challenges such as **civil documentation, proof of identity, proof of paternity and other sensitive civil issues**. These challenges should be addressed with standing procedures in countries involving civil registry agencies. One of the identified challenges in this regard is **lack of communication** on the steps to be taken to address all civil related issues such as documentation. This communication should

include cooperation between schools, healthcare, and police.

The challenge of education flushes out and also lacks extracurricular education that compliments formal education. The Ministry of Education should encourage and allow extracurricular activities in schools with the aim to bring more information regarding violent extremism. Interviews point to the importance of religion as well. Engagement with religious communities is necessary, but with a well-designed curricular planning and oversight of content that is offered to the repatriated. Education and religion are intertwined. Activities include addressing extremism and reintegration with the help of community leaders. **Education and religion** can focus on addressing issues such as issues pertaining to hate speech online, online

influence of extremist views and other negative behaviors.

 Repatriated individuals and families return with basic needs to be addressed immediately. They require **food, clothing, and medical care**, as well as **psychological support** as the first step to re-integration. Second step starts with continuation of psychological support and addressing civil documentation and education & vocational training to self-sustain and fully reintegrate.

In current efforts and programs to reintegration, the CVE Center faces challenges such as a lack of trust from individuals towards psychologists, resistance to seeking services, difficulties in building rapport, and inappropriate meeting environments. Trust-building activities, training on psychosocial issues and addressing trauma are difficult and require systematic and long term approach.

A challenge is identified by interviewees that is related to **lack of availability of special therapy** for different groups. Although counseling is available and psychologists are proactive, the specialist approach for children and women as vulnerable groups is generic and consequently also assumed as ineffective. This delays the process of reintegration and rehabilitation of returnees which delays all processes in line.

3.1.2 Opportunities

Whole government approach

There is a need to create a *whole government approach* curriculum of all interventions where all participating institutions go for effective coordination and in depth training. This will not only provide different angles to the same training for different institutions but will provide a foundation for synergies between collaborating institutions and make sure of institutional memory continuation. This would address several challenges such as lack of communication between agencies, lack of coordination as well as the issue of staff leaving positions vacant or new staff needs for training.

The whole of government approach refers to the joint activities performed by diverse ministries, public administrations and public agencies in order to provide a common solution to particular problems or issues.

Such an approach should be employed in training, campaigns and overall repatriation and reintegration but also in countering and preventing violent extremism in society.

Psychologists should understand education challenges and education challenges should

understand administrative burdens as well as civilian documentation challenges.

Campaigns should be developed in the same approach jointly by institutions, civil society organizations and in partnership with the media. Target audience-based messages for gender, age, socioeconomic status and other factors should be taken into account. Especially vulnerable groups such as women and children were part of the discussions in interviews and focus groups

The whole of government approach	Central Government Institutions	Information at hand (leaflets)	Gender
	Local Government Institutions	Media productions-digital platforms	Age
	Non-governmental organizations	Televised campaigns One to one	Belonging
	International organizations	Two-way communication	Location
	Media		Receiving community

Capacity Building trainings

Although there are training initiatives from 2017 until now, and training that took place for different fragments of the circle of countering violent extremism and addressing repatriation and reintegration of returnees from conflict zones, the lifelong learning approach has not been considered as well as comprehensive training method was not sufficiently utilized. Training in the future should be designed to include all institutions involved in the processes of countering violent extremism and repatriation and reintegration of returnees from conflict zones. These trainings should be delivered to the whole group, so each group understands challenges of the next level.

The training package should include administrative procedures, repatriation processes and involved institutions but most importantly, it should include countering violent extremism, prevention, and mitigation of risks as civilian administrative staff without the need to securitize countering violent extremism. This curriculum would also include issues of education on religions, online and offline hateful commentary, general education and healthcare. CVE center should coordinate these trainings and provide both human resources as well as space for these coordinated efforts to increase capacities. Training of trainers should be worked together with international and national partners.

Whole of government training curriculum	Countering violent extremism	Online and offline hate speech Religious tolerance and harmony Peace and conflict resolution
	Preventing violent extremism	Online and offline hateful commentary Critical thinking and media literacy Peace and conflict resolution
	Repatriation and reintegration	Processes of RR Education, health, employment Social support / Reintegration

Mechanisms

Mechanisms for gathering and referring information for further investigation and intervention are in place and function well with horizontal collaboration institutions despite minor challenges. Recommendations from interviewees include increasing the capacity of those working with violent extremism cases both in reintegration and prevention as well as establishing specialized institutions where these challenges can be addressed to promote tolerance and cooperation. The importance of primary prevention through social education is emphasized, as well as the need for ongoing support services from the state.

Local government

The role of local government is seen as key to reintegration and empowerment through reintegration until full integration into society. A good example to follow is Tirana Municipality involved and helpful in the reintegration front. All the returnees are in Tirana and are case managers who deal with it successfully, however they feel overloaded, and somehow "alone" in this process. The good example of prevention and planning, even though it did not have cases but are hot spot is Pogradec Municipality. Although Pogradec remains low risk, the municipality has created plans for reintegration and policies for prevention of violent extremism. Other Municipalities of Albania, like Kukesi, Cerrik, Shkodra (who have been part of the interviews) are organizing preventive efforts such as information raising in communities and schools, however they still need to have

update information, trainings, as well as they lack procedures and information how to deal with a case identified or returned. Developing capacities in municipalities, proving them if updated information and resources are good steps toward successful prevention and RR.

Youth Engagement

There is a great opportunity to involve youth in a systematic way in reintegration of repatriated individuals from conflict zones. Creation of programs in youth clubs, youth centers and cultural environments where young individuals, women and men can attend trainings, attend general psychological trainings, and generally get to return to social environments in a more ´controlled environments´ is an opportunity for all institutions to create safe spaces for repatriated individuals and for the receiving community. Interviews and focus groups point to a feeling of positive discrimination in terms of benefits for the repatriated individuals and there is a genuine fear that scenarios where people pretend to get to extremist violence to enjoy benefits of being prioritized on education and receiving the aid packages on easier way to employment and access to services. Creation of safe spaces in youth centers means that the receiving community also gets to understand the repatriated community better and thus reintegration will be facilitated in a more natural way. These safe spaces can also serve as centers for early warning for various indicators for prevention activities in countering and preventing violent extremism.

Economic and psychological sustainability

Understandably, there is a need for economic sustainability of repatriated individuals and individuals with violent extremism tendencies. However, this should be addressed hand in hand with the education efforts. The focus group with psychologists highlights the need for economic independence among cases with violent extremism is very high and programs should prioritize vocational training, education efforts which lead to employment and economic independence. Also, continued psychological support is very important for the economic intervention to function. Psychologists agree that the risk of trauma making regression and potential for going back to violent extremism among repatriated individuals is very high unless other components such as training for employment, social integration and other factors are also fulfilled.

In psychological services, there is an opportunity to standardize interventions. Psychologists are present most times in RR processes but interventions differ and there is a need for a program which offers standard operating procedures with psychological advice. This should be known (in principle) to other involved personnel due to risk of intervention by the rest of the staff members. Coordination at this level is crucial to successful repatriation and reintegration. In this regard, the teams should receive input from local authorities on receiving community, psychologists, religious leaders, education institutions and possibly also input from economic factors such as business

associations. Entering in the job market is one of the greatest signals of successful reintegration.

Violent extremism online and hate speech

Interviews and focus groups identify a gap in knowledge and addressing among institutions involved with countering and preventing violent extremism in the field of ability to identify and address contents of violent extremism online and hate speech. There is a need to decipher cultural understanding of violent extremism and particular knowledge should be acquired through more training of specialist nature to unlock language and signs of violent extremism. Critical understanding of violent extremism in the local context and culture will lead to well-designed interventions and improvements. The need for specialized services for the rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees is emphasized, as well as the importance of tolerance and cooperation between institutions and individuals and this could be built through training of staff in specialist knowledge. The challenges faced by institutions include the risk of repeated cases of violent extremism.

3.2 - Prevention

Based on the current situation and the findings from the interviews and focus groups prevention efforts by the key actors are crucial to be focused.

Key institutions, such as schools, municipalities, and prisons, have made efforts to prevent VE over the years. An important role has been played by civil

society organizations through direct interventions in the institutional level, target groups and communities.

However, prevention does require sustainable and ongoing initiatives. In addition, it does require a clear prevention plan and mechanism which connects all these institutions and actors. Even though some events might look repeated, it is considered a must to be continued at all levels.

There is considered an inclusive approach to effective prevention, and each actor has an important role in it. The main responsible institution is considered the Ministry of Education and Sports through the prevention actions organized in the schools with teachers, pupils, staff and community interventions. The ministry has an action plan to combat radicalization and violent extremism in the schools, main actions are implemented or are under implementation, however, there is still need to make further efforts. A major effort is emphasized on preventing online radicalization in schools, as well as a worrying trend is bullying, which leads to radicalization. There are no measurements, either reporting mechanism in the schools to identify, report or manage online radicalizations, as well as any other form identified.

The security officers in the schools emphasize the need to further develop their capacities, as they have the most important role in prevention. Also, they state the need to have better collaboration with the teachers, psychologists and social workers in the schools.

Community police have had close collaboration with the schools and municipalities for managing the returnees; together, they have taken impactful steps toward useful management; however, they are overwhelmed with duties, and this vague their role in prevention. The preventive role of community policing is even weaker with the new changes on the structure, where their primary roles are investigations. These might affect their important role in the community; therefore, such changes should be monitored for the future.

Municipalities make some prevention actions through information in the community and in collaboration with the schools and other local institutions. However, there is a need for updated materials, information, procedures and mechanisms on how to identify cases, what steps to take , and how to proceed in case they have identified cases. This is the task of the child case managers, who still are overwhelmed, as well as needs further support and training, also to share some tasks with other sectors in the municipality. In addition to training the municipalities (especially those small and outside of Tirana, but still in hotspot areas) to have guiding materials will clear steps on how to identify, how to refer and manage classes they have identified.

The continuous preventive efforts are done by NGOs in Albania. They have been focused on young people and communities in hotspot areas. The main challenge for them is the funding resources, lack of trained human resources and expertise to identify and work with cases. However, they already have built some ground, have experiences and capacities to make impactful work, but long term funding would make it possible to

organize effective prevention campaigns and measurements. As an effective opportunity for the future it sees the close collaboration among small grassroot organizations and those having a valuable experience on managing funds, this could be through consortium and subgratings for small NGOs, as this would allow better community intervention as well as opportunities to learn and grow.

As a real risk the violent extremism is seen in the armed forces, prisons and prohibitions, where they state the need to increase their capacities on prevention, also update informative materials

Local Public Safety Council

Local Public Safety Councils is considered an important prevention a mechanism. It started to be piloted in 2016 by OSCE in Albania and then later supported and implemented by other organizations in Albania. At the piloting stage, all 61 municipalities recognized it as a preventive mechanism for all security issues in the municipalities.

Over the years, it has been realized that almost only the Elbasan model is functioning due to the goodwill commitment of Mayors and the person coordinating it, as well as institutional collaborations in the city, mainly with the prosecutor's office.

From the interviews and focus groups, it is pointed out that this is a very important consultant mechanism for prevention as well as preventing VE in Albania. However, many challenges and opportunities should be addressed.

According the the interviews with the key

stakeholders (municipalities and civil society organizations) following the LPSC process , first has to have its legal framework, a comprehensive law which is inclusive and easily implemented. It should be followed by establishing a regulatory framework. By making this mechanism mandatory for the institutions and not be dependent on the will of the Mayer, as it has been functioning so far in Elbasan , and few other Municipalities like Pogradec. Having a legal and regulatory framework should be followed by capacity building training , especially for the main coordinators of LPSC. It argued that the development of the capacities should be done by well-experienced organizations, especially organizations which might have better expertise. It is particularly important to standardize the implemented model of LPSC , as well as coordinate the interventions and projects in the municipalities. There are certain organizations who have supported LSPC in some cities of Albania, where there has been seen the phenomenon of implementing diverse models in different municipalities, also cases overlapping in some municipalities, and completely missing initiatives in other cities.

3.3 Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returnees in Albania: A Multi-Agency Integrated Approach

Detailed mapping of Albania end-to-end process on Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Resocialisation, key actor and institutions at each different stage, their function, linkage and working modality.

The successful rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals returning from conflict zones represent a critical element of Albania's multifaceted efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism (PCVE). This chapter delves into the comprehensive Repatriation, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (R&R) programs initiated by the Albanian government, emphasizing the Multi-Agency Integrated Approach. It explores the collaborative efforts involving various government agencies, NGOs, and international organizations, highlighting the key phases of the rehabilitation and reintegration process for returnees into Albanian society. In addition, this reflects a detailed mapping of Albania end-to-end process on Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Resocialisation, identify key actor and institutions at each different stage, describes their function, linkage and working modality

3.3.1 Albania's Challenge and Response

Albania faced a significant challenge when a considerable number of its citizens left for conflict zones in Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2015. Official data estimates that approximately 144 Albanian citizens, including 38 children, 27 women, and 79 men, joined these conflicts during this period. In response to the growing concern, the Albanian government initiated a series of measures to address the issue, including changes to the Criminal Code, capacity-building for law enforcement, the establishment of the Center for Coordination Against Violent Extremism, and approval of the national strategic framework for the prevention of violent extremism.

3.3.2 Rehabilitation & Reintegration & Resocialization (RRR) Programs in Albania

To address the complex issue of repatriation and reintegration, Albania has implemented a series of RRR programs, as outlined below:

1. Pilot program at the Municipality of Cërrik (for Albanian citizens returned before 2014, before the changes in the Criminal Code) in May 2020

2. Second repatriation of Albanian women and children in October 2020

3. Third repatriation of Albanian women and children in August 2021

4. Fourth repatriation of Albanian women and children in May 2022

These programs have facilitated the return and reintegration of a total of 87 individuals, including 8 men, 16 women, and 63 children, into Albanian communities.

	No. returnees	No. men	No. Women	No. Children	Reintegration into communities
Pilot program Cërrik Municipality (citizens voluntarily returning to Albania)	50	8	7	35	50
First Repatriation 27.10.2020	5	0	1	4	5
Second Repatriation 01.08.2021	19	0	5	14	19
Third Repatriation 27.05.2022	13	0	3	10	13
Total	87	8	16	63	87

- The Multi-Agency Integrated Approach

The successful rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals returning from conflict zones is not only a humanitarian imperative but also a crucial aspect of national security and stability. Albania, like many other countries, has grappled with the challenge of reintegrating its citizens who had joined conflicts abroad. To address this challenge, the Albanian government implemented a comprehensive approach known as the Multi-Agency Integrated Approach. This approach is not only noteworthy for its commitment to the principles of human rights and social inclusion but also for its effectiveness in mitigating the risks associated with returnees.

- Key Components of the Multi-Agency Integrated Approach

1. Coordination and Collaboration

Central to the Multi-Agency Integrated Approach is the coordination and collaboration among various stakeholders, including:

1. Government Agencies: Multiple government agencies, such as law enforcement, social services, health, education, and justice, work together to provide a seamless and comprehensive response.
2. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): NGOs play a vital role in delivering specialized services, including psychosocial support, counseling, and vocational training.
3. International Organizations: Collaboration with international organizations ensures access to additional resources (such as humanitarian aid, equipment, etc.), expertise, and best practices in the field of rehabilitation and reintegration.

4. Needs Assessment and Individualized Planning

Returnees undergo a thorough needs assessment to identify their specific requirements in terms of physical, psychological, social, and legal support. Individualized rehabilitation and reintegration plans are then developed based

on the assessment results. These plans are dynamic and responsive to the evolving needs of each returnee.

5. Specialized Services

The Multi-Agency Integrated Approach ensures that returnees have access to a wide range of specialized services, including:

- Medical and Psychological Support: Returnees receive medical and psychological assessments to address immediate health or trauma-related issues. Ongoing mental health and psychosocial support are provided to address trauma and emotional challenges.

- Education and Vocational Training: Programs are offered to acquire new skills and knowledge, empowering returnees to pursue educational and vocational opportunities.

- Legal and Documentation Support: Ensuring that returnees have the necessary legal documentation is essential for their reintegration into society.

- Family Reunification: Efforts are made to facilitate family reunification when it is possible and desirable.

6. Gradual Reintegration

Returnees undergo a phased reintegration process that prioritizes their gradual reintegration into their communities. This comprehensive approach encompasses various elements:

- Community Engagement: Returnees actively participate in group activities, workshops, and discussions, fostering a sense of community and belonging. These initiatives address potential feelings of isolation or alienation and promote social cohesion by encouraging interaction between returnees and the broader community.

- Follow-Up Support: Ongoing support, counseling, and monitoring continue to ensure successful reintegration. This includes tailored assistance in finding employment or income-generating opportunities. Securing meaningful employment is crucial for financial stability and reducing the risk of individuals returning to extremist activities due to economic vulnerabilities.

- Social Reintegration: Efforts are dedicated to facilitating returnees' acceptance and support within their families and communities. Albania recognizes that successful reintegration is not solely an individual endeavor but a communal one. Strengthening familial and community bonds creates a more inclusive and supportive environment for returnees, contributing to their overall well-being.

- Continued Education and Training: Returnees receive

support for further education and skills development, empowering them to pursue their aspirations. This support may involve returning to school, attending vocational training, or participating in skill-building programs. Equipped with enhanced knowledge and skills, returnees are better positioned to make positive contributions to society.

- Economic Reintegration: A distinct focus is placed on economic reintegration. Albania acknowledges the significance of financial stability and independence in preventing recidivism into extremist activities. Economic reintegration initiatives help returnees reintegrate into the workforce and society, reducing their susceptibility to extremist influences by addressing economic vulnerabilities. These efforts not only benefit individuals but also contribute to the nation's security and prosperity.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

Regular assessments and evaluations are conducted to track the progress of returnees and address emerging issues. Continuous monitoring ensures that returnees' evolving needs are met effectively.

3.3.3 End-to-end Mapping of R&R Processes

COORDINATION CENTER COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM (CVE CENTER) — Coordination and monitoring of the progress of the processes for all the institutions involved	Involved institutions	Applied procedures	Needs	72-hours phase	7-days phase	14-days phase	30-days phase	Reintegration Phase
	RECEPTION CENTER (RC)	Establishing a working group with psychologists 24/24 monitoring of returnees Giving donors access to Reception Center	Equipment of working tools in the reception center from donors Equipment with basic living material for the stay of the target group	Providing psychological assistance	Weekly reports with psycho-social assessment by the specialized staff of the RC	Weekly reports with follow-up psycho-social assessment by specialized RC staff and external experts	Weekly reports with follow-up psycho-social assessment by specialized RC staff and external experts Preparation of exit file of returnees for R&R in the community	
	Ministry of Health and Social Protection	Establishment of the working group by Ministerial Order Standard Operating Protocol Training/Information	Identification of staff in charge of providing service and assistance Identification of the environment for their	Providing first medical / forensic / psycho-social assistance	Evaluation of preliminary reports Development of psycho-social sessions Monitoring 72 hours/ 14 days / 30	Evaluation of following reports Development of psycho-social sessions Monitoring 72 hours/ 14 days / 30 days (in shifts)	Final assessment Development of psycho-social sessions Monitoring 72 hours/ 14 days / 30	Establishment of the working group by Ministerial Order Standard Operating Protocol Training/Information Humanitarian package (partially covered)

	Humanitarian package (partially covered)	placement during the rehabilitation process Information on files Humanitarian package			days (in shifts)	Identification of Child Protection Officers for pre-preparation of resettlement in the community	days (in shifts) Drafting of the first individual rehabilitation plan	
	Ministry of Interior (including Agency for the Support of Self-Government Units ó local government)	Compilation of files with profiles for each repatriated citizen Development of meetings with family members Evidence of an accommodation environment/hosting structure Preliminary verification of citizens	Providing suitable premises for conducting the interviewing and documentation process. Provision of necessary equipment for documentation Coordination for the registration of unregistered minors Securing the area from a security point of view	Creation and completion of individual files Starting the interview process Evidence and documentation of material evidence Daily assessment of security parameters (access they will have with external factors) Creation of profiles for each	Drafting of individual plans for re-integration into the community Coordination with Civil Register for the registration of minors Coordination with Special Prosecution Office regarding the investigative process for adult citizens and the referral of materials to the Special	Coordination at the local level with all the actors involved in those municipalities where it is thought to be re-integrated The working group conducts meetings with families, the community and religious communities in the areas where they are expected to settle Continuous monitoring of security measures	Coordination with other relevant institutions – Self-government Units Coordination with other relevant institutions regarding housing needs from the local government Coordination regarding the needs for financial support/employment with local government	Accompanying to the apartment according to the designated areas Designing a monitoring protocol Development of work plans for case monitoring Periodic (weekly) reporting from Community Policing Officer (CPO) to the structure on the progress of cases CPO coordinates information with other relevant structures Drafting of individual child protection plans by CPU of Administration Unit (neighborhood administration office) of the respective Municipality

			Contacting family members	repatriated citizen	Prosecution Office Development of meetings with family members	Training of Community Policing Officers in the areas where citizens are expected to move and introduction to Child Protection Officers	representatives.	
	Ministry of Defense	Capacity building of responsible personnel	Relevant information on the data of returning individuals and their legal status	Coordination with relevant institutions on the criminal legal status of returnees	Preparation of detention institutions for the reception of individuals who will be criminally prosecuted	Preparation of detention institutions for the reception of individuals who will be criminally prosecuted; Identifying cases that need free legal aid	Preparation of detention institutions for the reception of individuals who will be criminally prosecuted; Identifying cases that need free legal aid	Follow-up of individual treatment plans in the relevant Institutions for the Execution of Criminal Decisions (if applicable); Follow-up of free legal aid for identified cases;
	Ministry of Education and Sports	Instruction of the Minister for the reintegration of children	Coordination at the Ministerial Capacity building of	Coordination at the central level with Ministry and	Coordination at the central level with Ministry and	Coordination at the central level with	Assessment of children's knowledge; Drafting of individual	Registration of children in school; Providing children with free textbooks;

		returned from conflict areas to school	responsible personnel	local structures	local structures	Ministry and local structures	plans of children for treatment at school; Determining the schools where the children will be re-integrated	Monitoring of children for the implementation of the individual plan drawn up; Re-integration of children in pre-university education schools.
CVE Center		Protocol for the rehabilitation and reintegration of persons returned from conflict areas	Coordination with the Ministries and donors for coming to the aid of the returned citizens within the basic needs they have	Coordination and monitoring of the progress of the process; Coordination for the drafting of information with the press office in the Ministry of Interior and the institutions involved in the process	Coordination and monitoring of the progress of the process; Coordination for the drafting of information with the press office in the Ministry of Interior and the institutions involved in the process	Coordination and monitoring of the progress of the process; Coordination for the drafting of information with the press office in the Ministry of Interior and the institutions involved in the process	Coordination and monitoring of the progress of the process; Coordination for the drafting of information with the press office in the Ministry of Interior and the institutions involved in the process	Coordination with Ministries and donors to come to the aid of returnees in the context of their successful re-integration and rehabilitation in the community based on their needs

- The Phases of Rehabilitation and Reintegration

The successful rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees in Albania follow a structured process consisting of several phases:

Initial Contact and Assessment (72 Hours):

- Arrival and Reception: Returnees are received at designated reception centers, where initial identification and security screenings take place.
- Basic Needs Assessment: Immediate assessment of returnees' essential needs, such as food, shelter, and medical care.
- Security Measures: Ensuring the safety and security of both returnees and staff.
- Orientation: Providing returnees with initial orientation about the facility, its rules, and expectations.
- Detailed Needs Assessment: A comprehensive assessment of returnees' physical, psychological, and social needs.
- Medical and Psychological Evaluation: Identifying and addressing immediate health or trauma-related issues.
- Individualized Case Planning: Developing personalized rehabilitation and reintegration plans based on assessments.
- Security Clearance: Conducting further security checks and assessments.
- Access to Services: Connecting returnees to essential services, including medical care, hygiene facilities, and nutritional support.

Customized Rehabilitation Planning (7 days):

- Case Management: Collaborating with returnees to create personalized rehabilitation plans.
- Trauma-Informed Care: Providing specialized care and support for returnees who have experienced trauma.
- Educational and Vocational Assessments: Identifying returnees' educational and vocational needs.
- Legal and Documentation Support: Ensuring returnees have appropriate legal documentation.
- Family Reunification: Exploring possibilities for family reunification if applicable.

Transition to Rehabilitation (2 Weeks):

- Education and Skills Development: Offering educational programs and vocational training.
- Psychosocial Support: Providing ongoing mental health and psychosocial support.
- Community Engagement: Encouraging participation in group activities, workshops, and discussions.
- Counseling and Rehabilitation Sessions: Conducting regular sessions based on individualized plans.

- Reintegration Planning: Preparing returnees for eventual reintegration into the community.

Community Reintegration (30 Days):

- Gradual Reintegration: Facilitating the gradual transition of returnees back into the community.
- Follow-Up Support: Continuously providing support, counseling, and monitoring.
- Employment and Livelihood Support: Assisting returnees in finding employment or income-generating opportunities.
- Social Reintegration: Fostering family and community acceptance and support.
- Continued Education and Training: Supporting further education and skills development.

- Monitoring and Evaluation: Regular assessments to gauge progress and address emerging issues.

3.3.4 Institutional engagement in the R&R phases

R&R Phases	Responsibilities by Ministry/Agency				
	1. Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs	**2. Ministry of Interior**	**3. Ministry of Health and Social Protection**	**4. Ministry of Justice**	**5. CVE Center**
Phase I: Preparatory Phase	- Provision of transit permits for transport Lebanon - Albania	- Assignment of temporary accommodation for phase III	- Processing preliminary information and measures for the development of analyzes on epidemiological / infectious diseases	- Preliminary information on individual files for each returned citizen	- Coordination of steps to implement the plan
	- Selection of the airline that will perform the flight	- Adaptation of dining and reception facilities	- Preliminary information on the health history of citizens registered in Albania	- Identification of issues that need free legal assistance	- Coordination with partners and international organizations on urgent needs of citizens
	- Sending the support team (Antiterrorism Directorate, State Intelligence Service, doctors, translators) from Tirana	- Securing the territory	- Drafting of the action protocol	- Increasing the capacities of responsible personnel	- Drafting and distribution of the confidentiality statement to frontline employees
		- Sending detailed information to each citizen on their needs			
		- Preliminary verification of persons who are expected to return			
		- Coordination with other institutions and working groups			
		- Provision of airport transport – accommodation			
		- Drafting and implementation of the media communication protocol			

	1. Ministry of Interior	2. Ministry of Health and Social Protection	3. Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy
Phase II: Arrival and Isolation	- Carrying out procedures for the identification, verification, and registration of citizens	- Equipping staff with kits against infectious diseases	- Taking necessary measures at Rinas Airport
		- Providing necessary ambulances for possible transport of citizens in serious condition	- Guaranteeing conditions for successful verification process
		- Conducting Covid-19 tests for all citizens	- Provision of a special stopping place for the aircraft and verification teams

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	1. Ministry of Interior	2. Ministry of Health and Social Protection	3. Ministry of Justice	4. Ministry of Education and Sports	5. CVE Center
Phase III: Temporary Accommodation and Initial Procedures	- Reception of citizens by the staff	- Providing medical/psycho-social assistance	- Concrete assessment of the needs of individuals, with a focus on children and women for "Primary Legal Aid" and Secondary Legal Aid"	- Construction of profiles of children who will be re-integrated into school	- Coordination with line Ministries in terms of communication with the media
	- Provision of appropriate food (halal) by the canteen staff	- Development of sessions/interviews		- Determination of schools according to the geographical area for accommodation	- Distribution of aid (hygiene-sanitary materials and appropriate clothing)
	- Registration by DPGJC for babies born in Syria	- Carrying out preliminary assessment reports		- Coordination with Ministry of Education and Sports structures at the local level	- Providing assistance for all links of the process by coordinating activities between Ministries and donors
	- Carrying out the process of taking photographs and fingerprints	- Monitoring their progress		- Completion of individual files of children who will be included in the educational system	
	- The beginning of the interview phase in cooperation with the Prosecutor's Office	- Conducting additional tests, if necessary, by the medical staff		- Drafting of the individual learning plan for each child	
	- Communication with family members whether they will wait for returnees or not	- Development of recreational/playful processes with children		- Assessing the needs of children with developmental disorders and preparing the module for treatment at school	
	- Preparing the ground with local government representatives	- Finding shelters for children without family members or whose family members refuse to accept them			

	1. Ministry of Interior	2. Ministry of Health and Social Protection	3. Ministry of Justice	4. Ministry of Education and Sports	5. CVE Center
Phase IV: Reintegration in the Community	- Continuous monitoring of their progress in the field	- Confirmation of the need for social care institutions for children and girls/women	- Continuous follow-up of the needs of returned citizens regarding the issues of free legal aid that will be offered in the future	- Provision of support staff for schools that will reintegrate students	- Coordination with Ministries and donors for successful re-integration and rehabilitation in the community
	- Continuous interaction with the Local Government to ensure their successful rehabilitation and re-integration/re-socialization in the community	- Facilitation for completing the appropriate documentation		- Creation of a working group for treatment at school	- Monitoring their progress with psycho-social staff and social service in the field
		- Drafting of individual plans for children/girls/women		- Knowledge level testing	- Coordination for their education and employment needs in the community
		- Assessments on the mental health of children/girls/women		- Provision of free textbooks and school materials	- Continuous monitoring and coordination with donors and NGOs to cover their needs
		- Vaccination planning		- Drafting of individual plans for de-radicalization by the workgroup at the school	- Development of community projects to oppose marginalization and promote interaction in the community
				- Advice on the rights and duties of students	
				- Involvement in extra-curricular activities for students, parents, teachers, and the community	
				- Periodic monitoring and reporting on progress to local monitoring structures	

3.3.5 Establishment of the Interinstitutional Technical Group

The Interinstitutional Technical Group plays a pivotal role in the success of the rehabilitation and reintegration process. This technical, cross-sectoral group convenes at the request of the director of the structure responsible for social services at the municipality level or the child protection worker at the administrative unit level. It comprises representatives from various sectors and organizations, including:

- Police Structures
- Social Services Structures
- Local Educational Institutions
- Health Structures
- Justice Structures
- Non-Profit Organizations
- Other Specialists with Relevant Knowledge

Participation from the mentioned structures is mandatory, and the case manager has the authority to request the involvement of professionals from other structures as needed.

The Interinstitutional Technical Group convenes when the Child Protection Unit or the Child Protection Worker assesses the risk to the child as medium, high, immediate, or when the case is complex, even if it has a low risk. The group's role includes reviewing and approving individual project protection plans.

In addition to the comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration process, Albania has established the Interinstitutional

Technical Group to further enhance support for returnees and children at risk. This group consists of representatives from various sectors, including police, social services, education, health, justice, non-profit organizations, and other specialists who can contribute to child protection efforts. The group convenes in response to identified risks, ensuring that the most appropriate and comprehensive measures are taken.

The participation of representatives from relevant structures in the Inter-Institutional Technical Group is mandatory. The group is called when the Child Protection Unit or Child Protection Worker assesses risks as medium, high, immediate, or when cases, even with low risk, are highly complex. The group is led by the director of the structure responsible for social services at the municipality level or the child protection worker at the administrative unit level.

The Inter-Institutional Technical Group plays a crucial role in assessing risks, developing individual project protection plans, and coordinating efforts to protect children and returnees effectively. Its establishment reflects Albania's commitment to a coordinated and multidisciplinary approach to safeguarding vulnerable individuals.

3.3.6 Resocialization

The journey of rehabilitation and reintegration goes beyond the restoration of basic needs and skills. It extends to resocialization, a critical aspect of ensuring that returnees are integrated as productive and law-abiding members of society.

Resocialization involves the following components:

Counseling and Mentorship: Returnees receive counseling and mentorship to assist them in adapting to the social norms and values of their communities. This guidance helps them navigate the challenges of reintegration and build positive relationships with peers and neighbors.

Conflict Resolution Skills: Returnees are provided with conflict resolution skills to help them manage disputes peacefully and constructively. These skills contribute to community cohesion and reduce the risk of returnees resorting to violence.

Community Involvement: Encouraging returnees to engage in community activities, volunteer work, or civic initiatives fosters a sense of belonging and responsibility. Active participation in community life helps break down barriers and dispel stigmas associated with their past.

Public Awareness Campaigns: Public awareness campaigns are conducted to educate communities about the challenges faced by returnees and the importance of their successful reintegration. This promotes empathy and understanding within society.

Reconciliation Initiatives: Efforts to facilitate reconciliation between returnees and the wider community are crucial. These initiatives aim to heal any divisions caused by the returnees' previous actions and promote forgiveness and acceptance.
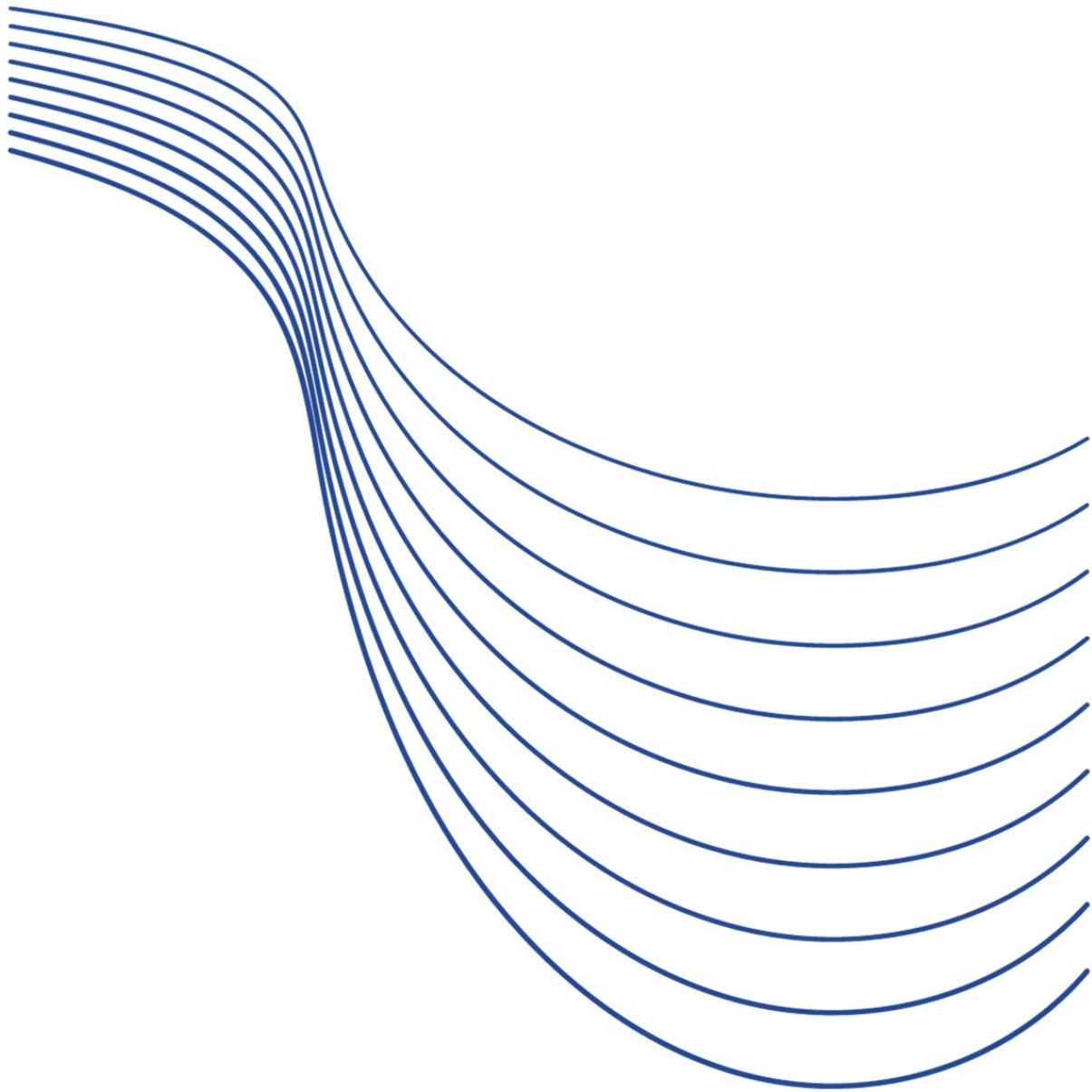
4. COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

4. COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The quantitate data from the survey included 376 respondents spread throughout the host spots areas of Albania. Age distribution of respondents starts from 18 to 85 years of age. This representation of population fits within the demographic structure of Albania. In real value, most of the respondents are from 20-30 age group and 30-40 age group.

4.1 Demographics

The graph below groups age into decades to represent respondents with some exceptions (0-10) where age was not declared.
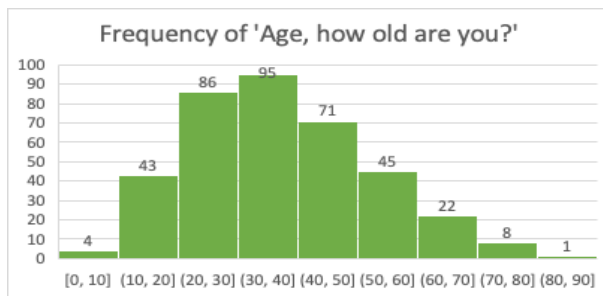
Table 1. Distribution of age groups among respondents (in 10 year group)

The gender of respondents is divided into 50,3 % women and 49,7 men representing the population of Albania. Although the option to declare other genders was provided, all respondents identified as men and women.
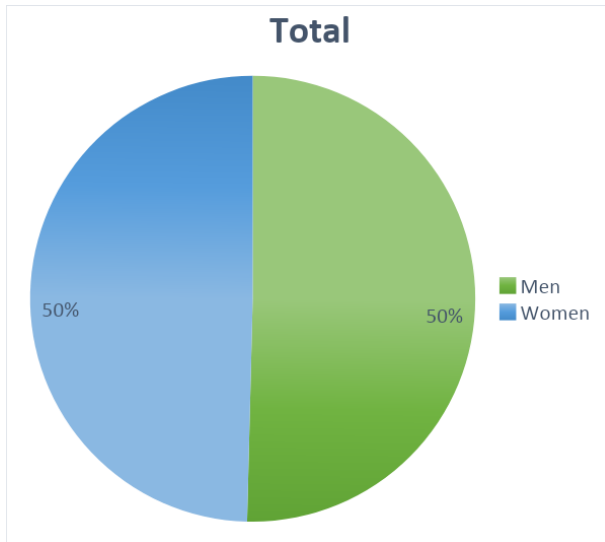
Figure 2. Distribution of gender of respondents

The geographical representation of Municipalities (Bashkia) and County (Qarqe) includes all major administrative Municipalities in Albania wich are considered hot spot. However, as population concentration in Albania is to a large extent around the capital Tirana, 23% of respondents are from Tirana. The rest of respondents are from affected areas in general.
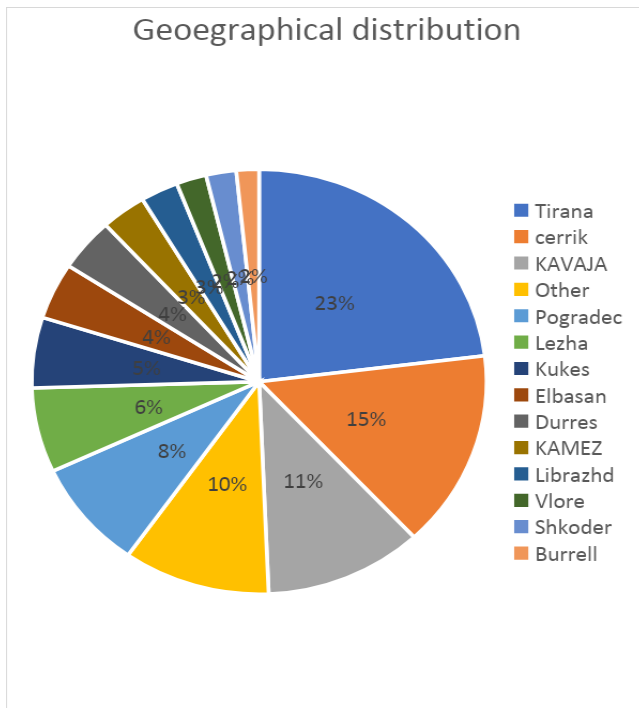

Figure 3. Geographical distribution of respondents in regions

The urban-rural distribution ratio is 59% of respondents live in urban areas and 41% of respondents live in rural areas. This also represents the population distribution in Albania between cities and villages. In addition, this finding also corresponds with return locations of the repatriated families in Albania.
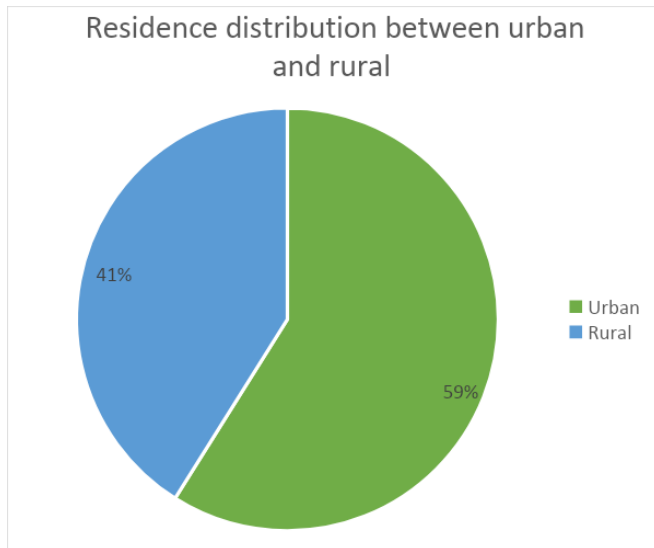

Figure 4. Urban-Rural division of respondents

The ratio of education leans towards more respondents with Higher Education while primary and middle education respondents make up for 55% of the sample. Higher education is considered any education beyond secondary school.
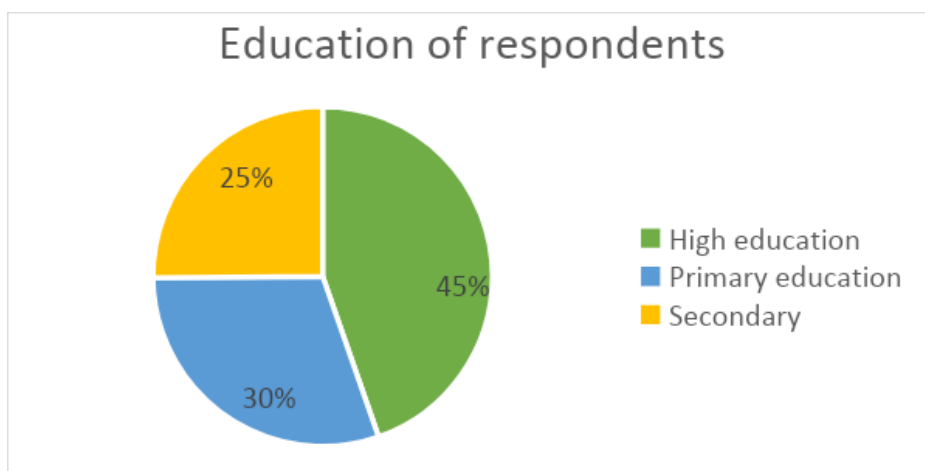

Figure 5. Level of education of respondents

The employment of respondents also shows that 24% of respondents are unemployed while the rest belong to 41% of employed, 19 % self-employed which includes also if the respondent works in farm without formal employment and students or pensioners.
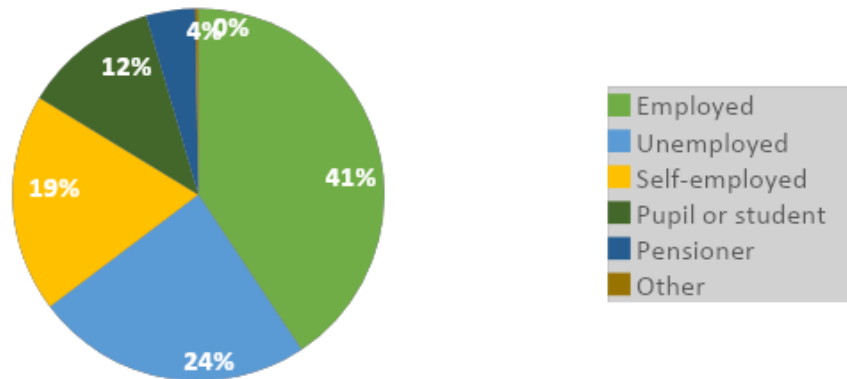

Figure 6. Employment ratio

Marital status of respondents shows that 52% of respondents are single or unmarried whereas 43% are married. A small percentage is divorced.
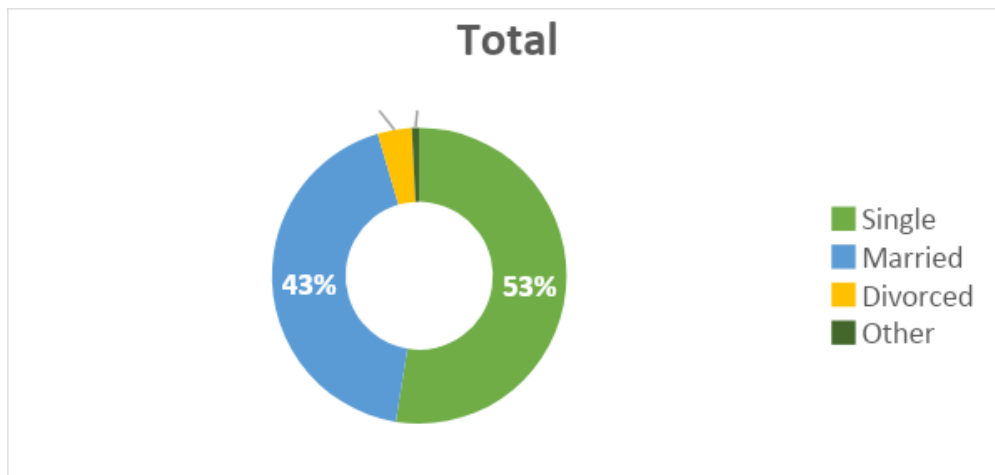

Figure 7. Marital status of respondents

4.2 Perceptions of violent extremism and radicalism

A majority of respondents have heard about violent extremism and radicalism. Respondents who claim a positive attitude on the question make up for 73% while 27% of cumulative respondents have not heard or are not sure.
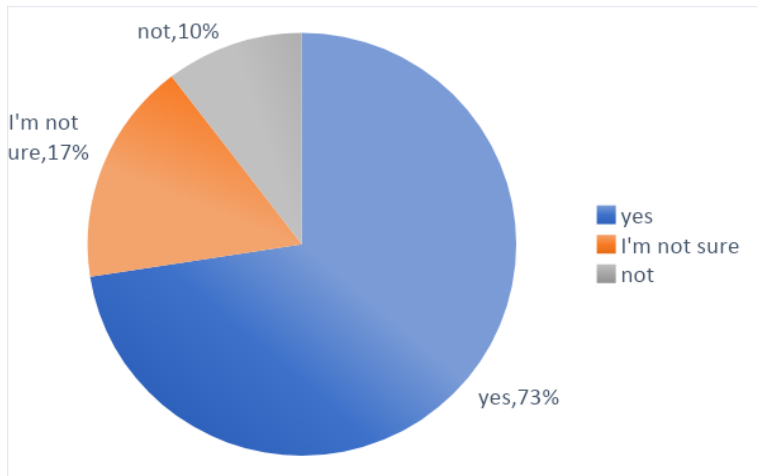
Figure 8. 73% of respondents have heard about violent extremism or radicalism.

Respondents who have knowledge about violent extremism and radicalism are 45%. This is explained that respondent might have heard but has a lack of information on the subject or consider that their understanding is limited.
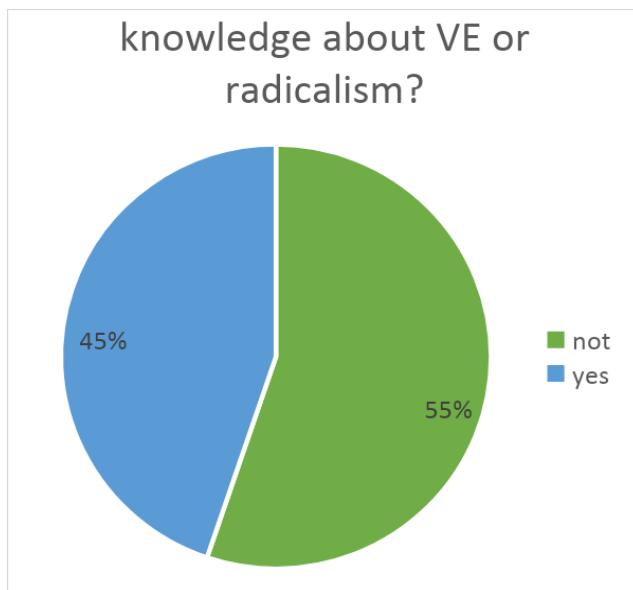
Figure 9. Percentage of knowledge about violent extremism and radicalism

Respondents identify religious violent extremism as most pressing issue. When asked about the forms of violent extremism, given choices among religious, political, ideological, ethnic, gender or sport violent extremism, a large number choose religious extremism. 55% choose religious extremism as key form of violent extremism while there are signs of political, ideological and other forms of violent extremisms.

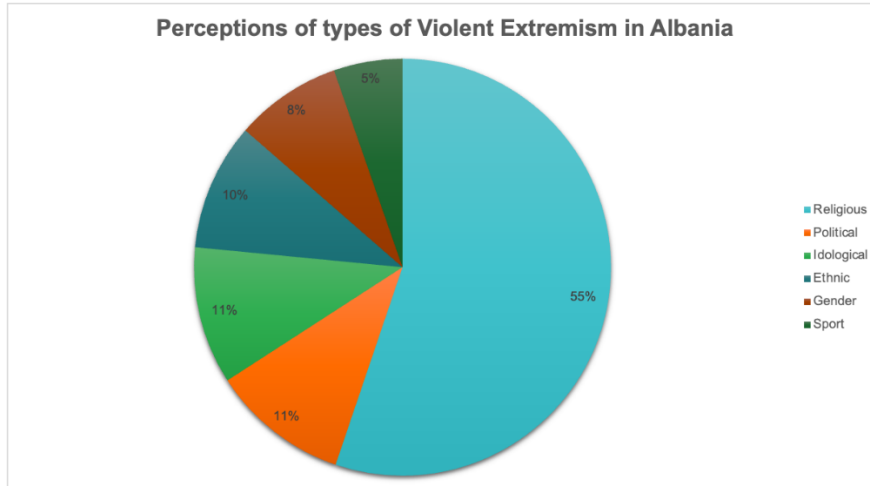*Figure 10. In ranking factors of Violent Extremism in Albania, 55% of accumulative respondents rank religious violent extremism as the main followed by 11% political violent extremism.*

In the question number 3, respondents look at more than one option to express their perceptions on driving factors of violent extremism. Mainly, the perception of a large majority is that economic situation is first choice followed by lack of perspective and lack of identification with the group. The three priorities in the field thus are identified as economic situation or the lack of economic income, lack of perspective and lack of identification with the group which drives individuals to fringes of political extremism. The data below shows the word tree representation of choices accumulated in percentages and visually show the curve of perceptions.

Economic situation, the Promised Land for believers	Count of Economic situation, the Promised Land for believers
Bullying	2,14%
Bullying, Social exclusion	0,54%
Bullying, Violence and discrimination	1,61%
Bullying, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	2,41%
Economic situation	11,26%
Economic situation, Bullying	2,41%
Economic situation, Bullying, Social exclusion	1,07%
Economic situation, Bullying, Violence and discrimination	4,83%
Economic situation, Bullying, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	2,14%
Economic situation, Bullying, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion, low integrity of individuals	0,27%
Economic situation, defective education system and lack of discipline (military education)	0,27%
Economic situation, Lack of identification with a group	3,75%
Economic situation, Lack of identification with a group, Bullying	0,54%
Economic situation, Lack of identification with a group, Bullying, Social exclusion	0,80%
Economic situation, Lack of identification with a group, Bullying, Violence and discrimination	1,07%
Economic situation, Lack of identification with a group, Bullying, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	0,80%
Economic situation, Lack of identification with a group, Social exclusion	1,07%
Economic situation, Lack of identification with a group, Violence and discrimination	1,34%
Economic situation, Lack of identification with a group, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	0,80%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective	5,90%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Bullying	3,22%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Bullying, Social exclusion	0,80%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Bullying, Violence and discrimination	1,61%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Bullying, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	1,34%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Lack of identification with a group	2,41%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Lack of identification with a group, Bullying	1,34%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Lack of identification with a group, Bullying, Social exclusion	0,27%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Lack of identification with a group, Bullying, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	6,70%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Lack of identification with a group, Bullying, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion, Other (Please specify)	0,27%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Lack of identification with a group, Bullying, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion, World politics that promote violence.	0,27%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Lack of identification with a group, Social exclusion	0,54%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Lack of identification with a group, Violence and discrimination	0,54%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Lack of identification with a group, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	0,54%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Other (Please specify)	0,27%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Social exclusion	2,41%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Violence and discrimination	2,95%
Economic situation, Lack of perspective, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	1,34%
Economic situation, Social exclusion	2,68%
Economic situation, Violence and discrimination	3,49%
Economic situation, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	2,14%
Lack of identification with a group	0,54%
Lack of identification with a group, Bullying	0,54%
Lack of identification with a group, Bullying, Social exclusion	0,27%
Lack of identification with a group, Bullying, Violence and discrimination	0,54%
Lack of identification with a group, Bullying, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	0,27%
Lack of identification with a group, Violence and discrimination	0,54%
Lack of identification with a group, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	0,54%
Lack of perspective	3,22%
Lack of perspective, Bullying	0,27%
Lack of perspective, Bullying, Violence and discrimination	0,54%
Lack of perspective, Bullying, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	1,07%
Lack of perspective, Lack of identification with a group	1,07%
Lack of perspective, Lack of identification with a group, Bullying, Violence and discrimination	0,27%
Lack of perspective, Lack of identification with a group, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	0,80%
Lack of perspective, Social exclusion	0,80%
Lack of perspective, Violence and discrimination	1,34%
Lack of perspective, Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	1,34%
Social exclusion	0,27%
The economic situation, the destruction of the educational system	0,27%
Violence and discrimination	3,49%
Violence and discrimination, Religious beliefs	0,27%
Violence and discrimination, Social exclusion	1,61%
Grand Total	100,00%

Table 2. Representation of choices of respondents with all their choices in group percentage

Same question delivers a clear statistic of choices and perception that lead to violent extremism when perception of respondents is filtered into first choices only. Almost 32% of respondents think that lack of economic sources drive individuals to violent extremism whereas almost 21% of respondents think that discrimination is the reason. Combined, these two choices represent more than 53% of accumulated value.
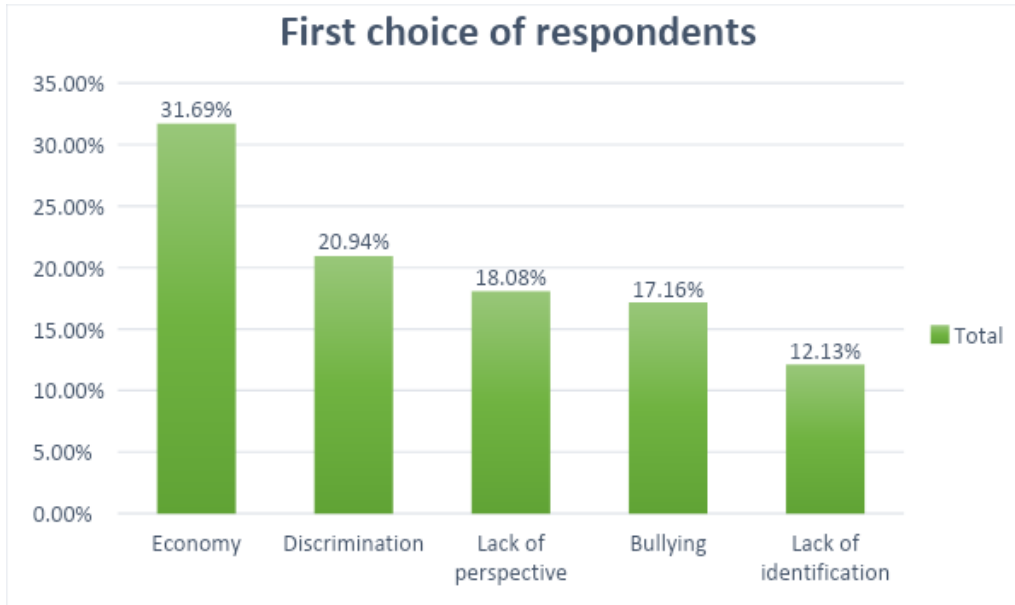
Hkiwtg"330"Tgrtgugpvcvkqp"qh"hktuv"ejqkegu"qh individuals into political extremism

4.3 Perception for likely recruitment

On the question about the perception of individuals exposed at risk to radicalize or becoming part of violent extremism, respondents feel that children, unemployed and individuals that are exposed to violence and bullying present most vulnerable groups. About 65% of respondents think that children are exposed to high risk and risk of radicalization (see Figure 10). Furthermore, the moderate risk and low risk perception still exist at a great extent with about 37% in cumulative format leaving only about 2.5% of respondents thinking that there is no risk at all for children to radicalize when exposed to violent extremism ideology.
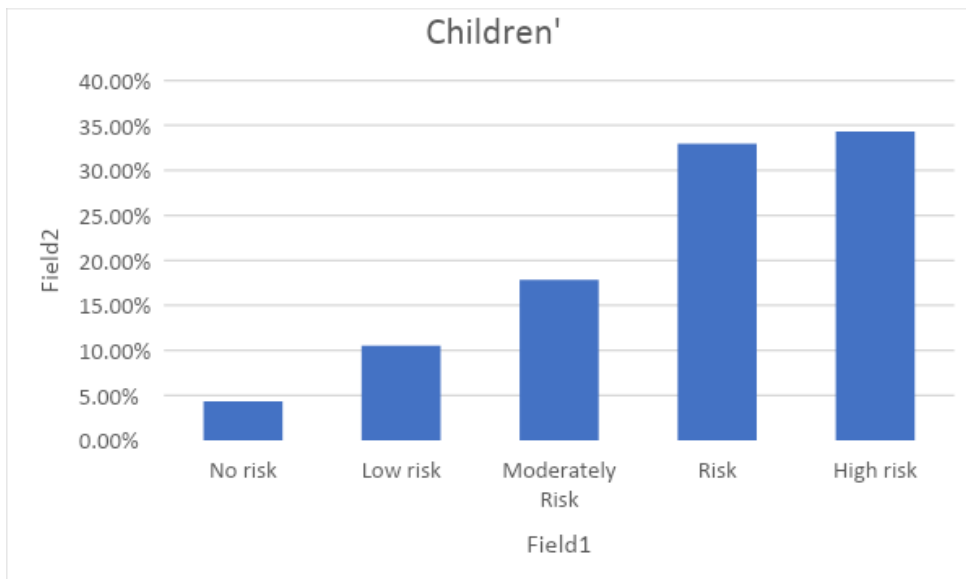
Figure 12. Perception degree of children exposed to radicalization

On the perception of respondents about the youth, respondents feel that youngsters are more exposed to high risk, risk and moderate risk with about 90% (See Fig 11) in total whereby little risk or no risk makes up about 5-6%. The definition of youth includes individuals from the age of 16-26 which is a high number in Albanian population.

Figure 13. Perception degree of youth exposed to radicalization
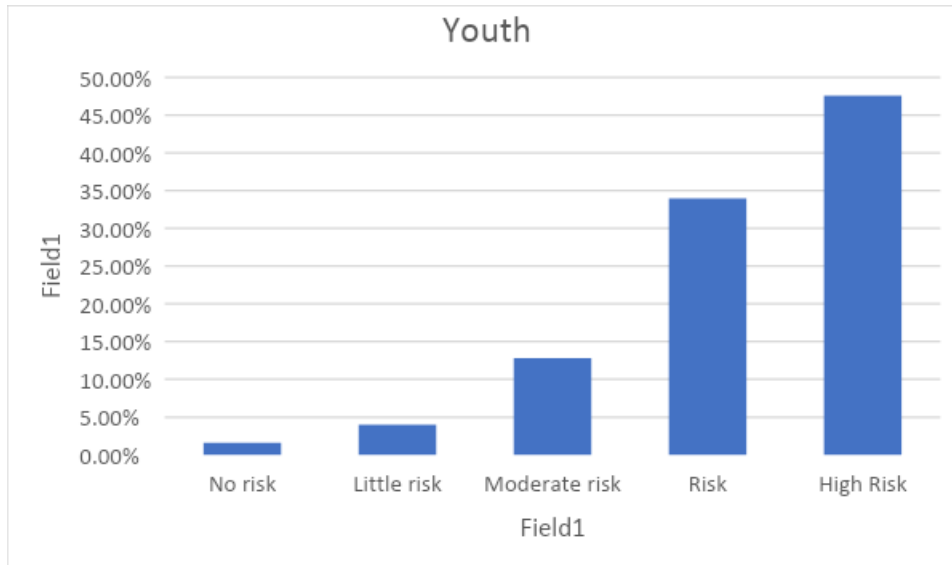
Overall, when it comes to minorities, perception of respondents does not differ very much from other vulnerable groups. Although this category was in conjunction with children without parents, still perception is similar to the two categories above. There is a very high risk and risk of Roma and children without parents to be exposed to radicalization. (see Fig. 12).
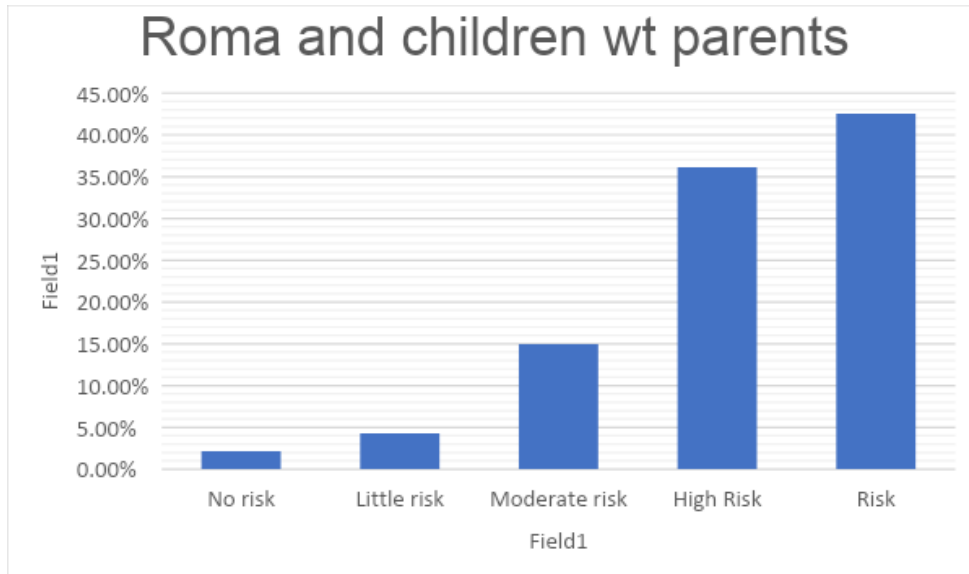
Figure 14. Perception degree of Roma people and children without parents exposed to radicalization

One of the most vulnerable groups of people according to respondents is also unemployed. As unemployment is also one of the large problems precepted as problem (see Table 2), this group is exposed to risk, high risk and moderate risk in a cumulative form of 80%. This figure shows that economy plays a very important role in not only presentation of political opportunity for violent extremism but also a strategic aim for prevention.
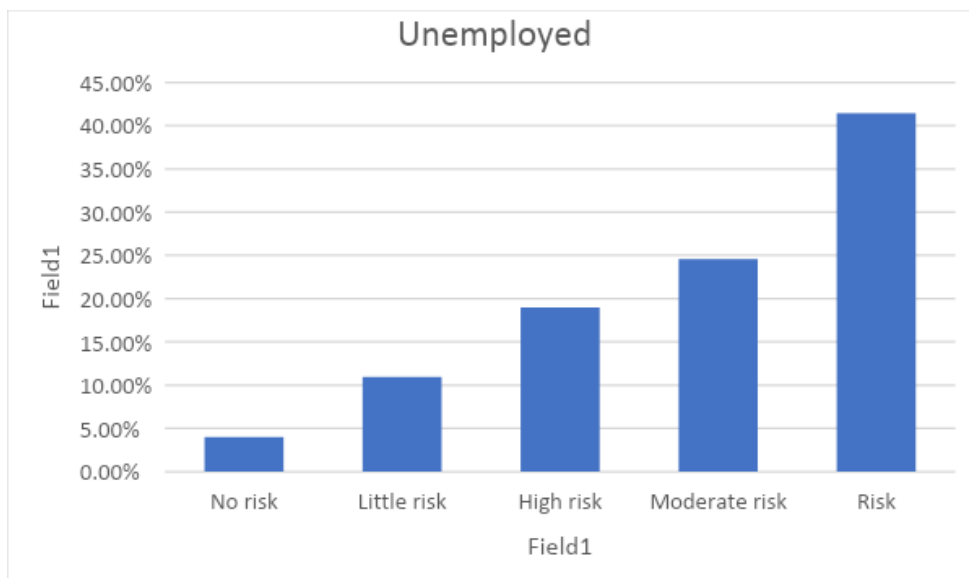
Figure 15. Perception degree of unemployed exposed to radicalization

Individuals with crime history are 94% likely to be at high risk, risk and moderate risk of radicalization according to respondents. This figure in relationship with perception of unemployment as one of the major push factors for violent extremism.

Individuals with crime history
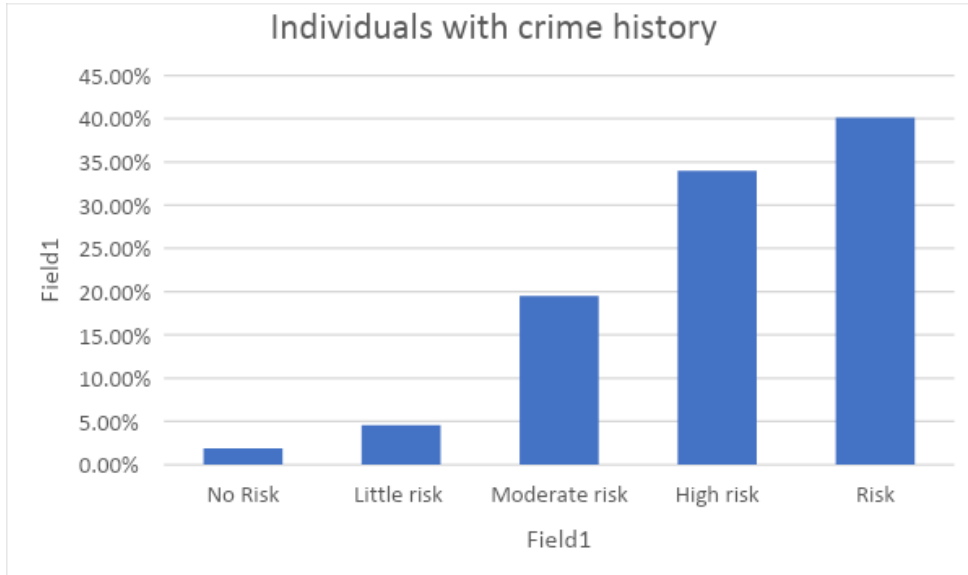
Figure 16. Figure 15. Perception degree of individuals with crime history exposed to radicalization.

Similar to individuals with crime history, also individuals facing domestic violence are perceived as a group with high risk of exposure to violent extremism and radicalization. Some 90% of accumulative respondents think that this group is at high risk, risk or moderate risk of recruitment.

Individuals facing domestic violence
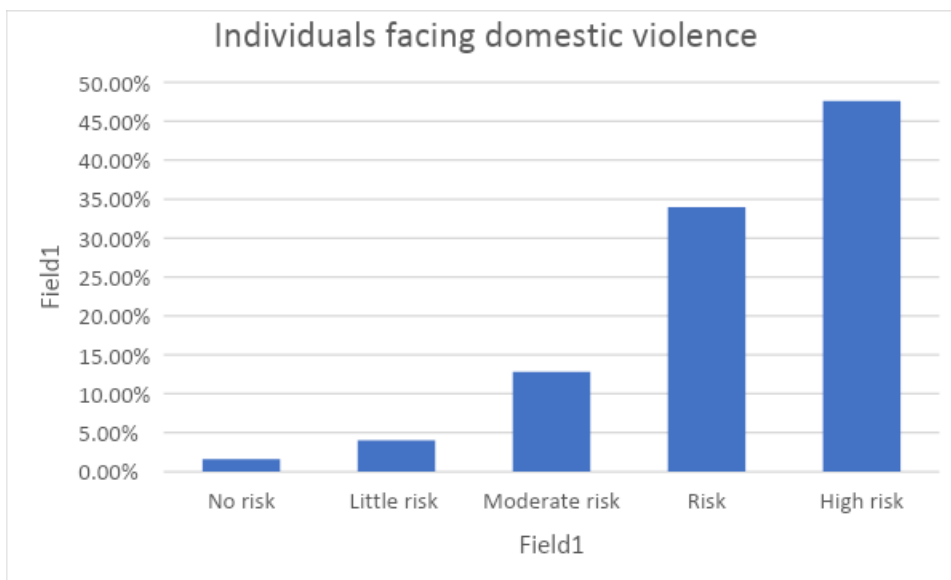
Figure 17. Perception degree of individuals facing domestic violence exposed to radicalization.

Similarly, the group of individuals who face violence or bullying is perceived as vulnerable to recruitment by radical and violent extremist ideology. Some 90% of respondent think that individuals facing violence and bullying are at high risk, risk and moderate risk of being recruited.
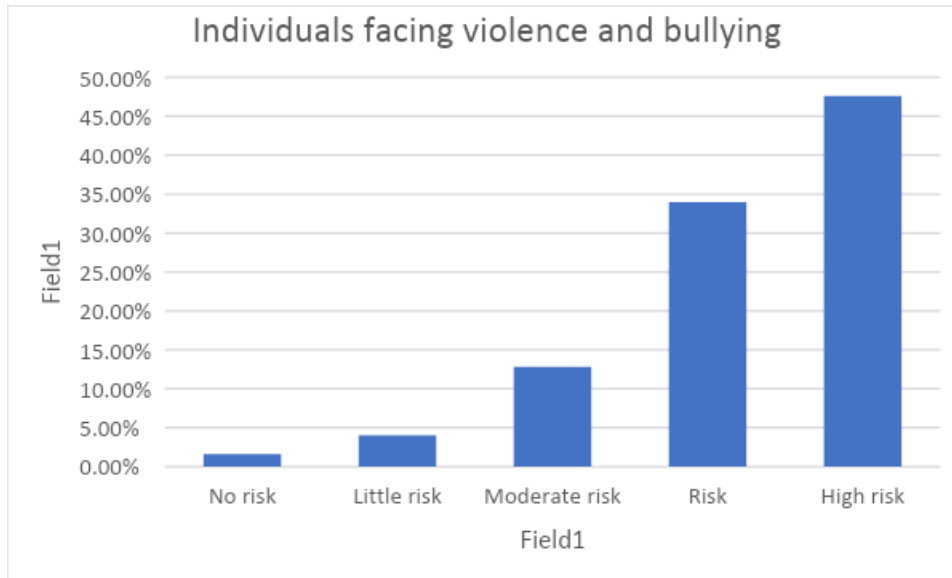
Figure 18. Perception degree of individuals facing violence and bullying exposed to radicalization.

Also from other measurements, respondents have a tendency to think along the lines of religious violent extremism being key issue (See Fig. 8 also). Individuals who are part of religious groups are perceived to be at high risk, risk and moderate risk of being target for recruitment.
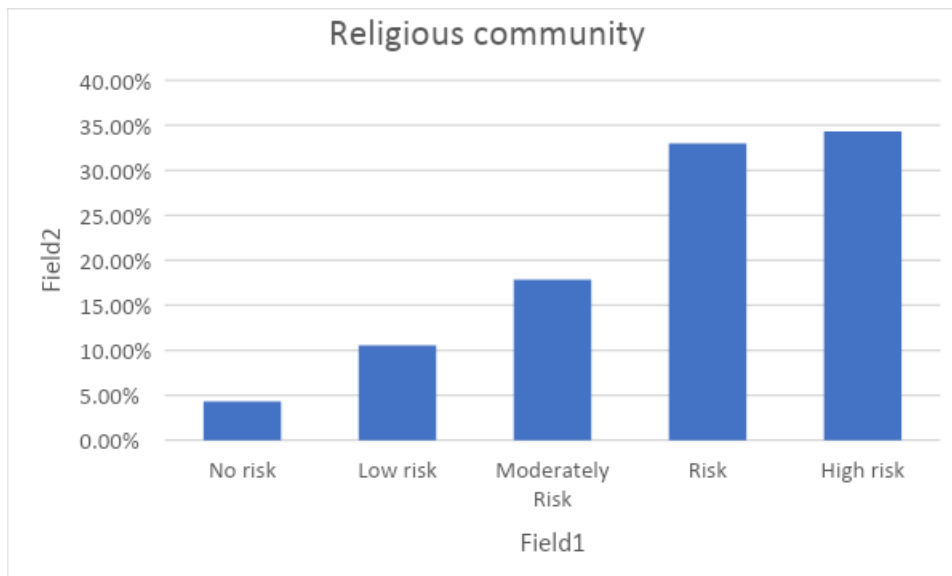
Figure 19. Perception degree of individuals belonging to religious community exposed to radicalization.

4.4 Perceptions about recruitment and risks

Respondents have perceptions about groups and movements in Albania and how they use mobilization techniques and communication to target especially age groups that appeal to them.

Figure 20. Perceptions on the most used way of radicalization

On the question "Please rate from 1 to 5, which you think are the most used ways of radicalization and recruitment. 1=not at all used and 5=very used [Propaganda by radicalized individuals]," generally, the perception of respondents is that there is a high risk of being targeted from the individuals who have been radicalized. 44,9% think that there is high risk whereas 27,5% think there is risk. Only 3% think there is no risk at all.

Table 3. Please rate from 1 to 5, which you think are the most used ways of radicalization and recruitment. 1=not at all used and 5=very used [Propaganda by radicalized individuals]

On the question "5. Please rate from 1 to 5, which you think are the most used ways of radicalization and recruitment. 1=not at all used and 5=very used [Communication through social media]," generally, the perception of respondents is that there is a high risk of being targeted from the individuals who have been radicalized. 44,9% think that there is high risk whereas 30,2% think there is risk. Only 1% think there is no risk at all.

V c d n g " 6 0 " Q p " v j g " s w g u v k q p " õ 7 0 " R n g c u g " t c v g " h t q o radicalization and recruitment. 1=not at all used and 5=very used [Communication through u q e k c n " o g f k c _ . ö

On the question "5. Please rate from 1 to 5, which you think are the most used ways of radicalization and recruitment. 1=not at all used and 5=very used [The lure of money]," generally, the perception of respondents is that there is a high risk of being targeted from the individuals who have been radicalized. 46% think that there is high risk whereas 26,4% think there is risk. Only 2% think there is no risk at all.
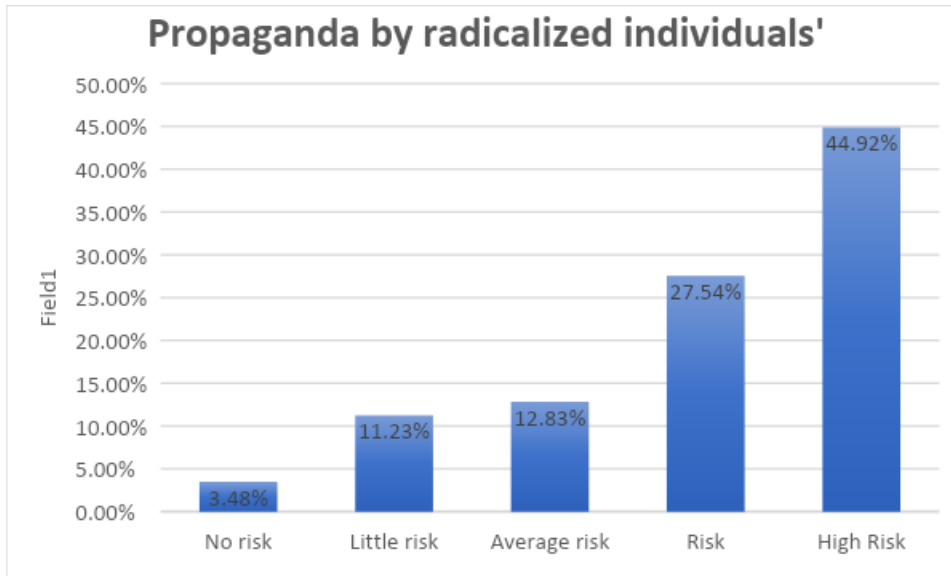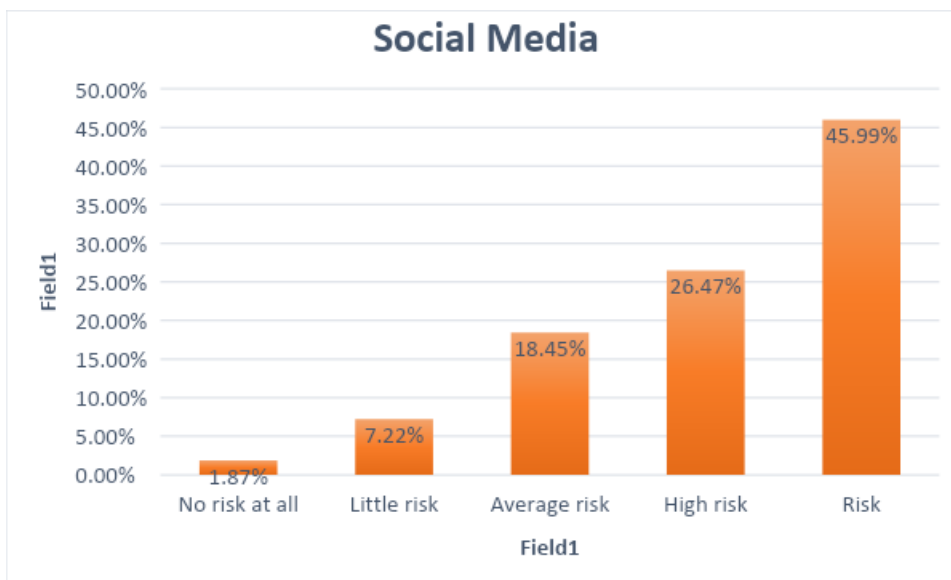

V c d n g " 7 0 " Q p " v j g " s w g u v k q p " õ 7 0 " R n g c u g " t c v g " h t q o radicalization and recruitment. 1=not at all used and 5=very used [Lure of money],

On the question "5. Please rate from 1 to 5, which you think are the most used ways of radicalization and recruitment. 1=not at all used and 5=very used [Political Influence]," generally, the perception of respondents is that there is a high risk of being targeted from the individuals with political influence. 36,7% think that there is risk whereas 12,06% think there is high risk followed by 32,9% under perception that there is average risk of being targeted by individuals with political influence. Only 3,5% think there is no risk at all.

Political influence

Chart showing percentages by risk category:
- No risk at all: 3.49%
- High risk: 12.06%
- Little risk: 14.75%
- Average risk: 32.98%
- Risk: 36.73%
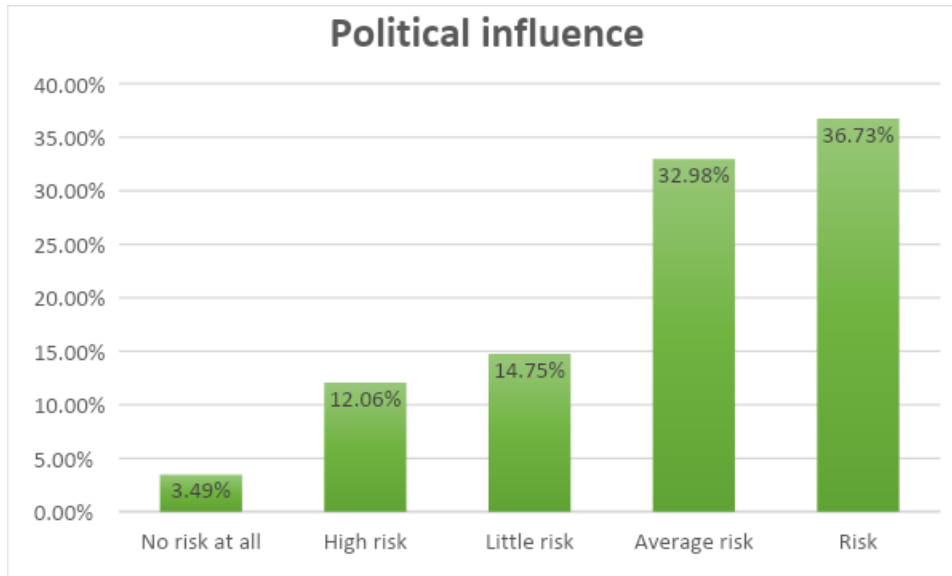
Table 6 The most used ways of radicalization and recruitment. 1=not at all used and 5=very used [Political Influence]

On the question 5. Please rate from 1 to 5, which you think are the most used ways of radicalization and recruitment. 1=not at all used and 5=very used [Influence of family and friends]," generally, the perception of respondents is that there is a high risk of being by family and friends. 39,8% think that there is risk whereas 18,45% think there is high risk followed by 25,6% under perception that there is average risk of being targeted by individuals with political influence. Only 4,8% think there is no risk at all.

Family and friends

Chart showing percentages by risk category:
- No risk at all: 4.81%
- Little risk: 11.23%
- High risk: 18.45%
- Average risk: 25.67%
- Risk: 39.84%
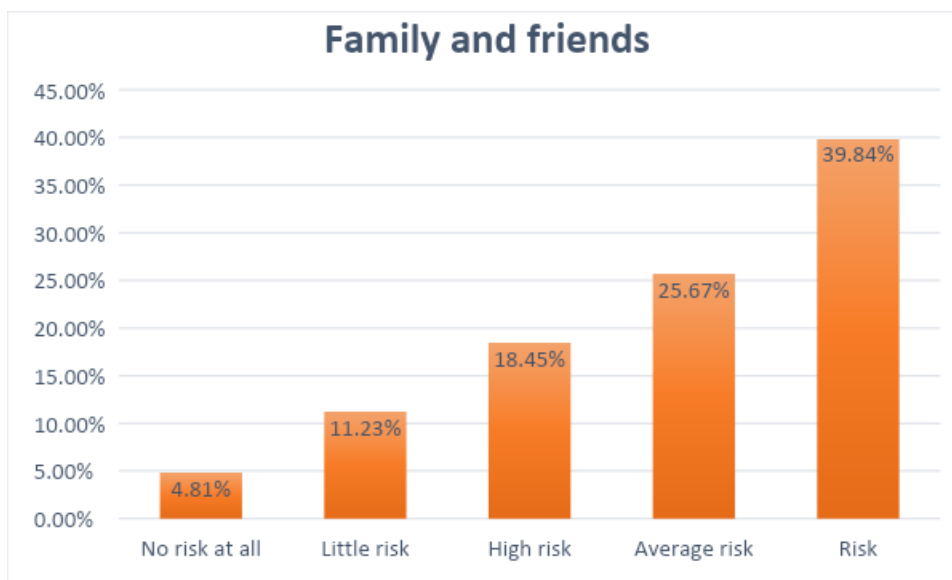
Table 7: The most used ways of radicalization and recruitment. 1=not at all used and 5=very used [Influence of family and friends]

4.5 Community acceptance

In regard to community acceptance, respondents have mixed feelings primarily because many do not know whether there are returnees in their own community. 48% of respondents do not know and 33% claim to have no information while this leaves only 19% of respondents with knowledge about returnees from the areas of Syria and Iraq war in their own community.
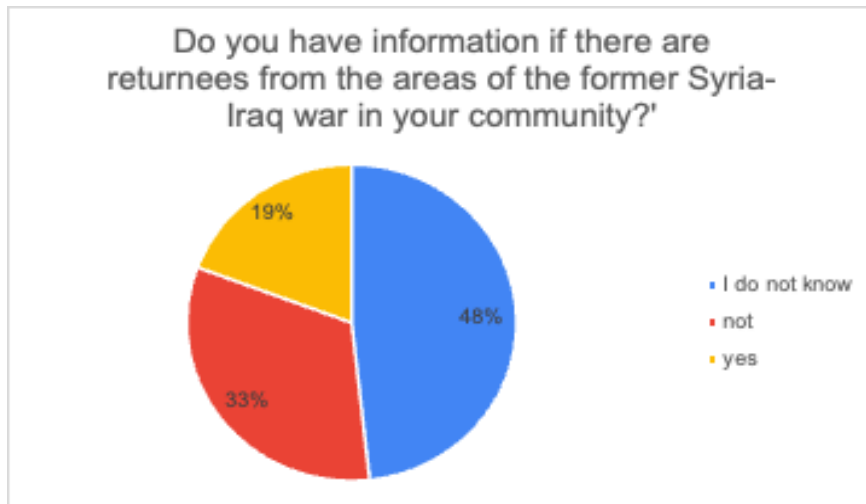
Figure 21. Percentages of respondents with knowledge about returnees in their own community.

Respondents have mixed feelings about living with the returnees in their own community. When asked how would they feel about returnees living in their community, 37% declared neutral which is a reflection of the statistic on the lack of knowledge and information. Some 30% does not agree that returnees live in their community and 20% agree entirely. This finding, corresponds with other findings of need for more information in the community.

I feel comfortable living when returnees live in my community]
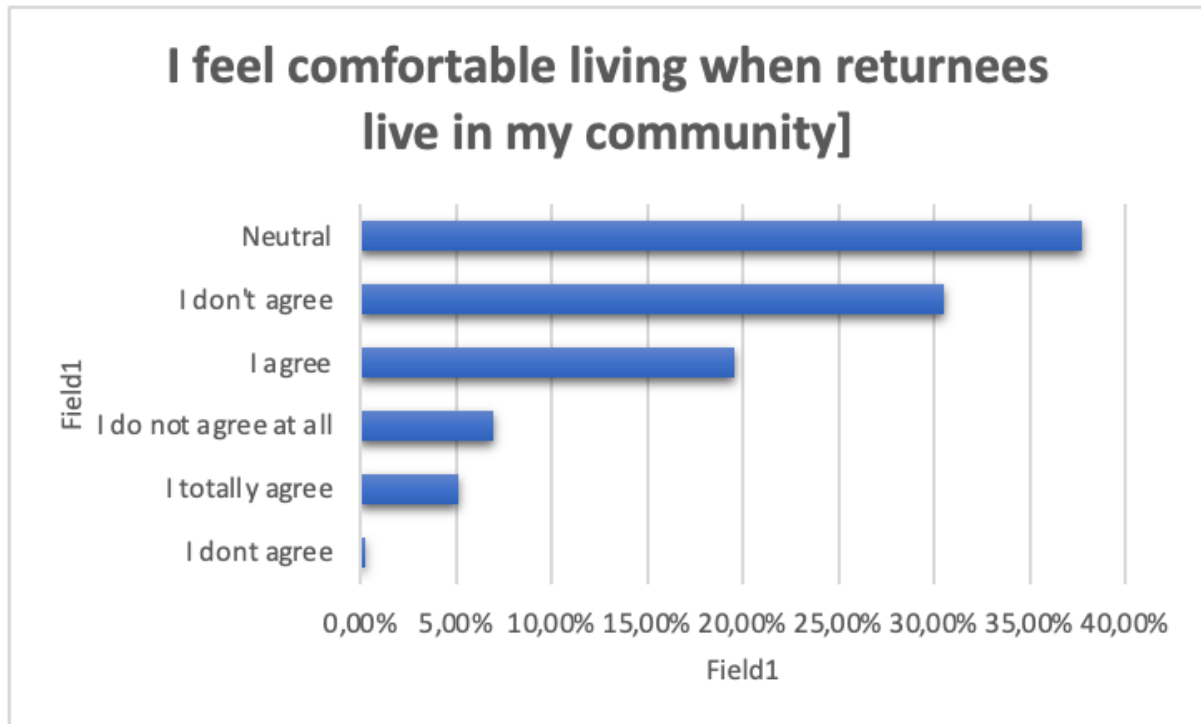
Table 8 : Living with the returnees in their own community

The readiness to collaborate with authorities is very high which gives good indication of prevention actions to be successful. More than 60% of respondents express readiness to report violent extremism and radicalization to the police providing that they encounter it. This is followed but a number of respondents responding with "maybe" and leaving very little number with no.
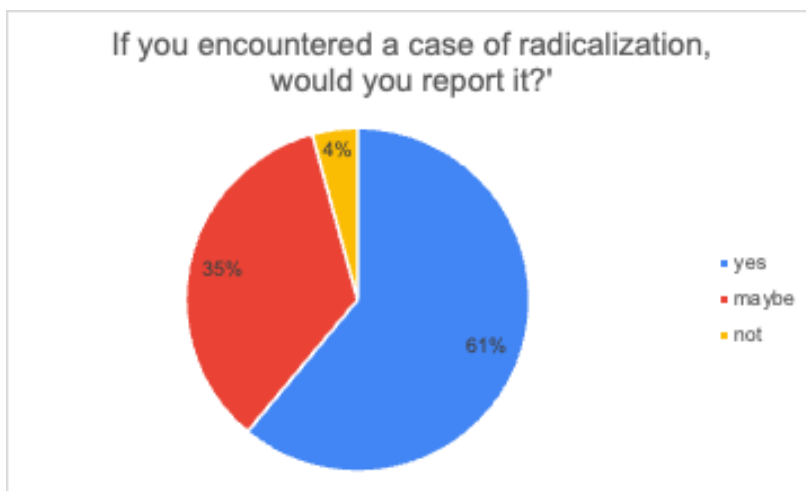
Figure 22: Would the radicalization be reported by citizens?

Respondents feel ready to report cases of violent extremism and radicalism. 41% of respondents would report to the police while while only 8% would not know where to report or not want to report. But, respondents also added other choices such as social services, ministry of interior, intelligence services, and media. It is important to clarify that this question was open ended on purpose to receive a multitude of inputs where respondents would report cases and cumulative.

In the question for the respondents to answer about the ways for the community to accept returnees, a large majority respond that employment is the best possible way to reintegration, followed by awareness increase and security. Once again, two large factors come to surface which are also interlinked with reintegration overall. Employment ensures sustainability and financial safety.
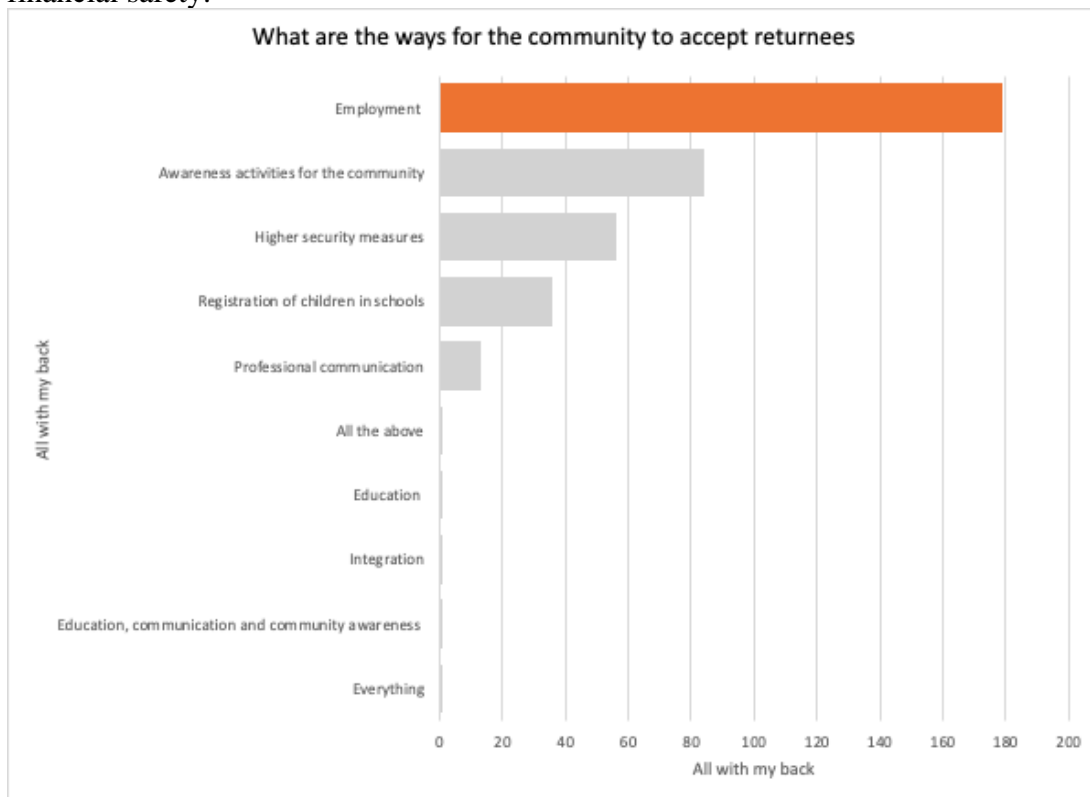
Table 9: Ways to accept returnees in the community

4.6 Information dissemination and communication

Respondents provide options on how they would like to receive information on violent extremism and radicalization. Overall, the perception is that there is a need for more community awareness activities on one-to-one basis, campaigns including public information campaigns. This is the largest channel that respondents would like to receive information (36%) through followed by social media and networks (30%) and visual media (television and web based) (22%). Online applications and print media are less popular with 6% in accumulative and other forms of 6% too. This is a clear indication that social networks are main channel of information

and communication for the respondents as well as expectation to be informed by authorities is high.
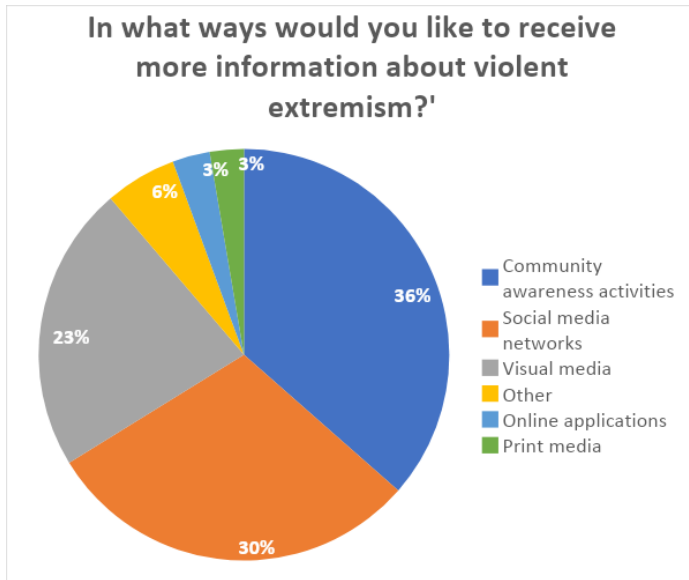
Figure 22. The ways respondents would like to be informed about Violent Extremism.

Finally, the perception of respondents that there are tendencies of violent extremism and radicalization in own community and neighborhood or city are a good warning of need for information and communication. A good number of respondents (49%) are not sure if there are any tendencies in their community for violent extremism or radicalization. This is followed with 23% who believe that there are tendencies and 16% not as well as 12% of not knowing. The indication is clear that lack of information and communication contributes in overall perception of violent extremism and radicalization in the population.
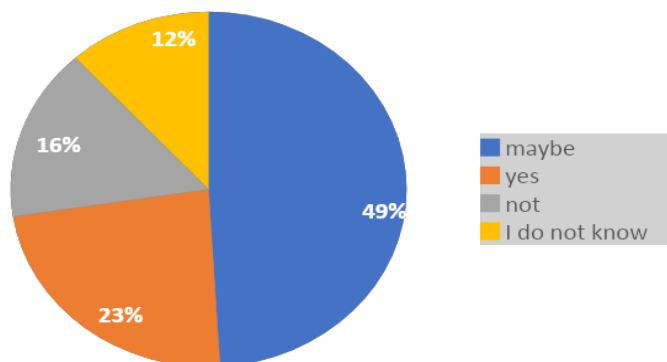
Figure 23. Perception of tendencies for violent extremism or radicalization in own neighborhood.
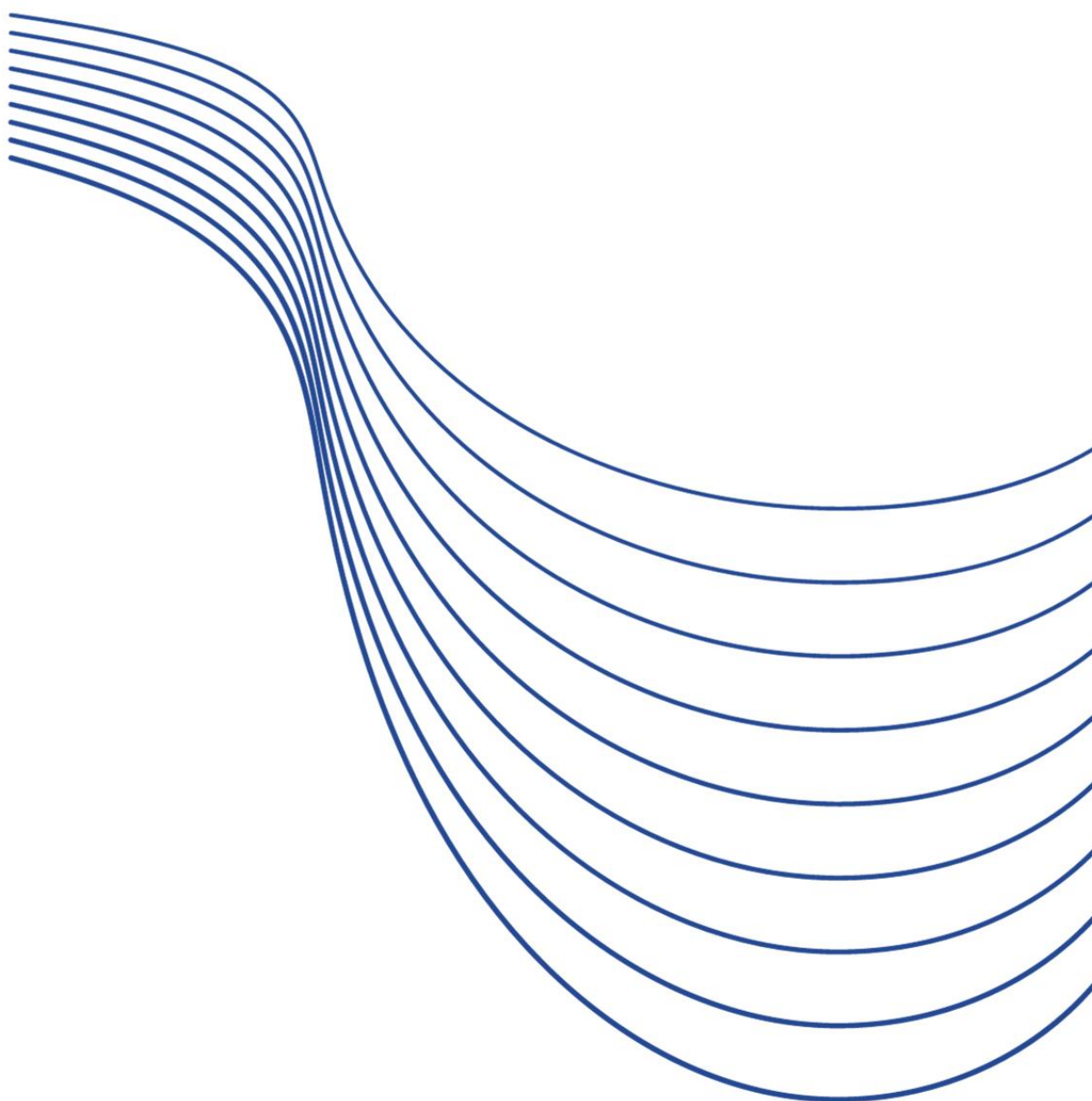
5. CONCLUSIONS

5. CONCLUSIONS

The context of Violent extremism in Albania: Due to global shifts and events, Albania has seen the emergence of ideas related to religious radicalization and violent extremism. These concepts present a potential risk of extremist actions within the nation. The real peril of radicalization and extremism, whether driven by ideology, religion, or nationalism, lies in their ability to fuel and promote terrorist endeavors. The emergence of violent extremism ultimately resulting in terrorism may be driven by Albania's strategic geographical location, coupled with ethnic-driven tensions and disputes in neighboring areas; Potential exploitation of free movement of citizens; Fleeing conflict zones, they may seek refuge in Europe and particularly in Albania; Modern technologies, particularly the Internet and social media platforms etc. From a geographical standpoint, observations indicate that this phenomenon predominantly exists in Elbasan, Pogradec, Librazhd, Bulqizë, Cërrik, Kukës, Dibër, Kavaja and the rural areas adjacent to these cities. Factors contributing to this concentration might include early exposure to radical ideas, insufficient education and theological understanding, socio-economic challenges, experienced bullying, mental health issues, and enticements of financial aid.

Albania confronts several potential threats, including online radicalization; cyber terrorism; irregular migration routes; foreign nationals with contested allegiances; ethnic-based nationalist groups; and terrorist activities on home soil. Consequently, addressing and mitigating the threats of radicalization and violent extremism that might escalate to terrorism is a top priority for the Albanian government

Legal and strategic framework: Albania is actively and comprehensively addressing issues related to the prevention and countering of violent extremism (PCVE) in the Western Balkan region. This is evident through several initiatives, projects, and collaborations, underscoring Albania's commitment to regional stability and security. Although, the legal framework on combating terrorism is quite extensive, when it comes to the countering violent extremism the legal basis in place is at the strategic level and in administrative one, for example on the establishment of the CVE Center, or the reception of returnees from conflict areas. To date there is no comprehensive legal framework dedicated to the countering of violent extremism with the CVE Center as a competent authority with executive powers. There is also a legal gap regarding the rehabilitation and reintegration process as well as the there is no SoP in place when it comes to institutional coordination. The latter highly impacts the coordination process between the CVE and relevant central or local institutions stemming from periodic reporting to coordinated activities in order to increase the effectiveness of case management efforts.

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Albania's primary strategic blueprint against violent extremism and terrorism between 2022-2025, the Cross-sectoral Strategy, intertwines Albania's commitment to EU integration obligations, especially under Chapter 24, with its broader developmental goals, including alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals. This strategy is a centerpiece of Albania's National Strategy for Development and Integration, capturing a vision of a terrorism-free society that upholds European standards and human rights.

The institutional framework is detailed based on the central and local governmental bodies engaged in the Action Plan for the Prevention of Radicalization 2023-2025 implementing the Cross-sectoral Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and the Fight against Terrorism 2022–2025. The main institutions engaged are: Ministry of Interior, The CVE Center, Albanian State Police; Local Self-Government Units; Ministry of Health and Social Protection, State Agency for Children Rights and Protection, State Social Service; Ministry of Education and Sports; Ministry of Justice and School of Magistrates, Prisons' Directorate and Probation Service, Special Prosecution Office against Organised Crimes and High-level Corruption; Ministry of Defense; Ministry of Finance and Economy; Albanian Investment Development Agency; National Authority for Electronic Certification and Cyber Security.

The key institutions have listed related to the lack of human resources, better collaboration among institutions, and better capacities for human resources, especially those working directly with the returnees.

National Coordination

Effective coordination on PCVE and R&& is undertaken by state and state actors in Albania. The cross-sectorial strategy and action plan have made clear measurements, actions and roles of the institutions. The implementation of actions has faced challenges regarding the budget and collaboration among the state institutions. The strategy actions have been planned for the responsible state actors to cover the administrative costs; meanwhile, other costs are uncovered and expected to be covered by donors. However, there has been a need to establish clearer roles among institutions, and more effective coordination among key actors. CVE Center has been working over capacities, with limited human resources to coordinate the work with the institutions, professionals and returnees themselves. The collaboration with all main actors has been working due to the positive and productive relations the CVE Center has established as there is no law or mechanism which obliges the institutions to collaborate or report to the CVE Center.
In addition, it is concluded that a center that develops, collates, and standardizes resources and has information or an open database with projects and programs can make the entire country more effective and impactful by helping key stakeholders, organizations, and donors know where and how to focus and support on addressing violent extremism.

In October 2023 with the decision 285" *for establishment and function of the regional committee for preventing radicalisation and v j g " h k i j v " c i c k p . i This " x k q p u j c i c c i*. This decision expects to improve the interventions of key actors, and provide better national coordination and impact; however, strengthening the national coordinator and regional committees is crucial from now on.

Local Public Safety Councils (LPSC):
The Cross-Sectoral Strategy on Community Safety for the period 2021-2026 mandates the establishment of Local Public Safety Councils (LPSC) across all 61 municipalities. These councils function as consultative and decision-making bodies at the local level, addressing a spectrum of security concerns, including the mitigation of terrorism and violent extremism. However, it is imperative to note that an adequate legal framework governing their formation and operations has not been delineated yet s. Furthermore, there are no designated offices or officials entrusted with the responsibility of overseeing these councils. The regulatory approval process for LPSCs varies across municipalities, with some relying on mayoral authority, others engaging LPSCs themselves, and some seeking approval from the Municipal Council. The model used for LPSCs varies from city to city according to the projects and models NGOs bring; there is not a unified model to be implemented. Additionally, special attention and commitment must be drawn to the municipalities which constitute hot-spot

areas and more vulnerable to radicalization and violent extremism.
The CVE Center heavily relies upon Local Public Safety Councils (LPSCs) as a pivotal preventive but also rehabilitative, and reintegration mechanism within the context of countering violent extremism (CVE) in Albania.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returnees: As Albania dealt with the initial repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration operations, the surrounding circumstances and political landscape underwent significant changes. The primary concern back then, and to some extent still today, is the task of de-radicalization and reintegration of these returnees in Albania. Albania's Multi-Agency Integrated Approach, combined with the well-structured phases of rehabilitation and reintegration, exemplifies the country's commitment to PCVE and the well-being of its citizens. By harnessing the collective expertise and resources of government agencies, NGOs, and international partners, Albania ensures a comprehensive and coordinated response to the complex challenges posed by returnees from conflict zones. This approach not only addresses the immediate needs of returnees but also promotes their long-term reintegration into Albanian society. Albania's dedication to a collaborative, holistic, and compassionate approach to Repatriation, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration sets a strong example for other nations facing similar challenges.

Incorporating the Inter-Institutional Technical Group adds another layer of protection for children and returnees,

ensuring that their unique needs and risks are appropriately addressed. Albania's commitment to coordination and collaboration across sectors and with international partners enhances the effectiveness and sustainability of its efforts in preventing and countering violent extremism. A very important and effective support for the returnees has been offered by NGOs in the support of GCERF. NGOs states and value GCERF contribution due to the inclusion approach and diverse perspectives considered during R&R process.

By including resocialization as an integral part of the rehabilitation and reintegration process, Albania further enhances its approach to preventing and countering violent extremism while promoting social cohesion and stability.

Local-central institutional coordination and collaboration:
Empirical findings point to three main challenges among institutions and involved partis in the processes of both repatriation, reintegration and resocialization as well as in countering and preventing violent extremism. The first but most important challenge is the local-central institutional coordination and collaboration. There is a general attitude that this relationship between two levels of governance in Albania will benefit from a normative review as well as procedural reform to ease, simplify and increase efficiency of repatriation, reintegration and resocialization as well as in countering and preventing violent extremism. Empowering the Center

for Violent Extremism with coordinating tasks in the field of developing capacities and coordinating activities between the two levels of governance can improve these challenges but that is pending other interventions in staff development, financial resources and sustainable institutional development for a long term challenge.

Capacity building trainings for key stakeholders and professionals : despite that there are many trainings and well professionalization of the staff of all institutions in own institutions, there is a lack of the comprehensive training that will involve all institutions that deal with repatriation, reintegration and resocialization as well as in countering and preventing violent extremism.

These programs should provide in-depth knowledge, updated information, and specialized skills to effectively address the nuances of radicalization and reintegration. CVE Center has diligently focused on mapping front-line practitioners and fostering continuous capacity building. Nevertheless, the persistent issue of staff turnover within key institutions addressing CVE concerns, particularly in the field of returnees, has presented clear challenges over the years. These challenges encompass the erosion of institutional knowledge, hindered information sharing, and compromised fulfillment of essential prerequisites, ultimately resulting in a loss of referral opportunities. All the main key state and non-state actors, and first liners in Albania, such as teachers, community policing, psychologists and social workers,

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child protection workers and in the municipalities, staff of the prisons, armed forces, etc, have emphasized the need of in-depth training.

Designing, organizing and providing these trainings with the whole of government approach and key actors will improve not only professionalization but also communication and coordination amongst agencies. It will build synergies horizontally between ministries and other central institutions but also top down and bottom up collaboration between ministries and municipalities. Success of repatriation, reintegration and resocialization as well as in countering and preventing violent extremism depends on these two horizontal and vertical collaborations of institutions and coordination is crucial in implementing policies. Interviews and focus groups identified this issue throughout all fieldwork and this emerged as a cross cutting challenge.

Monitoring and evaluation: Third but not least important is that there is a need for an external monitoring and evaluation agency which will help institutions in delivering quality services and improve along the way of repatriation, reintegration and resocialization as well as in countering and preventing violent extremism. The importance of monitoring and evaluating organization is highlighted throughout interviews and focus groups by professionals involved in the process of repatriation, reintegration and resocialization as well as in countering and preventing violent extremism. This monitoring and

evaluation should be designed to follow the process and be able to recommend adjustments and design new interventions during the process of repatriation, reintegration and resocialization as well as in countering and preventing violent extremism due to time pressure. As most cases are different from one to another, it is difficult to create standardized intervention and approaches to individuals. An external organization would be able to provide constructive feedback to staff and develop with them needs assessments that will generate interventions and improvements in real time.

Community perceptions

One of the most important findings for the report from quantitative research is the ways to communicate repatriation, rehabilitation and reintegration as well as prevention with the receiving community in the field. The importance of campaigning in the field with official information on the field and using digital technology such as digital platforms (including social networks) for this two way communication should be a priority for the next stage.

Respondents have perceptions on the issues of violent extremism but most of these perceptions are shaped or influenced by the lack of information and media representation of realities. The fact that around 50% declare "Maybe" on possibility of violent extremism in their own communities and the same number approximately declare that they would

report if they are exposed to violent extremism is a good indicator for authorities and shows these anomalies. But, lack of information or perception of high tension in neighborhoods on political extremism is also a perception that should be taken with a serious approach in mitigation of polarized views, fringe political stands and violent extremism. A large number of respondents also declare that they would not want to live in a community with extremist violence. This explains the resistance of the community to receive and help reintegration of repatriated individuals. Feeling of precepted risks from repatriation is also high and could be the source of this skeptic view.

Communities, families, friends and social networks are very important fragments for prevention of violent extremism as found in the survey with the affected community in hot-spots. in both ways as a radicalization catalyst and de-radicalization catalyst. Methods used for communication of violent extremism messages reach individuals for recruitment and they should use similar means of communication for opposing violent extremism too. The high percentage of group exposure to violent extremism matches with the high percentage of perception for support from similar groups in the case of combating violent extremism. The indication of lack of belonging to a group as cause for violent extremism is also confirmed in the results. Social network bubbles, limited community and lack of communication and information by authorities somewhat put limitations on the individuals who are potentially disenfranchised and create political opportunities for violent extremism.
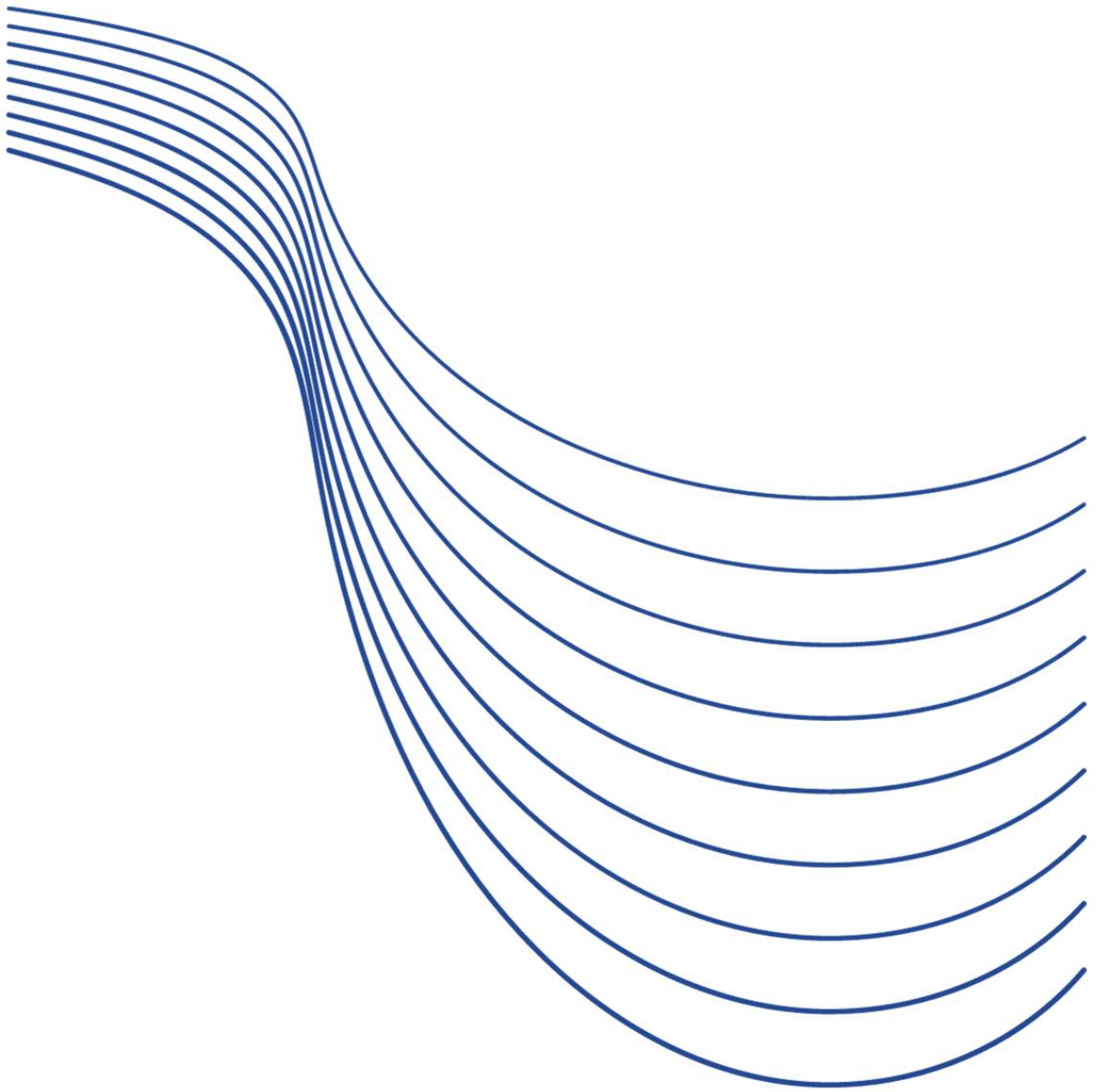
6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the pursuit of effective strategies for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE), an essential component is the identification of specific recommendations and needs within a given context. This chapter, "Recommendations and Needs," within the Country Needs Assessment on PCVE in Albania, represents a pivotal juncture in our exploration of the complex landscape of extremism and radicalization in the country. Drawing upon a thorough assessment of the situation, this chapter delves into the nuanced fabric of Albania's PCVE efforts.

Based on the findings garnered during the comprehensive assessment of needs, this chapter articulates thematic recommendations and institutional recommendations. These two facets of recommendations are not mutually exclusive; rather, they often intertwine and complement each other in a dynamic interplay. The synthesis of these recommendations crystallizes the insights derived from the extensive data collection and analysis carried out during the assessment process.

The main thematic recommendations are anchored in the framework of two fundamental pillars: Prevention and Rehabilitation and Reintegration. Within these pillars lie the core strategies that form the bedrock of Albania's approach to PCVE. These pillars are not isolated but are interconnected, reflecting the multifaceted nature of extremism and the need for a holistic response. The thematic recommendations address critical aspects of these pillars, offering actionable insights into how Albania can enhance its PCVE efforts.

Furthermore, this chapter briefly outlines some of the key institutional recommendations that play a pivotal role within each of these pillars. These institutions are instrumental in orchestrating and implementing the recommended strategies, thus serving as linchpins in the overarching framework of PCVE in Albania.

As we proceed through this chapter, we invite readers to delve deeper into the intricacies of these recommendations and the needs they seek to address. It is our hope that the insights presented herein will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders alike, facilitating a more effective and informed approach to PCVE in Albania.

6.1 Prevention recommendations

In the context of the Country Needs Assessment on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) in Albania, the first part of the Recommendations and Needs section underscores the critical importance of prevention efforts as a foundational pillar in the fight against

radicalism and violent extremism. Let's delve into the key elements of this recommendation:

Systematic and Coordinated Approach: The recommendation emphasizes the necessity of adopting a systematic and coordinated approach to PCVE. This means that interventions and strategies should be carefully planned, structured, and executed in a well-coordinated manner. The CVE center should establish a whole of society approach framework when engaging the relevant stakeholders. This would allow the center to engage a wide range of stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, religious leaders, community members, and international partners. Under this framework, the CVE center should foster collaboration and information-sharing among these stakeholders to ensure a holistic approach.This approach ensures that resources are utilized efficiently and that different stakeholders work together seamlessly. The CVE Center shall develop a referral mechanism as well as increase administrative capabilities to documentation and processing of data. Long-Term Perspective: PCVE initiatives must embrace a long-term perspective. Radicalization and extremism are complex phenomena that evolve over time, making sustained efforts and a National Threat Assessment

essential. By committing to long-term strategies, Albania can address the roots of radicalization and cultivate lasting resilience within communities.

Tailoring Strategies to Local Contexts: The establishment of a Regional Committee for the Prevention of Radicalization within Albania is imperative, aligning with the country's needs assessment on PCVE. This committee would serve as a pivotal platform for regional collaboration and coordination, addressing the nuanced challenges of radicalization in specific areas. As identified in the previous discussion, radicalization trends may vary across regions, necessitating tailored interventions. Moreover, a Regional Committee enables the sharing of localized insights, expertise, and resources, fostering a more effective response to the multifaceted issue of violent extremism. It promotes a holistic, community-centered approach, resonating with the Ministry of Health and Social Protection's efforts, and allows for a more targeted and impactful response to PCVE challenges in Albania.

National-Level Scope and Coordination: The recommendation emphasizes the need for a nationwide approach to PCVE. Radicalization is not confined to specific regions, so strategies should encompass the entire country to ensure a cohesive response. Hence,

the CVE ceneter should map and assess existing programs, policies, and initiatives related to countering violent extremism (CVE) and rehabilitation. Identify strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in the current system. This would then help the Government to prioritize interventions and focus on hot-spot areas.

Focused Attention on Hot Spot Areas: While the approach is national in scope, it acknowledges the existence of localized "hot spot" areas where radicalization may be more prevalent. Specialized and intensified efforts should be directed toward these areas to address specific challenges effectively. For this, a thorough risk assessment is needed. This would help the government to identify vulnerable populations, geographic areas, and online platforms where radicalization is more likely to occur. Moreover, this would help the authorities to determine the root causes of radicalization in the Albanian context.

Regulatory update: Legal Framework and Policy Review, to evaluate the existing regulations and policies related to violent extremism, repatriation, and rehabilitation. The CVE center/government should ensure that the legal framework is conducive to addressing the issues and protecting human rights, particularly meeting gender equity

and socially inclusive standards relevant to Albanian society.

Engagement of Key Actors: Effective prevention hinges on the active involvement of key actors within Albania. This includes government officials, community leaders, law enforcement, and other relevant stakeholders. Their commitment and leadership are crucial in driving successful PCVE initiatives.

Support from Donors and Organizations: External support from donors and specialized organizations with expertise in PCVE should be actively sought. These entities can provide financial resources, technical assistance, and knowledge sharing, reinforcing the effectiveness of prevention efforts.

R t k u q p u: Drafting and implementing programs, protocols and measures to prevent radicalization within correctional facilities. Ensure that the correction system has the required capacities and can provide access to counseling, education, vocational training, and psychological support.

Community Engagement: Engage with local communities to understand their concerns and needs. This would help to mobilize local resources and identify community-led initiatives that have the potential to counter violent extremism and promote social cohesion

Prevention role of Community Policing: Community Policing plays a pivotal role in preventing radicalization and countering violent extremism at the at the idetification and R&R process. By redefining its role to emphasize education and empowerment, community policing officers can become proactive agents of change within their communities. This approach not only helps build trust between law enforcement and community members but also equips officers with the knowledge and skills to identify early signs of radicalization and intervene effectively. However, to ensure the success of this redefined role, it is crucial to redimension the role of Community Policing Officers to its initial scope in preventing P/CVE contrary to the investigative focus performed thus far. This evolution will help identify areas for improvement and ensure that community policing remains a valuable tool in preventing radicalization.

Targeting Diverse Groups: The recommendation recognizes the diversity of contexts in which radicalization can occur. It highlights the need to engage with various segments of society, including:

Youth Groups: Addressing the vulnerabilities of young individuals who may be susceptible to radicalization. Pay particular attention to the role of the girls and females (sisters and wives) in the

prevention efforts; **Vulnerable Groups**: Tailoring interventions to protect and support marginalized or at-risk populations.
Schools: Implementing preventive measures within educational institutions to counter radicalization.
Armed Forces: Ensuring that military personnel are not influenced by extremist ideologies.

Multilevel Focus: PCVE initiatives should operate on multiple levels:

Individual Level: Providing tailored support and interventions for individuals at risk of radicalization.
Institutional Level: Ensuring that institutions like schools, the military, and prisons have robust measures in place to prevent radicalization within their spheres.
Community Level: Engaging with local communities to build trust, resilience, and awareness.

In sum, this first part of the Recommendations and Needs section highlights the need for a well-structured, coordinated, and long-term approach to preventing radicalism and violent extremism in Albania. By focusing on diverse groups and levels of society, involving key stakeholders and external support, and addressing both national and localized challenges, Albania can build a robust foundation for effective PCVE efforts.

National and Regional Coordination

- Enhancing National Coordination: National coordination efforts for Violent Extremism should be strengthened. This involves improving and strengthening the legal and institutional framework to facilitate more effective coordination among various stakeholders, streamlining efforts, and ensuring that strategies are implemented cohesively.
- Strengthening the National Coordinator: According the the latest developments, with the Prime Minister Order are established regional committee to prevent VE in Albania, coordinated by National Coordinator. This mechanism as newly one need to be strengthen first in order to enable actors address P/CVE. Despite huge step forward in establishing the mechanisms, now instruments are needed to gather and make it functional. Still CVE is counting on CSOs to boost application of the mechanism.
- Strengthening CVE Coordination: To enhance the effectiveness of PCVE initiatives, it's imperative to strengthen national coordination efforts. This entails improving the legal and institutional framework of the CVE center to facilitate more efficient collaboration among various stakeholders.

Enhancing Community Policing:

- The role of community policing should be redefined, with an

emphasis on education and empowerment through continuous training. Given their evolving responsibilities, the effectiveness of community policing should be closely monitored, particularly in terms of investigative and preventive functions.

Local Governance/Local Public Safety Councils

- Empowering Local Public Safety Councils (LPSCs): Local Public Safety Councils should have a comprehensive legal basis, administrative capabilities and capacity-building training. They should transition into key mechanisms responsible for the effective implementation and enforcement of the LPSCs, acting as a vital preventive and advisory mechanism within communities.

Community Engagement and Awareness

Community Awareness and Reporting: To effectively prevent radicalism and extremism, there's a pressing need to work consistently with communities, especially those in high-risk areas. This involves raising awareness within these communities about the risks associated with radicalization and extremism. The community should be informed about various aspects, including the methods used for recruitment and the ideologies exploited by extremist groups.

Moreover, communities should be empowered to act as key collaborators in this effort. They should know where and how to report potential cases or suspicious activities related to radicalization within certain individuals or groups. This includes providing them with accessible channels and guidance for reporting.

Socioeconomic Empowerment

Empowering Vulnerable Communities: To address the root causes of radicalization, a special focus is required at the national level on economic and social empowerment. This involves tailoring interventions to specialize in addressing the needs of the most at-risk groups within communities. This includes individuals facing economic, social, and family problems, as well as young people who are highly vulnerable to radicalization. Empowerment initiatives should aim to uplift these communities and offer opportunities for economic stability and social inclusion.

Training and Capacity Building

Specialized Training: To enhance PCVE efforts, specialized training programs should be established. These programs should offer standardized, clear, comprehensible, and easily digestible modules that

educate frontline actors and key institutions about early signs of radicalization, methods of identification, approaches to intervention, referrals, and reporting mechanisms. The goal is to equip these stakeholders with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively prevent violent extremism.

Information Dissemination:

- Informative Materials: To ensure that information reaches all levels of society, it's vital to produce informative and awareness-raising materials. These materials should serve central and local institutions, professionals, and the broader community. They must be approved by the Coordination Center for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and made easily accessible. These resources play a crucial role in educating and mobilizing stakeholders in the PCVE effort.

Online Radicalization and online hate

- **Preventing Online Radicalization:** Recognizing the severity of online radicalization as a threat, increased attention, information dissemination, and awareness campaigns are necessary. Concrete actions should be taken to counter online extremism. This includes monitoring online spaces for extremist content

and implementing measures to prevent its proliferation.

- **Ensure the development of handbooks** and guidance for youth, school workers, and parents on how to recognize and report online radicalization, and develop school protocols for this

- **Preventing Online Hate:** Concrete efforts should be made to prevent discrimination, harassment, and hate expressions on the internet. This involves implementing measures to counter online extremism and create a safer online environment.

Technology and Reporting

Online Prevention Platform: Developing an online platform or application dedicated to the prevention of violence is crucial. This platform should be user-friendly and accessible to to report any kind of violence across all age groups, with a particular focus on students. It should serve as a safe space for individuals to report incidents of violence, bullying, and cases of radicalization. This technology-driven approach facilitates timely reporting and early intervention. This could be integrated with digital police station on place.

Education and Awareness

- Proactive School Role: Schools should play a proactive and strategic role in PCVE efforts. This includes establishing clear identification, referral, and support mechanisms. Updating the network of coordinating teachers is essential, and there should be a strong emphasis on facilitating collaboration between teachers, psychologists, social workers, and security officers within schools. Continuous capacity building for all these actors is crucial to improve the effectiveness of prevention within educational institutions.

Media and Journalist

- Increasing Journalist Awareness: To support effective PCVE efforts, there's a need to increase the knowledge and awareness of journalists. Journalists should be trained to handle reporting/ media coverage related to radicalism and violent extremism with professionalism, care and responsibility. Media spaces should pay attention to these issues to contribute to more effective prevention by providing accurate and informed coverage.

Civil Society and Youth Empowerment

- Strengthening Civil Society: Civil society organizations should be empowered and coordinated to deliver high-quality interventions

with integrity, particularly within communities and institutions.

- Encouraging collaboration between organizations with extensive experience and smaller local/community-level entities is vital. Sub-grants for small organizations with direct access to communities should be promoted.
- Youth Programs: To engage and empower young people, especially in high-risk areas, educational, informative, and inclusive activities and programs should be expanded. These initiatives should also focus on the socioeconomic empowerment of youth to reduce vulnerability to radicalization.

Academic Involvement

- University Engagement: Universities should play a more active role in conducting research, data analysis, and generating qualitative and quantitative insights in the field of PCVE. This academic involvement can contribute to evidence-based strategies and informed decision-making.

Donor Coordination

- Long-Term Donor Support: Donors should provide sustained, long-term support for PCVE programs and mechanisms. Coordinating donor efforts is essential to avoid overlapping programs and projects,

ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively.

Religious Education and Counter-Narratives

- Religious Education: Cases identified as radicalized, as well as front-line employees who work directly with such cases, should receive religious education. This education helps to build a better understanding of religious ideologies and their implications for PCVE.
- Interfaith Dialogue: To foster understanding and harmony among different religious communities, interfaith dialogue should be encouraged and further developed. This can promote tolerance and mutuality.

Building Counter-Narratives: Counter-narratives against violent extremism should be developed, emphasizing non-violence, addressing hate speech, and countering extremist ideologies. These narratives promote alternative belief systems that reject violence and extremism.

Regional and International Cooperation

- Promoting Cooperation and Joint Program Implementation: Regional and international cooperation should be encouraged and further implemented, especially with countries that have successful PCVE practices. Sharing experiences and best practices can enhance Albania's

PCVE efforts. Empowerment of the Regional Network of National Coordinators is key and should be extended to technical level too.

Health and Justice Sector Competence

- Health Sector Competence: Competence within the health sector to address violent extremism should be developed. Health professionals should be equipped to identify and respond to signs of radicalization.
- Justice Sector Education: Education within the justice sector should be improved to enhance knowledge related to PCVE. This includes training for legal professionals and other justice sector actors.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to measure the impact of prevention and rehabilitation programs.
Continuously assess the effectiveness of interventions and make adjustments as necessary.
Budget and Resource Allocation: Determine the financial and human resources required to implement prevention and rehabilitation programs effectively. Allocate resources efficiently to address identified needs.
Public Awareness and Outreach: Engage in public awareness campaigns to educate the public about the dangers of extremism and the importance of repatriation and rehabilitation.
Long-Term Sustainability: Plan for the long-term sustainability of programs by

building local capacity and fostering ownership among stakeholders.

6.2 Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Resocialization Programs

The second part of the Recommendations and Needs in the Country Needs Assessment on PCVE in Albania focuses on the critical aspect of Rehabilitation and Reintegration. This part highlights the significance of providing comprehensive and continuous support to individuals who have been radicalized or engaged in extremist activities and are now returning to society.

This part emphasizes the critical importance of providing comprehensive, continuous, and long-term support for individuals returning from extremist activities. This support should not only focus on the returnees themselves but also extend to their families and children. Furthermore, it should foster independence while maintaining consistency in service provision to prevent regression and mitigate risks to the community as a whole. This approach is essential to the successful rehabilitation and re-integration of individuals affected by extremism in Albania.

Within the framework of the identified needs for the Rehabilitation and Reintegration (R&R) processes in the context of a Country Needs Assessment on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) in Albania, the

following points are essential considerations:

Timely and Continuous Support: It is imperative that state institutions and donors collaborate to ensure the provision of timely and uninterrupted support for individuals returning from extremist activities. This support should encompass various aspects, including psychological, social, educational, and vocational assistance. The goal is to facilitate the re-integration process and rehabilitation of these individuals effectively. The term "360-degree support" implies a comprehensive approach that addresses all aspects of an individual's life. It should encompass not only the individuals who have been radicalized but also their families and children.

Long-Term Perspective: Recognizing the complexity of rehabilitation and reintegration, a long-term approach is essential. This means that support should extend beyond the immediate aftermath of an individual's return and continue over an extended period. This long-term commitment is crucial to addressing the underlying issues that may have led to radicalization and to fostering lasting reintegration into society.

R&R projects must be designed as long-term and continuous initiatives. The impact of these projects arises from consistent and sustained interventions. Given the prolonged nature of deradicalization and reintegration processes, long-term commitment is crucial for success.

Independence for Returnees: While providing support, it's essential to maintain an approach that encourages independence for the returnees. This means equipping them with the skills, resources, and opportunities needed to become self-reliant members of society, some on going support could be on limiting the support on supervising the process on integration on the job market, monitoring the frequency of psychological support, engaging them in community activities as per every citizen when they have chances to be in touch with community members and making their own connections independently etc. Empowering returnees to take control of their lives and make positive choices should be a prior objective of state, non-state institutions,donors and civil society organizations.

Consistency in Service Provision: Inconsistent provision of services for returnees can have detrimental consequences. It can lead to regression within the target group, where individuals may revert to extremist ideologies or activities due to a lack of sustained support.

Additionally, inconsistent service provision poses risks to the broader community, as returnees who do not receive appropriate support may pose a security threat.

Educational and Creative Activities for Youth and children:

- Continuous Engagement: Fun, creative, and educational activities should be provided consistently for returned children and youth. These activities should be designed to engage and empower young individuals. They should not only serve as a means of diversion but also promote personal development and resilience. Inclusivity in these programs ensures that all young people, including those who may be vulnerable to radicalization, have access to positive alternatives.

Psychological and Social Support for Families:

- Continued Assistance: Psychological and social support must be an ongoing provision for returned mothers and children. The challenges they face do not dissipate quickly, and continued support is essential for their well-being and successful reintegration. This support should address trauma, emotional needs, and practical challenges they may encounter.

Training for Frontline Professionals:

- Updated Information: Frontline professionals, such as teachers, psychologists, case managers, community police, and social services near municipalities, should receive training that includes updated information on PCVE. This training equips them with the knowledge and skills necessary to identify, assist, and support individuals who may have been radicalized. Regular updates are crucial in keeping professionals well-informed and effective in their roles.

Increased Budgetary Allocation:

- Financial Support: Adequate budget allocation from both government sources and donors is essential for initiatives with a significant impact on R&R. Adequate funding ensures that programs and services can be adequately resourced to meet the complex needs of returnees and their families.

Qualified Human Resources:

- Expertise: Human resources involved in R&R should consist of qualified experts with in-depth knowledge of radicalism and violent extremism. Their expertise is crucial in delivering effective interventions and support. There are already some professionals with experience and expertise in the field , mainly the actors who have

been working with PVE and RR, however even those actors face the challenge of limited human resources.

Ongoing Support for Staff:

- Psychological Supervision: Staff directly involved in R&R should receive continuous support and step-by-step psychological supervision. This support helps them manage the emotional toll and challenges associated with their roles.

Continuous Training for Returnees:

- Skills Development: Returnees should have access to continuous training opportunities to acquire new skills and enhance their employability. This can significantly contribute to their successful reintegration into society.

Collaboration Between Universities and Businesses:

- Integration Opportunities: Collaboration between universities and businesses is important in facilitating the inclusion of returning youth. Scholarships, internships, and practical opportunities offered by businesses can provide valuable pathways for reintegration and socioeconomic empowerment.

Community Awareness and Acceptance:

- Informing the Community: Communities, especially in areas with repatriates, should be informed about violent extremism and the associated risks. Multimodal awareness campaigns should be employed to engage the community and repatriated families. This approach helps overcome stigma, fosters mutual trust, and encourages community support for returnees.

Mechanism for Transitioning Youth Over 18:

- Transition Planning: A well-defined R&R mechanism and legal framework should be established for youth who are transitioning beyond the age of 18. Child Protection Workers may not be suited for the unique challenges faced by older youth, and a tailored approach is necessary to support their reintegration.

Support for Child Protection Workers:

- Psychological Support and Training: Child Protection Workers require more psychological support and training to effectively manage their roles. These professionals often face overwhelming responsibilities and emotional burdens. Support and division of tasks among them can alleviate their workload and enhance their readiness to assist in the R&R process.

Training for Area Policing Specialists:

- Focus on Recidivism and Prevention: Area Policing Specialists should receive continuous training and updates, with a focus on effectively handling and addressing recidivist individuals. Emphasis should also be placed on preventive measures to deter individuals from engaging in extremist activities.

Incorporating these considerations into Albania's PCVE strategy will enhance the effectiveness of R&R processes, contribute to the successful reintegration of returnees, and promote community resilience against violent extremism.

6.3 Recommendations related to State and non-State actors

The Country Needs Assessment on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) in Albania has been a meticulous and comprehensive undertaking, drawing insights and recommendations from an extensive array of both State and non-State entities. The process of deriving these critical needs and recommendations was conducted through rigorous mapping exercises, encompassing thorough desk research, in-depth interviews, and dynamic focus group discussions. This introductory overview will set the stage for a detailed exploration of the specific roles, contributions, and unique recommendations provided by each entity within the PCVE landscape.

6.3.1 CVE Center (Coordination Center Countering Violent Extremism)

At the heart of national coordination efforts stands the CVE Center, a pivotal institution in the PCVE landscape. A striking consensus among various stakeholders, including state institutions, foreign organizations, and donors, has emerged as a resonant call for enhanced national coordination to address violent extremism. This consensus manifests in the form of recurrent recommendations that underscore the critical need for bolstering the legal, institutional, administrative, and policy framework of the CVE Center. This unanimous emphasis on strengthening the CVE Center underscores its central role in facilitating collaboration among diverse stakeholders, underscoring its essential contribution to elevating the overall effectiveness of PCVE initiatives.

The CVE Center should function with a special Law:

This recommendation suggests that the CVE Center should be established and granted legal autonomy through a dedicated law. Currently, the CVE Center relies on goodwill and trust to engage with other institutions and request their cooperation. However, this lacks the legal mechanisms to enforce responses or reporting from these institutions. By granting the CVE Center its own legal framework and executive powers, it would be able to

function more independently and efficiently. This should include a separate budget and decentralization in the decision-making based on merit criteria. This legal status would enable the CVE Center to undertake actions without being impeded by bureaucratic hurdles that often come with working through other institutions.

The CVE Center should incorporate the duties of a data center and a focal point at the national level for the collection of all the data for the returnees:

This recommendation underscores the need for the CVE Center to serve as a central repository of data related to individuals who have returned from extremist activities. Having a centralized data hub allows for better tracking, analysis, and management of returnees. It aids in assessing their progress, identifying trends, and making informed policy decisions. This centralization of data is crucial in preventing further radicalization and violent extremism.

The CVE Center should serve as a resource center with information, data, statistics, materials, training modules, procedures, and protocols:

To be effective, the CVE Center should not only collect data but also serve as a comprehensive resource center including the drafting of the National Threat Assessment on CVE. This means offering a wide range of information, materials, training modules, and best practices

related to countering violent extremism. It should provide tools, guidelines, and templates for professionals and institutions engaged in prevention and treatment efforts. This centralized resource hub facilitates a coordinated and standardized approach to PCVE initiatives.

The CVE Center should be a coordinating point for existing interventions/programs/projects:

This recommendation highlights the need for the CVE Center to act as a coordinating body for all interventions, programs, and projects related to radicalization and violent extremism. It suggests the creation of a database, platform, or website that catalogs all ongoing and completed projects by civil society organizations, state institutions, and informal groups. Such coordination is essential to prevent overlapping of interventions, ensure a nationwide distribution of projects, and evaluate their impact. It also guides donors on where to focus their support and helps organizations access information about existing initiatives.

The capacity building trainings, manuals, and any other product developed by several actors on radicalization and violent extremism should be standardized:

To maintain the quality and impact of capacity-building efforts in PCVE, this recommendation

emphasizes the need for standardization. All training programs, manuals, and products should align with the best practices of the European Union. Furthermore, they should be subject to approval by the CVE Center to ensure quality and effectiveness. Standardization ensures consistency and reliability in PCVE training and materials.

Enhanced legal and institutional connection between the local government and the CVE Center:

This recommendation calls for improved legal and institutional connections between local governments and the CVE Center. It suggests the development of procedures and/or standard operating procedures (SOP) that compel cooperation and information exchange between these parties. Such connections are essential for efficient local-level PCVE efforts and ensure that the CVE Center is effectively linked to municipalities and local institutions.

Better cooperation between prisons and the CVE Centre:

Enhanced cooperation between prisons and the CVE Center is crucial for the identification, rehabilitation, and reintegration of individuals involved in extremist activities. Improved communication and collaboration between these entities can lead to more effective programs and support systems within correctional facilities, ultimately

reducing the risk of recidivism. CVE Center's support in drafting of prevention or rehabilitation protocols is key to reducing the risk of violent extremism and radicalisation in prisons.

Harmonizing activities between CVE and Ministry of Education and Sports should continue to be offered in the host spot areas for active engagement of youth, parents, and communities for effective prevention.

The CVE Center needs to increase its human resources:

As the central hub for PCVE efforts at the national level, the CVE Center requires adequate human resources. The current staff is often overburdened with responsibilities. To effectively fulfill its role in national coordination, data management, resource provision, and project coordination, additional staff and expertise are necessary. An expanded team would enhance the CVE Center's capacity to serve as a comprehensive and effective resource center.

6.3.2 Community Policing/Albanian State Police

In the context of the Country Needs Assessment on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) in Albania, community policing stands as a vital component of the Albanian State Police's efforts to safeguard communities from the threat of radicalization and violent extremism. Through meticulous desk

research, interviews, and focus group discussions, a set of recommendations have emerged that pertain specifically to the role of Area Policing Specialists within the Albanian State Police. These recommendations underscore the need for an agile and proactive community policing approach in the prevention of violent extremism. They address critical areas such as the monitoring of structural changes, comprehensive training, staffing considerations, proactive reporting, and increased police presence in schools and communities.

Monitoring the efficiency of the amendments to the structure of the Area Policing Specialist:

This recommendation highlights the importance of monitoring the effectiveness of changes made in July 2023 to the role and responsibilities of Area Policing Specialists. The concern is that by giving these specialists additional primary responsibilities in investigations, their capacity to effectively engage in the prevention of violent extremism and the rehabilitation of returned cases might be compromised. This shift could potentially result in a reduced focus on their community policing duties.

Training of all Area Policing Specialists at the national level:

This recommendation stresses the need for comprehensive training programs for Area Policing Specialists. It calls for nationwide training sessions organized by

regions, with a specific focus on priority hotspot areas. Training should go beyond merely identifying early signs and should delve deeper into the nuances of preventing violent extremism. The aim is to equip Area Policing Specialists with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively address the unique challenges posed by radicalization within their communities.

Increasing the number of Area Police Specialists in the hot spot areas:

This recommendation suggests reconsidering the staffing levels of Area Policing Specialists, particularly in high-risk or hot spot areas. The idea is to potentially increase the number of specialists in regions where the threat of violent extremism is more pronounced. This expansion would help ensure that these specialists have adequate resources and personnel to fulfill their community policing and prevention roles effectively.

The Area Policing Specialist should have a more proactive role in prevention through reporting:

This recommendation calls for a more proactive role for Area Policing Specialists in prevention efforts. Specifically, it suggests that these specialists include a dedicated point related to violent extremism in their daily reports. This would involve monitoring and reporting on any suspicious activities or individuals with potential ties to

violent extremism. By actively engaging in surveillance and reporting, Area Policing Specialists can contribute to the early detection and prevention of extremist activities in their communities.

A higher presence of the police, including the patrols, the Area Police Specialists, and the municipal police in prevention in schools and in the community:

This recommendation underscores the importance of an increased police presence, not only with regular patrols but also through the active involvement of Area Policing Specialists and municipal police, in preventing violent extremism in schools and the broader community. It emphasizes the need for law enforcement to engage directly with educational institutions and community gatherings to create a visible and supportive presence, deter extremist activities, and build trust among community members.

6.3.3 Education system/ Ministry of Education and Sports / schools

Within the comprehensive framework of the Country Needs Assessment on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) in Albania, education emerges as a pivotal arena for the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism. As the assessment has revealed, there exists a pressing need for heightened attention, as well as the

establishment of specific coordinating and reporting mechanisms, to bolster the efforts of ninth-grade and secondary schools in Albania. The assessment findings stress the importance of providing critical support and empowerment to the educational staff tasked with safeguarding young minds against the allure of extremism. This introductory overview sets the stage for a detailed exploration of the recommendations pertaining to the education sector, delving into the specific measures required to enhance the role of schools in preventing violent extremism and fostering a secure and resilient society.

A Clearer Mechanism for Identification and Reporting:

The call for a clearer mechanism for identifying, referring, and reporting cases of suspected radicalization in schools emphasizes the need for structured procedures within educational institutions. Such mechanisms would enable both internal and external stakeholders to collaborate effectively in identifying and addressing potential cases of radicalization.

Coordinated Instruments and Actions:

The recommendation for better-coordinated instruments and actions highlights the importance of synergy between various stakeholders and staff within schools. This includes school directors, psycho-social services, and security officers. Collaboration among these key players is essential for the efficient

identification and reporting of potential radicalization cases, facilitating prompt responses by relevant authorities.

Empowerment and Training of Coordinator Teachers and All teachers :

The resizing, operation, continuous updating, and training of the network of coordinator teachers and all teachers of the schools on signify the significance of nurturing educators with specialized roles. These teachers act as linchpins in implementing PCVE measures within schools, necessitating continuous support and training to effectively carry out their responsibilities. The training should be offered to the teachers who enter in the system every year.

Capacity Building Training for Security Officers and psycho-social services in the schools:

The recommendation for joint support and training for security officers and psycho-social services within schools is paramount, as these individuals often have direct interactions with students and can serve as key observers of concerning behavior. Specialized training for security officers specifically addresses their unique roles and needs in dealing with radicalization issues within educational environments.

Evaluation and Support for School Security Officers and psycho-social services in the schools:

To enhance the effectiveness of school security officers, there is a need for ongoing evaluation and support through informative materials. These officers play crucial roles in fostering trust with students and teachers, making their training and awareness a vital component of PCVE efforts.

Online Radicalism Awareness and Reporting:

Acknowledging the growing concern of online radicalism, the assessment calls for in-depth training for teachers, security officers, and psycho-social services. This training should equip educational institutions with the knowledge and tools needed to address the risks associated with online radicalization effectively.

Child and Youth-Friendly Reporting Application:

The proposal for a child and youth-friendly online reporting application underscores the importance of giving students a voice in reporting potential incidents. Establishing a mechanism for monitoring and responding to reports is crucial to ensure that the application serves its intended purpose.

Students, Parents and community Awareness:

Increasing awareness among students, community and parents about the risks of radicalism, online radicalization, and bullying is vital. Empowering students with information and reporting tools, along with educating parents, fosters a holistic approach to prevention.

Immediate Reporting Mechanism for Online Cases:

The recommendation for an immediate reporting instrument for online violence and radicalism aligns with the evolving digital landscape. This mechanism should ensure swift reporting to educational authorities and law enforcement, paralleling existing procedures for offline cases.

Principal Engagement and Appreciation:

Finally, enhancing the understanding and appreciation of the role of school security officers among school principals is essential. This recognition ensures that security officers receive the support and recognition necessary for effectively contributing to PCVE efforts.

Psychosocial support for return children : their support must remain constant and ongoing, as well as for children who are identified or are in risk of radicalization

Extra-curricular activities: should be offered information, entertainment and other interactive activities for identified pupils and those in risk

6.3.4 Mental Health and Social Protection- Ministry of Health and Social Protection

Providing psychological and social support to individuals affected by extremism. Recommendations may include ongoing training, psychological supervision, and increased resources to address the mental health needs of individuals and families involved in PCVE processes.

Guideline Development:

- The creation of comprehensive guidelines for healthcare, public health, and social protection professionals to identify individuals susceptible to radicalization is essential. These guidelines should align with international best practices and be dynamic, adapting to emerging trends. Concurrently, a strong focus on training and capacity-building programs ensures that professionals can effectively implement these guidelines in their daily work, enhancing the overall response to radicalization.

Awareness and Training Initiatives:

- Developing the capabilities of healthcare workers, particularly nurses, family doctors, and other essential health professionals, to recognize early signs and potential radicalization is a crucial step in enhancing the country's PCVE efforts. Healthcare providers often

interact with individuals who may be vulnerable to radicalization, and these encounters present valuable opportunities for intervention. The challenge lies in equipping healthcare workers with the knowledge and skills to identify signs of vulnerability accurately and provide appropriate support. By offering training and guidance to healthcare professionals, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection can empower them to play an active role in preventing radicalization and contributing to the overall well-being and security of individuals and communities.

Case Management and Intervention:
- Establishing a structured case management system is crucial for addressing radicalization. It should encompass initial evaluations, comprehensive assessments, and tailored intervention plans for individuals showing early signs of radicalization. Customizing interventions based on individual needs and adhering to human rights principles is imperative. Additionally, the implementation of a robust monitoring and evaluation process ensures that interventions are effective and allows for timely adjustments. Clear referral mechanisms to appropriate agencies, such as the CVE Center, should be in place to ensure seamless coordination.

Reporting Mechanisms:
- Developing clear and standardized reporting mechanisms is essential to streamline the identification and reporting of radicalization cases within the Ministry. Protocols should be reviewed regularly to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Collaboration and information-sharing with the CVE Center are vital to ensure a coordinated response. Timely reporting allows for swift intervention and support for individuals at risk of radicalization.

Research and Evaluation:
- Investing in research initiatives to understand the underlying causes and risk factors associated with radicalization is a strategic move. By conducting rigorous research, the Ministry can better tailor its interventions and policies. Continuous evaluation of PCVE programs ensures that strategies are evidence-based and effective. The findings from research can inform future policy development and program design, enhancing the Ministry's impact.

International Collaboration:
- Collaborating with international organizations, governments, and institutions working on PCVE is beneficial. Partnerships enable the sharing of best practices, lessons learned, and access to international expertise. This collaboration strengthens the Ministry's PCVE

efforts and fosters a global perspective on addressing violent extremism.

Community Engagement:
- Engaging with local communities is fundamental. Building trust with communities, including religious and community leaders, facilitates their involvement in PCVE initiatives. Encouraging community-based approaches to identify and address radicalization at the grassroots level empowers communities to be part of the solution.

Regular Review and Adaptation:
- The Ministry should adopt a culture of continuous improvement. Regularly reviewing and adapting PCVE strategies, guidelines, and programs based on evolving threats, community needs, and emerging research ensures relevance and effectiveness. It allows the Ministry to remain responsive to the dynamic nature of violent extremism.

By implementing these recommendations, the Ministry of Health and Social Protection can strengthen its role in PCVE, contributing to more effective prevention and intervention efforts in Albania. This comprehensive approach emphasizes data-driven decision-making, collaboration, capacity-building, and continuous improvement in addressing the complex issue of violent extremism and radicalization.

6.3.5 Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs

The mandate of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, particularly the directorate of international organizations encompasses the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization issues (PCVE) within the framework of international organizations like the UN and OSCE.

Commitment to international efforts aimed at preventing radicalization and violent extremism:
The Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, through its directorate of international organizations, currently focuses on issues related to terrorism, which is a crucial aspect of national and international security. To enhance efforts in preventing violent extremism and radicalization, it is advisable to engage the directorate to include PCVE within the context of established international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). This engagement acknowledges the interconnectedness of counter-terrorism and PCVE efforts and leverages existing international platforms and partnerships. The Ministry can contribute to a more holistic approach to global security and strengthen Albania's commitment to international efforts aimed at preventing radicalization and violent extremism. Additionally, this recommendation promotes a coordinated and cooperative approach, ensuring that PCVE is addressed in alignment with international standards and practices. This recommendation gains

heightened significance and relevance due to the existing gap in the current state of affairs. Presently, the key role responsible for reporting and coordinating with international organizations regarding PCVE remains unfilled. Specifically, this pertains to the Directorate for International Organizations, specifically within the Sector for Security Issues.

6.4.6 Municipalities

Within the context of PCVE in Albania, municipalities emerge as central actors, positioned at the forefront of both prevention and the Rehabilitation and Reintegration (R&R) process. Their role is foundational, and their contributions have been shaped by a wealth of data obtained through extensive research and engagement. It is imperative that municipalities be encouraged, supported, and empowered in their efforts to craft concrete, effective, and sustainable policies, programs, and measures. These initiatives are aimed at not only averting radicalism and violent extremism within their regions but also effectively managing cases involving individuals who have returned from extremist activities. Such multifaceted endeavors require not just material resources but also a deep understanding of the nuanced challenges associated with reintegration and rehabilitation.

Municipalities must have policies, action plans, and concrete measures for prevention, identification, referral, and treatment of cases potentially identified as radicals or returned from war zones:

➔ To effectively combat radicalization and violent extremism at the local level, municipalities should establish comprehensive policies, action plans, and concrete measures. These should include guidelines for identifying individuals potentially at risk of radicalization, establishing effective referral systems, and providing appropriate treatment and support.

Special preventive mechanisms must be set up in the Municipality for the identification, referral, and treatment

➔ Creating dedicated preventive mechanisms within municipalities, in collaboration with Local Public Safety Councils and other relevant institutions, is essential. These mechanisms should focus on early identification of at-risk individuals, facilitating their referral to appropriate intervention programs, and ensuring a coordinated response among various stakeholders.

Municipalities, especially the Child Protection Workers and the Needs Assessment and Case Referral Unit should have dedicated plans for the management of returned cases, a specified and detailed plan that guides the staff with the concrete steps to follow throughout Rehabilitation and Reintegration process:

➔ Municipalities need well-defined and detailed plans for managing cases involving individuals who have returned from extremist activities. These plans should provide step-by-step guidance to Child Protection

Workers and the Needs Assessment and Case Referral Unit, ensuring a structured and effective approach to rehabilitation and reintegration.

Municipalities must consider concrete measures for the management of returned cases for persons who turn 18 and can no longer be under the management of the Child Protection Unit:

→ As individuals turn 18, they may no longer fall under the purview of Child Protection Workers. Therefore, municipalities should develop plans for the transition of care and management to appropriate agencies, such as the Needs Assessment and Case Referral Unit, ensuring continuity of support and supervision.

Capacity building must be strengthened with in-depth and updated training for Child Protection Workers and the Needs Assessment and Case Referral Unit:

→ Continuous training and capacity-building programs are crucial for Child Protection Workers and the Needs Assessment and Case Referral Unit. These programs should provide in-depth knowledge, updated information, and specialized skills to effectively address the nuances of radicalization and reintegration.

The construction of a mechanism for collecting information:

→ Establishing a mechanism for collecting and sharing information among relevant institutions is vital for effective case management. This

ensures that Child Protection Workers are informed and updated on the progress, challenges, and developments related to each case they manage.

Establishment of community centers on the Municipal level and increase the staff in the community centers to prevent radicalism and violent extremism:

→ Expanding the presence of community centers near municipalities and augmenting staffing levels is a proactive measure for preventing radicalization and extremism. These multidisciplinary community centers can play a pivotal role in reintegration efforts.

Drafting of manuals and guidelines for Municipal staff:

→ Equipping municipal staff with a comprehensive manual or handbook is crucial. This resource should offer detailed insights into the dynamics of radicalism and violent extremism, including effective management strategies, methods, and required skills.

Drafting of an assessment instrument for risk prevention, :

→ Developing assessment instruments for risk and progress is essential for monitoring cases effectively. These instruments provide a structured approach to evaluating the risk factors and tracking the progress of individuals involved in rehabilitation and reintegration programs.

Implementing these recommendations will empower municipalities to play a central role in PCVE efforts, ensuring a more coordinated, comprehensive, and effective response to the complex challenges posed by radicalization and violent extremism at the local level.

6.3.6 Public Local Safety Councils

The recommendations concerning self-government initiatives, as emerging from the Country Needs Assessment on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) in Albania, center on enhancing the roles and capabilities of Public Local Safety Councils. These councils serve as pivotal advisory and active mechanisms for bolstering public security and play an indispensable role in preventing violent extremism. The following analysis elucidates the essence and significance of these recommendations, highlighting the imperative of reinforcing and revitalizing PLSCs to address the multifaceted challenges posed by radicalization and extremism at the local level.

Legislation and Consultation: ensuring that PLSCs operate in accordance with existing legislation. PLSCs need a more inclusive and comprehensive consultation process, especially at the local level, to solicit feedback and insights from key stakeholders. Additionally, the suggestion of engaging national and international experts demonstrates the commitment to crafting an effective legal framework that can be efficiently implemented.

Strengthening PLSCs: The pivotal role of PLSCs as preventive mechanisms. LPSC's need to be strengthened, recognizing their potential in enhancing public security and preventing violent extremism. Strengthening PLSCs may involve providing them with additional resources, authority, or support to carry out their functions more effectively.

Internal Regulation and Infrastructure: The development of well-defined internal regulations to clarify their functions and responsibilities and investing in infrastructure to bolster the capacity and capabilities of these councils.

Binding Mechanism and Coordination: PLSCs need to operate as binding mechanisms for all local actors, potentially under the coordination of the mayor. This ensures that PLSCs are not marginalized and have a central role in local decision-making processes related to security and PCVE.

Capacity Building: The importance of capacity building for PLSCs, particularly for the contact persons and/or coordinators. Specialized training is proposed to underscore their role, significance, and operational aspects. The involvement of national or international experts in delivering such training can provide valuable insights and best practices.

Unified Model: Establishing a standardized model for PLSCs at the national level. This seeks to avoid variations in implementation across different cities, which can occur when different models are employed through various projects by non-governmental organizations. Standardization can enhance consistency and effectiveness.

Awareness and Inclusivity: The necessity of raising awareness about the importance and the role of PLSCs among central and local institutions, the community, youth, and other key stakeholders. Ensuring that citizens feel included and part of the decision-making process can foster a sense of ownership and engagement.

Budget Autonomy: Providing PLSCs with their own budget, sourced from the security fund in the Municipality. This financial autonomy is seen as crucial to prevent dependence on the mayor's discretion or short-term projects from civil society organizations, ensuring sustained and effective operation.

6.3.7 Armed Forces

The armed forces should have an active role in PCVE efforts, as they consider it a very high risk in that sector. Recommendations include enhancing capacity building, intelligence-sharing mechanisms, and collaboration between the armed forces and other security agencies to prevent the infiltration of extremists.

Capacity Building through Training:
- This recommendation underscores the immediate need to enhance the capacities of the Armed Forces through comprehensive training programs. These programs are expected to deliver a clear and professional message regarding radicalism, covering areas such as identification, communication, and the approach to identified cases. The training needs are identified for several specific groups:
  1. Personnel working directly with new arrivals in the armed forces.
  2. Lecturers and staff within the Armed Forces.
  3. Special security structures.
  4. The broader army personnel.

This training-focused recommendation reflects the acknowledgment that a well-informed and trained Armed Forces can play a pivotal role in identifying and addressing potential cases of radicalization. It recognizes that different categories of personnel within the Armed Forces require tailored training to effectively counter the diverse challenges posed by violent extremism.

Enhanced Information Sharing:
- This recommendation stresses the importance of improved information sharing between the Armed Forces and other institutions that may have

indications of suspected or identified cases in communities across Albania. The aim is to make the Armed Forces more vigilant and better equipped to take proactive measures.

Effective information sharing is a fundamental component of any counter-extremism strategy. By collaborating with other institutions and receiving timely information, the Armed Forces can better anticipate and respond to emerging threats. This recommendation underscores the necessity of building robust information-sharing networks.

Update and Enrich Awareness Materials:
- This recommendation calls for the update and enrichment of informational and awareness-raising materials used to educate staff and soldiers within the Armed Forces. These materials should focus on various aspects, including the identification of radicalization and violent extremism, appropriate approaches, risk assessment, and preventive measures.

Keeping educational materials up-to-date and comprehensive is essential in ensuring that Armed Forces personnel are well-informed and equipped to handle the evolving challenges posed by violent extremism. This recommendation highlights the importance of regularly reviewing and improving training resources to stay ahead of emerging threats.

In summary, the recommendations for the Armed Forces in Albania reflect a comprehensive approach to addressing the issue of violent extremism. They emphasize the significance of capacity building through targeted training, efficient information sharing, and the continuous improvement of educational materials. By implementing these recommendations, the Armed Forces can play a vital role in the prevention and countering of violent extremism within the country.

6.3.8 Penitentiary system

The penitentiary system is pivotal in the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals with extremist backgrounds, and recommendations may entail the development of specialized rehabilitation programs within correctional facilities and the provision of psychological support to inmates to prevent radicalization.

- **Prevention Mechanism in Prisons**: The first recommendation emphasizes the creation of a dedicated prevention mechanism within the penitentiary system, incorporating an assessment unit working with standardized protocols and modules. This recognizes the unique challenges posed by radicalization in correctional facilities, allowing prisons to more effectively identify individuals at risk of radicalization and implement measures to mitigate this risk.

- **De-radicalization Mechanism**: The second recommendation highlights the establishment of a mechanism for the de-radicalization of prisoners. De-radicalization programs aim to disengage individuals from extremist ideologies and behaviors. This is crucial for reintegrating inmates into society and preventing their reengagement in extremism after release.

- **Use of Screening Tools and Guidance**: The third recommendation underscores the importance of careful assessment in prisons, suggesting the implementation of screening tools and extremist assessment guidance to assist staff in accurately identifying and preventing extremism. These tools provide a systematic approach to pinpointing individuals at risk, enabling prison staff to develop tailored intervention plans, ultimately reducing the risk of radicalization within the prison environment.

- **Scaling Up Counter-radicalization and De-radicalization Interventions**: The fourth recommendation advocates for significantly expanding targeted counter-radicalization and de-radicalization interventions within prisons and during the probation phase of a sentence. Scaling up these efforts is vital for effectively addressing radicalization within and beyond correctional facilities. Expanding interventions both inside prisons and during probation supports individuals in disengaging from extremist ideologies and behaviors.

- **Continued Training for Staff**: The fifth recommendation stresses the ongoing need for training programs for prison and probation staff. Continuous training ensures that staff are well-prepared to address radicalization and implement prevention measures effectively. It also helps staff stay updated on best practices and ensures the consistent implementation of prevention and de-radicalization programs.

In summary, these recommendations collectively underscore the importance of adopting a comprehensive approach to addressing radicalization within the penitentiary system in Albania. They call for the establishment of dedicated prevention and de-radicalization mechanisms, the use of screening tools and guidance, the expansion of interventions, and ongoing staff training. These measures aim to reduce the risk of radicalization among inmates and support their successful reintegration into society.

Moreover, recognizing that prisons today face unique challenges in dealing with extremism, an innovative approach involving multilayered strategies, local capacity strengthening, community awareness, and resilience is essential. By acknowledging the interconnectedness of the

criminal justice system and promoting collaborative efforts, often referred to as "smart power" principles, prisons can play a pivotal role in creating safer communities and facilitating the successful reintegration of individuals who have turned to violent extremism. Many countries are recognizing the limitations of traditional penitentiary systems and are reorganizing their correctional services to emphasize cooperation with various stakeholders, such as municipalities, non-profit organizations, volunteers, and social networks, to address the significant global threat of extremism effectively. This approach requires considering various interconnected factors within the criminal justice system and upholding principles such as respect for personhood, meaningful autonomy, self-repair, and self-formulation. Embracing a rehabilitative approach within the correctional system and fostering collaboration between the different elements within the ecosystem aligns security with the principles of promoting social cohesion and reducing the likelihood of reoffending, contributing to overall community safety. However, ensuring that the strategies implemented in prisons to counter extremism are genuinely effective in achieving lasting transformation necessitates advocating for more independent evaluations. Through dedication and innovation, the ultimate goal is to create safer communities and successfully reintegrate individuals who have turned to violent extremism.

6.3.9 Probation Service

The Probation Service is essential in collecting and analyzing information related to extremism and radicalization. Recommendations may involve enhancing the capacity and resources of this service to support investigations and legal proceedings related to PCVE. These recommendations underscore the need for a comprehensive and tailored approach within the probation service to address radicalization. They advocate for personalized mechanisms, risk assessment, ongoing training, screening tools, separate spaces for radicalized individuals, and a broader focus on social staff to effectively prevent and manage radicalization among probationers.

Personalized Mechanisms and Protocols:
- This recommendation highlights the importance of creating personalized mechanisms and instruments within the probation service for the treatment and prevention of radicalism. It emphasizes the need for protocols that outline how individual cases should be managed and how to construct tailored management plans.

Customized approaches are essential in addressing the complex issue of radicalization among probationers. By developing personalized mechanisms and protocols, the probation service can better identify, assess, and manage the specific needs and risks associated with each individual, enhancing the chances of successful reintegration.

Support for Risk Assessment Mechanisms:

- The recommendation emphasizes the importance of supporting the establishment of mechanisms for assessing the risk of radicalism. It highlights the absence of prior practices in this area, making it even more crucial to develop such mechanisms.

Building risk assessment mechanisms is fundamental for identifying individuals at risk of radicalization and implementing targeted interventions. This recommendation underscores the need for a proactive approach in creating these mechanisms to address a potential threat that may not have been adequately addressed in the past.

Staff Training:

- This recommendation calls for continuous staff training within the probation service. It stresses the importance of addressing ongoing training requests from probation staff.

Continuous training is essential for keeping probation staff updated on the latest practices and methodologies in dealing with radicalization issues. It ensures that staff members remain well-prepared to identify and address radicalization risks among individuals under probation effectively.

Utilization of Screening Instruments:

- The recommendation emphasizes the importance of honoring screening

instruments within the probation service. Screening instruments are tools that help identify individuals at risk of radicalization.

Utilizing screening instruments is a proactive approach to identifying individuals with radicalization risks. It allows the probation service to assess individuals systematically and objectively, facilitating targeted interventions and risk management strategies.

Creation of Separate Spaces:

- This recommendation suggests the creation of separate spaces for radicalized individuals within the probation service. The objective is to prevent their influence on others and to enhance the effectiveness of the reintegration and de-radicalization process.

Creating separate spaces for radicalized individuals recognizes the need to isolate them from other probationers to minimize the spread of extremist ideologies. It also acknowledges that a controlled environment can provide better opportunities for rehabilitation and de-radicalization.

Focus on Social Staff:

- The recommendation highlights the importance of staffing the probation service with a focus on the social field, not just legal staff. Social staff can identify and consider critical social elements in rehabilitation and reintegration. Social workers can provide insights into the social

factors and circumstances that may contribute to radicalization, facilitating a more holistic and effective approach to intervention and support.

6.3.10 Civil Society Organizations

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) often deliver interventions and support directly in communities. Recommendations focus on strengthening CSOs' capacity to provide high-quality and integrity-based interventions. Encouraging collaboration and consortia among organizations is also emphasized.

- **Coordination and Registration of Projects**: This recommendation emphasizes the need for better coordination among donors and organizations involved in PCVE efforts. The proposal suggests that the CVE center should facilitate this coordination by maintaining an online database of projects. Such a database would help prevent duplication of efforts and ensure that resources are allocated effectively.

- **Long-term Programs and projects**: Recognizing that PCVE is a long-term process, this recommendation highlights the importance of offering sustained support through long-term programs and projects. Continuous funding ensures that services are not disrupted and enables organizations to provide consistent assistance to

individuals at risk of radicalization and those in the process of reintegration.

- **Financial and Coordination Support**: NGOs and CSOs should receive increased financial and coordination support from both the Albanian state and national and international donors. This support is crucial for strengthening their capacity to carry out PCVE activities effectively.

- **Empowering Local Organizations**: Local NGOs that have strong community connections and relationships with local institutions should be supported and empowered to implent qualitative and impactful projects at comunity lavel/grasroot. This can be achieved through sub-granting, training, and collaboration with larger, more experienced organizations. Such partnerships allow smaller organizations to complement the resources and expertise of larger ones, resulting in more effective PCVE efforts.

- **Improved Interaction and Cooperation**: Enhancing cooperation between CSOs and central and local state institutions is essential for effective PCVE. This recommendation emphasizes better planning, implementation, and evaluation of interventions through close collaboration. Coordinated efforts between CSOs and

government entities can lead to more impactful outcomes.

- **Innovative and Comprehensive Activities**: To engage communities and individuals effectively, NGOs and CSOs should employ creative, comprehensive activities and methodologies. These could include simulations, not just traditional training sessions, to make the PCVE message more attractive and impactful.

- **Standardized Training**: Training programs provided by organizations related to radicalism should be standardized to ensure consistency and quality. This standardization can be overseen by relevant government bodies like the Ministry of the Interior or the CVE center, depending on the specific focus of the training.

- **Avoiding Overlapping**: Overlapping of projects, both within cities and institutions, should be avoided to ensure that resources are distributed efficiently. Organizations need to be strategic in their project placement, addressing areas with the greatest need while minimizing redundancy.

- **Continuous Community Engagement**: NGOs and CSOs should engage with communities continuously and with integrity. Building trust and maintaining a consistent presence within

communities is vital for effective PCVE work.

- **Empowering Vulnerable Groups**: To prevent radicalization, organizations should focus on empowering vulnerable groups, including young people and those facing social and economic difficulties. By addressing the root causes of vulnerability, NGOs and CSOs can contribute significantly to PCVE efforts.

- **Alignment with National Strategy**: PCVE interventions should align with the national strategy and intersectoral action plan for the prevention of radicalism and the fight against terrorism. This ensures that efforts are coordinated with broader national objectives and priorities.

In summary, these recommendations highlight the essential role of NGOs and CSOs in PCVE in Albania. They stress the need for better coordination, long-term support, increased funding, and collaboration with both government and local organizations. Effective PCVE requires a multifaceted approach, and NGOs and CSOs are critical actors in implementing these strategies on the ground. Their involvement and adherence to these recommendations can contribute significantly to Albania's efforts to prevent radicalization and counter violent extremism.

6.3.11 Interreligious Community

The interreligious community should play a significant role in promoting tolerance and interfaith dialogue, which are essential for countering violent extremism. Recommendations include encouraging and supporting interfaith dialogue and cooperation to address the root causes of radicalization.

- **Promoting Dialogue and Cooperation**: The initial recommendation underscores the imperative for the government to foster dialogue and cooperation with faith institutions, particularly those vulnerable to extremist influences. This collaborative effort transcends religious boundaries and seeks to address the ideological dimensions of violent extremism. It acknowledges the sensitivity of these discussions and underscores the need for a cautious approach. This recommendation also recognizes that such dialogue is a crucial component of the broader relationship between the government and faith communities, emphasizing trust and mutual collaboration.
- **Enhancing Local-Level Conversations**: The second suggestion underscores the significance of maintaining ongoing discussions with faith groups and institutions at the community level. While national organizations can facilitate coordination, local dialogues are considered more

efficient in promptly resolving local issues. Given the diverse perspectives and affiliations within faith communities, localized discussions are essential for addressing specific concerns in a timely manner.

- **Engagement of Faith Leaders**: The third recommendation emphasizes the pivotal role of faith leaders, particularly imams, as influential figures capable of connecting with young individuals and addressing their apprehensions. Their credibility and sway can play a pivotal role in deterring recruitment into extremist activities. Furthermore, the advisory role of management committees within religious institutions is acknowledged as valuable in guiding and supporting imams.
- **Empowering Faith Leaders**: To complement the preceding suggestion, this proposal highlights the importance of equipping faith leaders with the requisite skills and qualifications to effectively engage with vulnerable youth susceptible to radicalization. This capacity-building is viewed as a means of empowering faith leaders to reach out and provide guidance effectively.
- **Promoting Commitment and Collaboration**: The fifth recommendation underscores the commitment of religious communities to participate in dialogues and maintain sustainable collaboration, not only with the CVE center but also with other relevant

governmental structures and institutions, such as anti-terrorism units, prosecution services, educational bodies, healthcare agencies, community organizations, and local governments. This multifaceted cooperation aims to identify common challenges and define the roles of each stakeholder in the context of PCVE.

- **Fostering Consensus within the Interreligious Council**: The sixth suggestion highlights the importance of achieving unified opinions, attitudes, approaches, and actions within the Interreligious Council. It suggests that while progress has been made in this regard, there is a need for more frequent actions and expeditious decision-making, particularly concerning violent extremism prevention.

- **Monitoring Religious Institutions**: This recommendation advocates for the supervision of mosques and religious institutions that provide social services or operate community centers. The objective is to evaluate the nature and scope of activities they offer to the community, particularly to youth and children, with a focus on identifying potential areas of concern.

- **Streamline Imams' Roles**: The eighth recommendation calls for the streamline and oversight of imams to ensure that they disseminate accurate information. This streamlining and support aim to enhance the role of

imams in countering radicalization effectively.

- **Youth Empowerment**: This proposal underscores the significance of empowering and engaging young people, especially at the community level. It suggests the establishment of interreligious youth clubs in various cities across Albania, providing opportunities for young individuals to actively participate in PCVE efforts.

- **Enhanced State Oversight of Religious Organizations**: The tenth recommendation advocates for heightened state control over religious organizations, particularly those not formally affiliated with established religious communities. The objective is to monitor their funding sources and activities and clarify their religious affiliations to prevent the potential misuse of religion for extremist purposes.

- **Developing Long-Term Initiatives**: This recommendation promotes the creation of enduring programs and projects in the realm of PCVE, recognizing the time-intensive nature of prevention and rehabilitation processes.

- **Controlling Online Hate Speech**: The twelfth suggestion emphasizes the necessity for the state to exercise greater control over online hate speech targeting religious communities. It calls for the establishment of clearer mechanisms for reporting and monitoring instances of online hate speech, with

active involvement from law enforcement agencies.

These recommendations collectively underscore the pivotal role of faith institutions and religious leaders in the efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism in Albania. They stress the significance of collaboration, dialogue, and partnerships to address the ideological aspects of violent extremism and empower communities to effectively confront this persistent threat.

6.3.12 Media

The media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and awareness regarding violent extremism. Recommendations involve increasing the knowledge and awareness of journalists about PCVE. Media spaces should be used to responsibly cover issues related to radicalism and violent extremism.

Raising Journalists' Capacities and Response

- This recommendation highlights the importance of providing training and support to journalists to enhance their understanding of where to focus media coverage. Journalists should be equipped with the knowledge of what aspects of extremism and radicalization are important to address and how to cover these topics responsibly. By enhancing the capacities of journalists, media

outlets can ensure more accurate and balanced reporting on issues related to violent extremism. Journalists often serve as key communicators between the public and complex issues like extremism. Equipping them with the skills to report on these topics responsibly can help prevent sensationalism and misinformation, fostering a more informed public discourse on the subject.

Media's Role in Community Education

- This recommendation underscores the media's role in increasing education within communities and institutions regarding prevention. Media outlets can act as channels for disseminating information and awareness-raising campaigns related to the prevention of violent extremism. They can contribute by providing accurate information, facilitating discussions, and featuring experts who can educate the public about the risks and prevention strategies. Media can be a powerful tool for educating the public about the dangers of radicalization and violent extremism. By providing credible information and promoting open dialogues, they can contribute to community awareness and understanding, ultimately assisting in prevention efforts.

Minimizing Media Exposure of Returnees

- The recommendation suggests that media coverage of individuals who have returned from extremist activities should be minimized or

avoided entirely. Such media exposure can have negative consequences for both the returnees themselves and the communities they are returning to.

There is a concern that excessive media coverage of returnees can unintentionally glorify or sensationalize their actions, potentially attracting others to extremist ideologies. Moreover, it can stigmatize returnees and make their reintegration into society more challenging. By reducing media exposure, there is an attempt to balance the need for transparency with the potential harms associated with sensationalizing returnee stories.

In summary, these recommendations emphasize the media's role as a partner in preventing violent extremism. They call for responsible reporting, community education, and sensitivity to the potential negative impacts of media coverage, particularly in the case of individuals who have returned from extremist activities. Media outlets can be instrumental in promoting informed discussions and fostering a better understanding of the complex issues surrounding violent extremism.

6.4 Matrixes of Recommendations

Prevention of radicalizati

Sector	Main actors	Recommendations and Conclusions
Prevention Efforts	Various stakeholders	- Adopt a systematic and coordinated approach to PCVE. - Embrace a long-term perspective in PCVE initiatives. - Establish a Regional Committee for Enhanced PCVE to tailor strategies to local contexts. - Target diverse groups, including communities, youth, vulnerable populations, schools, armed forces, and the prison system. - Engage key actors and seek support from donors and specialized organizations for PCVE efforts. - Develop a National Threat Assessment. - Outline a national referral mechanism and information flow.
Community Engagement and Awareness	Local and central actors engaged in the community	- The role of community policing should be redefined, with an emphasis on education and empowerment through training - Raise awareness within communities about the risks associated with radicalization and extremism.

		- Empower communities to report potential cases or suspicious activities related to radicalization.
Socioeconomic Empowerment	Local and central actors aiming vulnerable communities	- Tailor interventions to address the economic and social needs of at-risk groups within communities. - Provide economic stability and social inclusion opportunities.
Technology and Reporting	Online platforms	- Develop an online platform for reporting incidents of violence and radicalization. - Focus on technology-driven approaches for timely reporting and early intervention.
Training and Capacity Building	Frontline actors, institutions	- Establish specialized training programs for frontline actors to identify early signs of radicalization and intervene effectively. - Equip stakeholders with knowledge and skills through standardized modules.
Information Dissemination	National coordinating institution for CVE	- Produce informative materials for educating and mobilizing stakeholders in PCVE efforts. - Ensure that information reaches all levels of society.
Online Radicalization and Coordination	Online platforms, institutions	- Counter online extremism through monitoring and prevention measures. - Strengthen national coordination efforts for more effective PCVE.
Local Governance and Policing	Local and Central actors	- Empower Local Public Safety Councils and community policing with legal authority and capacity-building. - Monitor and enhance the effectiveness of community policing.
Education and Awareness	Educational institutions	- Empower schools to proactively address radicalization through clear identification and referral mechanisms. - Promote collaboration between teachers, psychologists, social workers, and security officers. - Provide continuous capacity building for educators.
Media and Journalist Training	Media outlets, journalists	- Increase journalist awareness about radicalism and extremism. - Provide journalist training for responsible reporting.

Civil Society and Youth Empowerment	Civil society organizations, youth programs	- Strengthen civil society organizations and support them in delivering PCVE interventions. - Focus on youth empowerment through educational and socioeconomic programs.
Donor Coordination	Donors in coordination with national responsible institution on PCVE	- Ensure sustained, long-term donor support for PCVE programs and mechanisms. - Coordinate donor efforts to avoid program overlap and ensure efficient resource allocation.
Religious Education and Counter-Narratives	Religious institutions n coordination with national responsible institution on PCVE	- Provide religious education for identified cases and frontline employees. - Develop counter-narratives against violent extremism promoting non-violence and tolerance.
Regional and International Cooperation	Regional and international partners	- Promote regional and international cooperation in sharing experiences and best practices.
Academic Involvement	Universities in coordination with national responsible institution on PCVE	- Engage universities in conducting research and generating insights in PCVE.
Health and Justice Sector Competence	Health professionals, legal professionals	- Develop competence within the health sector to address violent extremism. - Improve education within the justice sector related to PCVE.

Rehabilitation, Reintegration and Resocialization Programs

Aspect	Recommendations and Conclusions
Timely and Continuous Support	- Collaborate between state institutions and donors to provide uninterrupted support for individuals returning from extremist activities. - Ensure comprehensive support covering psychological, social, educational, and vocational assistance.
Long-Term Perspective	- Adopt a long-term approach to R&R to address underlying issues and foster lasting reintegration into society.

360-Degree Support	- Provide comprehensive support not only to returnees but also to their families and children, recognizing their role in the reintegration process.
Independence for Returnees	- Encourage independence for returnees by equipping them with the skills and resources needed for self-reliance and positive choices.
Consistency in Service Provision	- Ensure consistent provision of services for returnees to prevent regression and mitigate risks to the community.
Fun, Creative, and Educational Activities for Youth	- Offer continuous engagement with fun, creative, and educational activities for returned children and youth. - Focus on engagement, empowerment, personal development, and resilience. - Ensure inclusivity in program design.
Psychological and Social Support for Families	- Provide ongoing psychological and social support for returned mothers and children, addressing trauma, emotional needs, and practical challenges.
Training for Frontline Professionals	- Offer training programs with updated PCVE information for frontline professionals, including teachers, psychologists, case managers, community police, and social services near municipalities. - Provide regular updates to keep professionals well-informed.
Long-Term Rehabilitation and Reintegration Projects	- Design R&R projects as long-term, continuous initiatives to ensure consistent and sustained interventions.
Increased Budgetary Allocation	- Allocate adequate budgets from government sources and donors to adequately resource impactful R&R programs and services.
Qualified Human Resources	- Employ qualified experts with in-depth knowledge of radicalism and violent extremism in R&R initiatives for effective intervention and support.
Ongoing Support for Staff	- Offer psychological supervision and continuous support for staff directly involved in R&R to help them manage emotional toll and challenges associated with their roles.
Continuous Training for Returnees	- Provide continuous training opportunities for returnees to acquire new skills and enhance their employability, contributing to successful reintegration into society.

Collaboration Between Universities and Businesses	- Promote collaboration between universities and businesses to offer scholarships, internships, and practical opportunities for returning youth, facilitating their reintegration and socioeconomic empowerment.
Community Awareness and Acceptance	- Inform communities, especially in areas with repatriates, about violent extremism and related risks through awareness campaigns. - Overcome stigma, foster mutual trust, and encourage community support for returnees.
Mechanism for Transitioning Youth Over 18	- Establish a well-defined R&R mechanism tailored for youth transitioning beyond the age of 18 to support their reintegration effectively.
Support for Child Protection Workers	- Provide psychological support and training to Child Protection Workers to manage their overwhelming responsibilities and emotional burdens more effectively. - Consider support division among professionals.
Training for Area Policing Specialists	- Focus training for Area Policing Specialists on effectively handling recidivist individuals and preventive measures to deter engagement in extremist activities.

Recommendations related to State and non-State actors

Sector of Intervention	Recommendation and Conclusion
Cooperation with local government	- Establish clear policies, action plans, and concrete measures for prevention, identification, referral, and treatment of potential radicals or returnees. - Set up preventive mechanisms within municipalities, coordinated with Local Public Safety Councils, for identification, referral, and treatment of radicalization cases. - Develop dedicated plans for managing returned cases, especially those who turn 18. - Strengthen capacities through in-depth and updated training for Child Protection Workers and the Needs Assessment and Case Referral Unit. - Create a mechanism for collecting information from other institutions regarding case progress.

	- Establish more community centers near municipalities to prevent radicalism. - Provide municipal staff with a manual or handbook on radicalism and violent extremism. - Develop an assessment instrument for risk and progress in identified cases.
	- Establish clear policies, action plans, and concrete measures for prevention, identification, referral, and treatment of potential radicals or returnees. - Develop dedicated plans for managing returned cases, especially those who turn 18. - Strengthen capacities through in-depth and updated training for Child Protection Workers. - Create a mechanism for collecting information from other institutions regarding case progress. - Develop an assessment instrument for risk and progress in identified cases.
Prevention and RRR processes	- Establish the CVE Center with a special law. - Function as a national-level data center for collecting data on returnees. - Serve as a resource center with information, data, statistics, training modules, and protocols. - Coordinate existing interventions, programs, and projects. - Standardize capacity building training, manuals, and products on radicalization and violent extremism. - Strengthen legal and institutional connections between local government and the CVE Center. - Enhance cooperation between prisons and the CVE Centre. - Increase human resources.
Law Enforcement	- Monitor the efficiency of Area Policing Specialist structural changes. - Organize national-level training for all Area Policing Specialists. - Consider increasing the number of Area Police Specialists in high-risk areas. - Empower Area Policing Specialists to have a proactive role in prevention through reporting. - Increase the presence of police, including patrols, Area Police Specialists, and municipal police in schools and the community.
Education and Schools	- Establish a clearer mechanism for identification and reporting of radicalization cases. - Coordinate instruments and actions related to PCVE. - Empower and train Coordinator Teachers. - Provide training for security officers. - Evaluate and support School Security Officers. - Promote awareness of online radicalism and reporting. - Develop child and youth-friendly reporting applications.

	- Raise student and parent awareness. - Implement an immediate reporting mechanism for online cases. - Engage school principals and appreciate their roles in PCVE.
Actions based on local contexts	- Strengthen PLSCs through legislation and consultation. - Enhance internal regulations and infrastructure. - Establish binding mechanisms and coordination. - Provide capacity building. - Develop a unified model. - Promote awareness and inclusivity. - Ensure budget autonomy.
Interreligious Community	- Promote dialogue and cooperation at local levels. - Enhance engagement of faith leaders. - Empower faith leaders. - Foster consensus within the Interreligious Council. - Monitor religious institutions. - Streamline imams' roles. - Empower youth. - Enhance state oversight of religious organizations. - Develop long-term initiatives. - Control online hate speech.
Defense	- Provide capacity building through training for specific groups within the armed forces. - Enhance information sharing. - Update and enrich awareness materials.
De-radicalization	- Establish prevention and de-radicalization mechanisms in prisons. - Use screening tools and guidance. - Scale up counter-radicalization and de-radicalization interventions. - Provide continued training for staff.
Probation Service	- Implement personalized mechanisms and protocols. - Support risk assessment mechanisms. - Offer ongoing staff training. - Utilize screening instruments. - Create separate spaces. - Focus on social staff.
Mental Health and Social Protection	- Develop guidelines. - Conduct awareness and training initiatives. - Improve case management and intervention. - Establish reporting mechanisms. - Promote research and evaluation. - Engage with communities. - Regularly review and adapt strategies.

International Affairs	- Enhanced engagement in the reporting and coordination role carried out towards international organizations such as the UN and the OSCE
External support and CSOs engagement	- Coordinate and register projects. - Focus on long-term programs. - Seek financial and coordination support. - Empower local organizations
Media	- Raise journalists' capacities and response to radicalism and extremism issues. - Enhance the media's role in community education. - Minimize media exposure of returnees.

In conclusion, the recommendations discussed in this extensive paper underscore the multifaceted nature of Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) efforts in Albania. These recommendations mainly coming from the empirical data that span various sectors, highlighting the need for comprehensive, coordinated, and proactive strategies to address the complex challenges posed by radicalization and extremism. The overarching goal is to create a safer and more resilient society by focusing on early intervention, community engagement, institutional collaboration, and capacity building.

Enhancing inter-institutional cooperation is a central theme across all recommendations. It is imperative that institutions in Albania work together seamlessly to tackle the threat of radicalization effectively. Building synergistic relationships among law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, local governments, and civil society organizations is crucial. Inter-institutional coordination can ensure that the efforts of each entity complement one another, leading to a more robust PCVE strategy.

First and foremost, the institutional framework for PCVE in Albania needs significant enhancements. This includes strengthening the capacity and role of the Albanian State Police, emphasizing community policing, increasing the number of Area Policing Specialists, and equipping them with the necessary training and tools to prevent and address violent extremism effectively. These measures should be integrated with other relevant institutions, such as the Ministry of Education and local governments, to ensure a cohesive approach. Non-governmental organizations and civil society organizations are invaluable partners in the PCVE landscape, and their role should be further cultivated through better interaction and cooperation with central and local state institutions. Support for these organizations, especially smaller, community-focused ones, should be channeled through sub-granting and consortium partnerships with larger, experienced organizations. This collaborative approach will ensure that PCVE efforts are well-coordinated and address the unique needs of different communities across Albania.

Furthermore, the media's role in PCVE should be refined to ensure responsible coverage, education, and awareness-raising activities that contribute positively to prevention efforts. Media organizations should collaborate with governmental and non-governmental institutions to create more comprehensive, informative, and impactful initiatives. This will not only raise awareness but also foster a sense of collective responsibility in combating radicalization and violent extremism.

Lastly, the penitentiary system plays a pivotal role in PCVE, and the recommendations emphasize the need for specialized prevention and de-radicalization mechanisms within correctional facilities. Scaling up interventions within prisons and during the probation phase, improving staff training, and enhancing security intelligence and data-sharing are essential components of managing violent extremist prisoners effectively. Inter-institutional cooperation

should extend to sharing information and expertise among these entities to create a unified approach.

In essence, the key to a successful PCVE strategy in Albania lies in a comprehensive, collaborative, and interconnected approach among institutions, both governmental and non-governmental. Enhanced inter-institutional cooperation will be the cornerstone of Albania's efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism and build a safer, more resilient society.
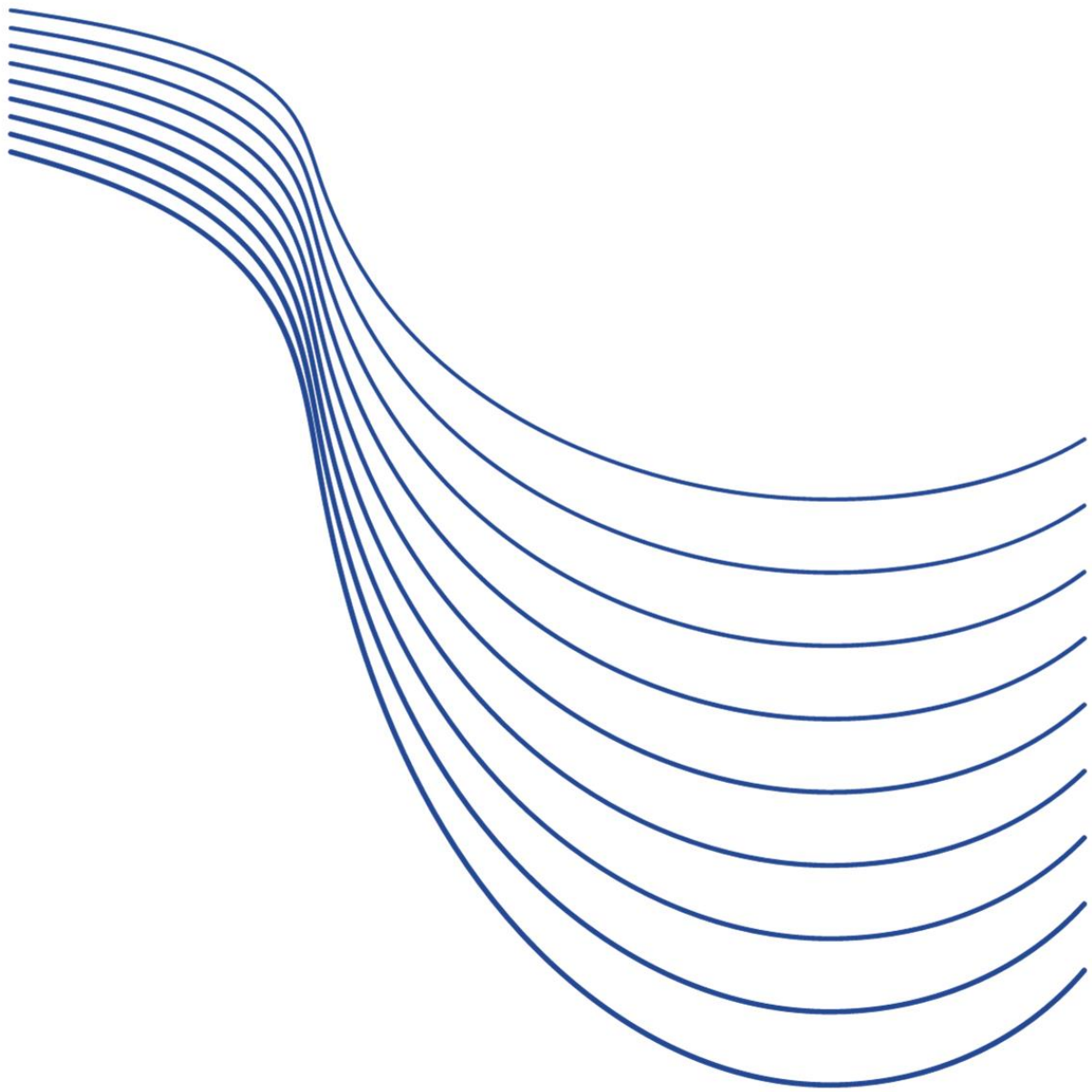
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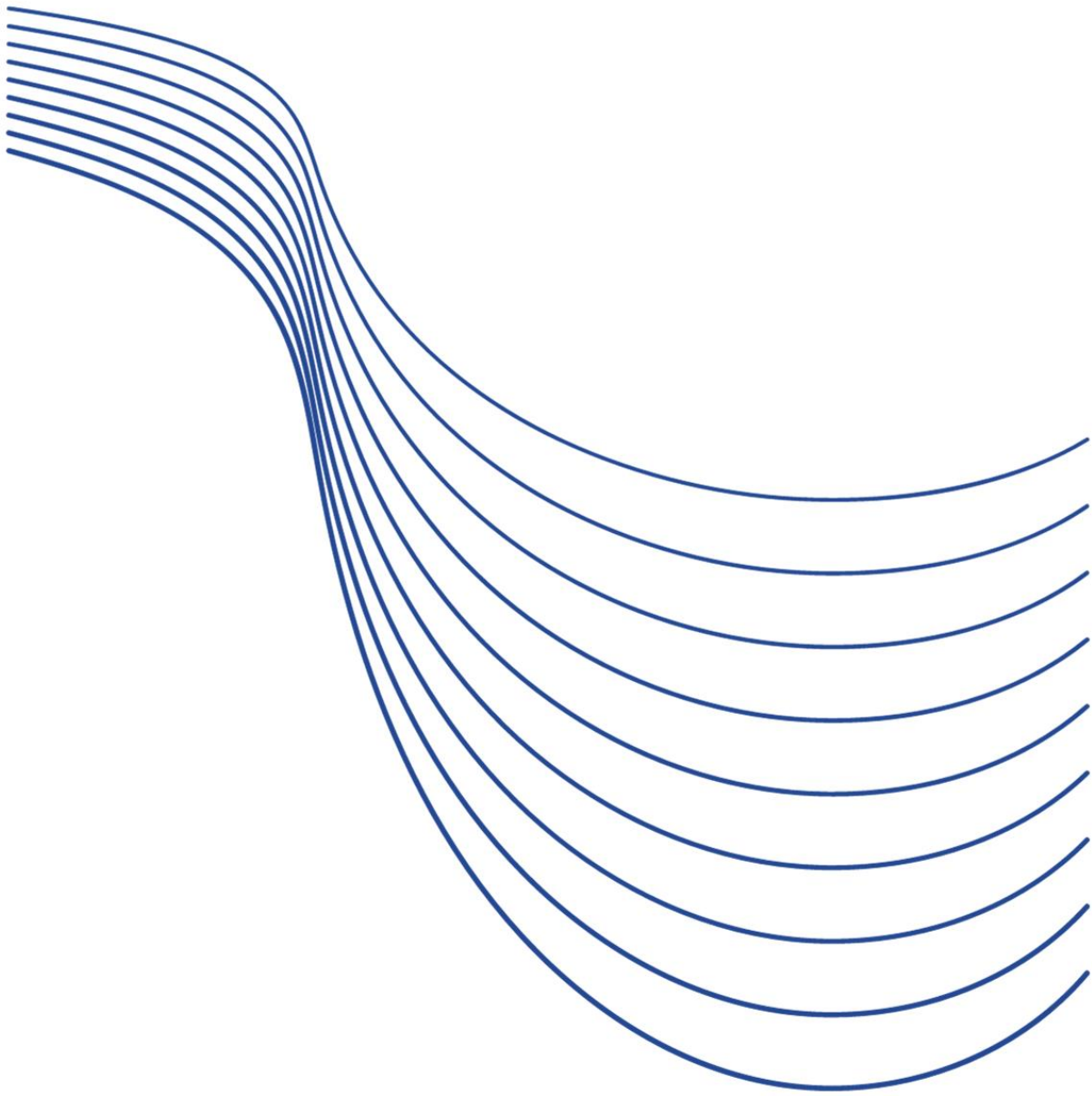
8. ANNEXES

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SURVEY

This questionnaire aims to collect data from citizens over 18 years of age to understand their perception of radicalism and to understand the examples that have contributed to the positive perception of returnees. It aims to understand and analyze the main community concerns regarding safety and security; the current perception of RFTF family members, and the reintegration process; and what elements have contributed to positive examples of community acceptance of returnees. We appreciate sincere answers. All data are confidential and used only for study purposes.

SESSION 1 GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. **Name Surname (optional)**

2. **Age**

————————————

3. **Sex**
- Female
- Male
- Other

4. **City/Province**

1. Tiranë
2. Kamez
3. Shkodër
4. Elbasan
5. Cërrik
6. Pogradec
7. Librazhd
8. Vlorë
9. Kukës
10. Durrës
11. Kavajë
12. Lezhë
13. Burrel
14. Tjetër

5. Residence

- Village
- City

6. Education

Education Level	Elementary	Secondary	Higher Education

7. Employment

- Employed
- Unemployed
- Self-employed
- Pupil or Student
- Retired
- Other _____

8. Marital status

- Single
- Married
- Divorced
- Other

1. **Have you ever heard of violent extremism and radicalization?**
   - Yes
   - No
   - I am not sure

2. **Referring to the known factors of Violent Extremism in Albania, which form would you rank from 1 as the main form to 6 as the smallest form. You can only choose 1 different number for each shape.**

	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*
Religious						
Political						
Ideological						
Ethnic						
Gender-based						
Sports						

3. **What do you think are the driving factors of Violent Extremism? You can choose more than 1 alternative**

      a. Economic situation
      b. Lack of perspectives
      c. Lack of identification with a group
      d. Bullying
      e. Violence and marginalisation
      f. Social exclusion
      g. Other (please specify)

4. **Please rank from 1 to 5 how vulnerable you think the groups below are to being radicalized.1 = not at all at risk, 5 = very at risk.**

	Not at all at risk	*Slightly at risk*	*Moderately at risk*	*At risk*	*Very at risk*
Children					
Youth					
Religious					
Marginalized targeted groups (Roma community, Children and Youth without parents)					
Unemployed					
Individuals who have committed crimes					
Individuals who face domestic violence					
Individuals who face violence and bullism					

5. Please rate from 1 to 5, which you think are the most used ways of radicalization and recruitment.

	Not at all used	*Slightly used*	*Moderately used*	*Used*	*Very used*
Propaganda from radicalized individuals					
Communication through social media					
Lure of money					
Political influence					
Family and Friends' influence					

6. **Have you ever come across any cases of EDH or radicalism?**
   - Yes
   - No

7. **If you came across a case of radicalism, would you report it?**
   - Yes
   - No
   - Maybe

8. **If yes, where would you report it?**

   _____

9. **Are there trends of radicalism or violent extremism in your community, neighborhood/city?**

   - Yes
   - No
   - Maybe
   - I don't know

10. **Do you have information if there are returnees from the areas of the former Syria-Iraq war in your community?**

    - Yes
    - No
    - I don't know

11. To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please tick one answer for each statement. 1= do not agree at all; 5= I strongly agree

	Do not agree at all	*Do not agree*	*Neutral*	*I agree*	*I strongly agree*
Being violent helps me show how strong I am					
I trust law enforcement authorities/agencies					
My community accepts that young people can use violence to solve problems					
I am willing to speak out publicly against violence in my community					
I regularly engage with people of multiple religions/cultures and beliefs					
I am willing to challenge the violent behavior of others in my community					
I feel safe when dealing with the government and authorities					
I feel that my voice is heard when dealing with the government and authorities					
I feel comfortable living when returnees live in my community					

12. What do you think could be some ways for returnees to be accepted and supported by the community?

- Employment
- Registering children in schools
- Higher security measures
- Awareness activities for the community
- Professional communication
- Other _____

13. Want more information about violent extremism, prevention and reporting?

- Yes
- No

14. In what ways would you like to receive more information?

- Social media networks
- Visual media
- Press
- Awareness raising activities in the community
- Online Apps
- Other _____