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Kosovar Centre for Security Studies

# UNPACKING KOSOVO'S RESPONSE TO RETURNEES FROM THE WAR ZONES IN SYRIA AND IRAQ



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# LIST OF ABBREVIATION

<b>CT/CVE</b>	Counterterrorism and counter-violent extremism
<b>DPRRP</b>	Division for Prevention and Reintegration of Radicalized Persons in Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kosovo
<b>DRRP</b>	Department for Reintegration for Repatriated Persons in MIA
<b>EC</b>	The European Commission
<b>EU</b>	The European Union
<b>FF</b>	Foreign Fighters
<b>ICITAP</b>	International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program
<b>IS</b>	Islamic State
<b>ISC</b>	Islamic Community of Kosovo
<b>KCS</b>	Kosovo Correctional Service
<b>KCSS</b>	Kosovo Center for Security Studies
<b>KIA</b>	Kosovo Intelligence Agency
<b>KSCS</b>	Kosovo Security Council Secretariat
<b>MCSC</b>	Municipal Community Safety Councils
<b>MEST</b>	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
<b>MH</b>	Ministry of Health
<b>MIA</b>	Ministry of Internal Affairs
<b>MJ</b>	Ministry of Justice
<b>MLSW</b>	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Government Organization
<b>NSAPCS</b>	The National Strategy and Action Plan for Community Safety 2018-2023
<b>NSSRRP</b>	The National Strategy for Sustainable Reintegration of Repatriated Persons in Kosovo 2018-2022
<b>OPM</b>	Office of the Prime Minister
<b>P/CVE</b>	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
<b>RFF</b>	Repatriated Foreign Fighters
<b>RTK</b>	Radio Television of Kosovo
<b>SPVERLT</b>	Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020
<b>SSATAP</b>	The State Strategy against Terrorism and Action Plan 2018-2022
<b>UHCSK</b>	University Hospital and Clinical Service of Kosovo

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is estimated that around 403 citizens of Kosovo joined the war zones in Syria and Iraq, and in the aftermath of the collapse of the 'Islamic State' Kosovo government has been willing to repatriate its citizens from the region. This presents a significant challenge for the government and non-government sectors. Existing studies shows that establishing programs to facilitate and support reintegration of the returnees is essential for overall efforts of preventing and countering violent extremism. This report seeks to address a gap in the existing literature pertaining to the approaches of Kosovo in supporting rehabilitation/deradicalization as well as reintegration of the returnees. By focusing on institutional and policy infrastructure, this report sheds light into the relevance of having a holistic (government + non-government +community), coherent and coordinated response to meet the needs of the returnees and effectively address the challenges for their social and economic reintegration, as well as ideological disengagement.

This report finds that the government of Kosovo as well as civil society have, overall, positively responded to the needs of the returnees and supported their reintegration, albeit shortcomings with the extent of implementation of proclaimed commitments towards the returnees. Upon arrival in Kosovo institutions provide medical care, temporary housing, mental health sessions, while preparing them for reintegration in the society. Kosovo has two overall approaches to the returnees: punitive-restorative approaches and societal reintegration programs. Following a period of 72 hours returnees are interrogated by authorities to determine their roles in the war zones in Syria and Iraq, while confirmed foreign fighters are arrested. The first set of measures deals with those Kosovars who are found to have committed a criminal offense for participating in a foreign conflict in accordance with the national legislation. While in the correctional service, foreign fighters are offered access to programs that aim to help them with skills development to increase their employability, completion of education, as well as, training and lectures that target radical religious beliefs.

At the same time, the government has established a special division in the Ministry of Internal Affairs to exclusively work on coordinating and providing support for reintegration process of the returnees. Returnees are supported with housing, registering the children in the school, an emergency financial assistance package, counselling sessions, and continued support

through the social welfare scheme. The report also finds that majority of the returnees have been successfully resettled in the society, and this is as a result of the strong community and family ties. Family and community ties were essential to also ensure effective reintegration of orphaned children. This is a demonstration of a strong social cohesion in Kosovo that has provided the most significant factor when examining reintegration of the returnees. Notes from the four focus groups in four different regions of Kosovo: Prizren, Mitrovica, Gjilan and Kacanik, confirm that all citizens are welcoming of the returnees and harbor no discriminatory approaches that would impede their reintegration. These development show that reintegration of the returnees is most effective when it is not entirely orchestrated or managed by government, but it is facilitated by community and the well-kept family ties. The report also finds that in practice government lacks a coherent policy and there are serious shortcomings with coordination and inclusion of civil society in the process.



# 1. INTRODUCTION

Many Europeans, including an estimated 403 Kosovars, joined the war zones in Syria and Iraq between 2012 and 2018, of which 255 are considered foreign fighters while the rest are women and children (Perteshi S. , 2018). Following the collapse of the ISIS, Kosovo is among a relatively small number of countries that have expressed readiness to repatriate its citizens. Kosovo's efforts are in contrast with other European countries, who have been reluctant to repatriate their citizens or even revoked their citizenship. Looking at the statements of public officials, Kosovo government believes it is a moral and constitutional obligations to repatriate its citizens as well as to help them reintegrate in the communities they left behind. In the words of a government minister returnees "[...] deserve rehabilitation and hope for a peaceful life [...]. These citizens of ours, especially the children, have been through a period of severe traumatic experiences, but now we shall take care of them so that they overcome such bitter experiences." (Tahiri, 2019, para. 5).

Around 242 Kosovars have returned from the war zones of Syria and Iraq. Establishing a coherent and organized approach to support their rehabilitation and reintegration is a necessity. Existing literature holds that reintegration programs are essential to prevent 'recidivism' as well as counter radicalization in the society (Holmer & Shtuni, 2017, p. 2). This report examines how the government of Kosovo has dealt with the returnees from the war zones in Syria and Iraq. It analyzes government policies, institutions and programs that were established to facilitate reintegration of the returnees. The report also looks at the role of civil society in the process. This report covers key rehabilitation and reintegration activities taken by government until October of 2019 based on information provided by the government officials through interviews. The central argument of this report is that while government of Kosovo has created the necessary institutions to manage and coordinate rehabilitation and reintegration support for the returnees, there is no coherent policy and there are significant challenges and shortcomings with intergovernmental coordination as well as with participation of civil society in the process.

First part of this report will provide a summary of key government policies pertaining to de-radicalization as well as reintegration of returnees. This section shows that while there are policies adopted by the government, there is no coherent and integrated approach to reintegration of the returnees. Third section will investigate in more details the actual programs that the government implements to support social reintegration of returnees. The section

shows that the government has established dedicated services for the returnees, but their are challenges with resources, and coordination. Fourth section discusses civil society engagement and their potential to play a more substantial role in partnership with the government to support reintegration of returnees. Fifth section provides a summary of examples from other countries of reintegration programs, and the sixth section highlight needs and challenges for the way forward in rethinking approaches of the government of Kosovo.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

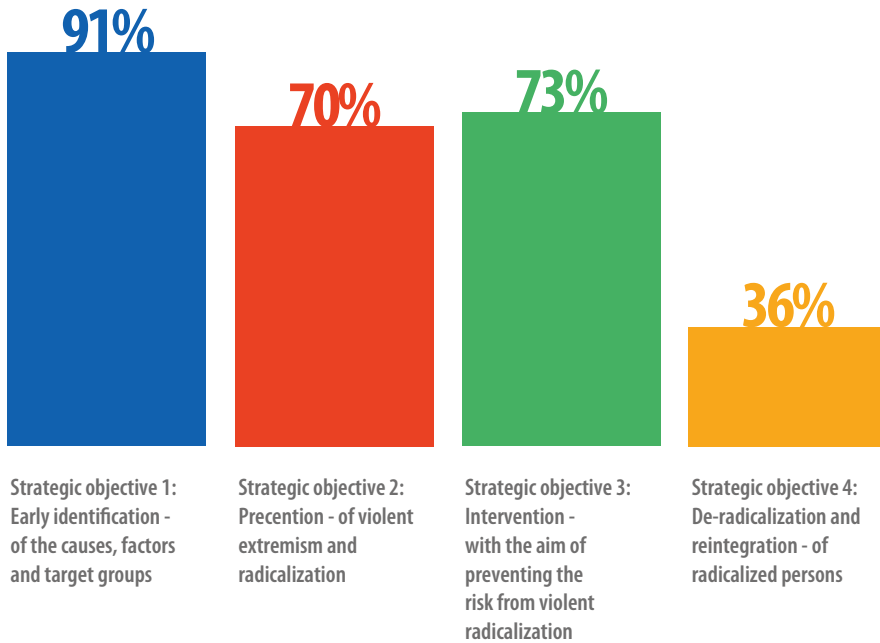
The information presented and analyzed in this report is based on in-depth, face-to-face interviews with government officials and civil society organizations, focus-groups and document-analysis. Interviews were conducted with government officials from Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, Ministry of Healthcare, and Ministry of Education, Science and Technology. In addition to this, five focus-groups were conducted in different municipalities of consisting of diverse group of participants from public institutions, community leaders, students, and international organizations. There are two important limits to this report that should be noted. First, despite our efforts, interviewees were often reluctant to share detailed information about particular programs, policies or projects, and in some cases, they seemed to not know the extent of the involvement of their own institution, which has limited our analysis. Secondly, this report should not be read as a comprehensive review of the rehabilitation and reintegration approaches of the government of Kosovo. Such a review is important and should be commissioned by the government.

Also, a note of clarification on terms and definitions. While there is no consensus on how to refer to repatriated individuals from the war zones in Syria and Iraq, there is wide agreement that references such as 'radicalized individuals' or even 'foreign fighters' can lead to stigmatization, marginalization and it is seen as dehumanizing. Therefore, this report unless context requires to utilize the term 'foreign fighter' it will general refer to the repatriated citizens from the war zones in Syria and Iraq as 'returnees'. Secondly, the report refers to rehabilitation and reintegration, which can be used interchangeably, depending on context. However, for the purpose of clarity, in the context of this report, the concept of rehabilitation is primarily used to describe government efforts of supporting disengagement of returnees from violent and radical ideology. Reintegration refers to government and non-government efforts to help the returnees with their social and economic challenges in order to facilitate their reintegration in the society.

## 2. GOVERNMENT POLICIES FOR REINTEGRATION OF REPATRIATED FOREIGN FIGHTERS AND THEIR FAMILIES

In 2015, Kosovo was among the first countries in the Western Balkans to approve the Law on Prohibition of Joining the Armed Conflicts Outside State Territory. Concerning a dedicated government policy on rehabilitation and reintegration of the returnees, the Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism (SPVERLT 2015-2020), which contains specific provisions on this matter. The strategy has four overall objectives, and 'De-radicalization and reintegration of radicalized persons' is one of them. This strategic objective is further divided into six specific objectives and 11 activities. According to SPVERLT 2015-2020 reintegration efforts of the Kosovo government are primarily focused on "persons or groups that have been identified in Kosovo, [...] and did not violate the law, because afterwards they are subject to applicable laws " (Government of Kosovo, 2015, p. 24). The strategy outlines among others three practical measures for reintegration: providing "psychological and religious counselling for prisoners in relation to illegal activities associated with extremism", providing "social support for their families", and "[d]evelopment of new employment programs or other methods for reintegration of deradicalised individuals into society" (Ibid.,). According to a 2018 report prepared by the Secretariat of the Kosovo Security Council of the Office of Prime Minister, on the implementation of the Action Plan of the SPVERLT 2015-2020, the objective on de-radicalization and reintegration of radicalized persons has the lowest implementation rate compared to the rest of the three objective, with only 36% of foreseen activities implemented. Furthermore, the report notes that only four out 11 planned activities were implemented.

Implementation of the Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation  
Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020



The report notes that the government has also planned to implement some additional activities for reintegration of radicalized persons such as ‘inclusions of vulnerable groups in labor market’ and more importantly identify new ‘services’ to support rehabilitation and reintegration. The National Strategy for Sustainable Reintegration of Repatriated Persons in Kosovo (NSSRRP 2018-2022) in the section on vulnerable groups includes a small part about, what the strategy refers to as ‘reintegration of returned persons from conflict zones’ in order to provide based-needs assistance. Strategy defines vulnerable groups to mean “repatriated persons who are in need for special reintegration measures as a consequence of their reduced functional capacity due to the illness or limited abilities or as the consequence of their family condition, gender, age, illiteracy or similar reasons, or persons who have lack of adequate knowledge of official languages in Kosovo” (Ministry of Internal Affairs , 2017, p. 22). The strategy appeals to institutions to be prepared and meet the needs of the families of persons returned from conflict zones. With respect to concrete support, the strategy states the fol-

lowing: "As a support measure for this category, a response plan will be developed under the leadership of MIA, an effective treatment system will be established within the framework of the reintegration system, and standard support packages will be designed to suit their specific needs" (Ibid, p. 23).

The State Strategy against Terrorism and Action Plan (SSATAP 2018-2022) recognizes the 'threat from foreign terrorist fighters for democratic institutions as well as the secular character of the Kosovar'. The strategy holds that religious-based extremism is one of the main security threats for Kosovo (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2018, p. 8). With respect to foreign fighters the strategy holds that: "The danger facing Kosovo is the return of such fighters from the conflict zone as well as the persons involved in criminal acts of terrorism and with an interest in harming Kosovo as a state with an ethnically and religiously diverse society and with a democratic government and secular society" (Ibid.,). SSATAP 2018-2022 sees reintegration of foreign fighters as part of prevention of the spread of extremist ideologies and radicalization, however it does not contain any particular objective or measures concerning social and economic support for reintegration.

Oddly enough, despite the overwhelming research showing that often the most suitable approaches to preventing violent extremism includes community-led initiatives, the National Strategy and Action Plan for Community Safety (NSAPCS 2018-2023) does not contain any specific provisions on reintegration of returnees (Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2018). A closer inspection of the document shows that it is very weak, and hardly meets minimum standard for a strategic document. This is an indication, perhaps, of the lack of serious commitment on the part of the government concerning community safety, as a policy sector. This can be a result of a perception that community safety is predominantly a municipal responsibility. Other strategies, that would carry relevance for the reintegration such as the outdated State Strategy on Migration and Action Plan 2013-2018, Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021 and Sectorial Strategy 2018-2022 do not contain any specific provisions with respect to reintegration of the repatriated foreign fighters.

### 3. GOVERNMENT APPROACHES OF REHABILITATION AND REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES

In April of 2019 110 Kosovars were repatriated from the war zones in Syria and Iraq. This included 74 children 32 women and four confirmed fighters. Upon their arrival in Kosovo they were greeted by social workers, doctors and psychologists, while police officers verified their citizenship. The four confirmed fighters were arrested immediately, while the rest of the group was “taken to a center in Vranidoll, 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the capital Prishtina, to be taken care of before being sent to homes in the next 72 hours.” (Bajrami & Semini, 2019). During their stay in Vranidoll the returnees were provided with medical care, which also included a psychologist who conducted an assessment of their mental health needs. Analysis conducted by Kosovar doctors show that most returnees exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), as well as “backtracking and depression” (Manisera, 2019). However, there is no clarity with regard to what methodological approaches were followed to determine these symptoms (Perteshi S. , 2019). The returnees were not immediately interrogated by police or prosecutors in order to allow for social workers and medical personnel to conduct their work. A specially created division within the MIA to coordinate and manage the reintegration of the returnees, conducted an assessment of the needs of returnees, as well as prepared the personal documents for the returnees in order to facilitate their reintegration.

After the period of 72 hours of processing and support was concluded most of the returnees were able to return to their families. In this context, it is very important to note, that families as well as the community were very willing to welcome them back. Among the 74 children that were returned, nine were orphans, but they were also accepted and welcomed back by the extended members of the family of their parents. For those returnees who did not have a house to return to, the government in coordination with municipal authorities, arranged for them to be housed in homes that were rented for them by the government. MIA in coordination with MEST continued to provide support in order to ensure that the children were reintegrated in schools, while in cooperation with MLSW, some families were included in the

social welfare scheme, which provided a monthly financial stipend for them to cover basic expenses.

As illustrated by the segment above, the government of Kosovo has actively supported repatriation of its citizens from the war zones in Syria and Iraq as well as their reintegration in the society. These approaches can be divided into two overall categories: punitive-restorative measures and societal reintegration support. Punitive-restorative approaches refer to government programs and activities, mainly implemented within the correctional services that aim to support ideological disengagement of the incarcerated radicalized individuals as well as to support their eventual reintegration in the society through educational programs that builds their skills and increase chances for employment. Societal reintegration support refers to a variety of government measures and services that facilitate resettlement as well as social and economic reintegration in the society of the returnees, including housing, food, monthly financial stipend to cover basic expenses, and reintegration of children in the school system. This section examines in more details these approaches of the government of Kosovo.

### **3.1 PUNITIVE-RESTORATIVE APPROACHES**

As already explained in the previous section, the law no. 05/L -002 on Prohibition of Joining Armed Conflicts Outside State Territory of the Republic of Kosovo as well as the Criminal Code of Kosovo carry legal ramifications for returnees from the war zones in Syria and Iraq. Accordingly, a legal screening is required for all returnees in order to determine if they committed a criminal offense. Participation in the armed conflict in other countries is punishable from 3 to 15 years of imprisonment, while actions of individuals who recruit and organize participation in foreign conflicts is punishable from 5 to 15 years in prison. Actions of individuals who call or incite others to join foreign armed conflicts is punishable from 6 months to 5 years in prison (Kosovo Assembly, 2015, pp. 1-2). Additionally, the law criminalizes funding for the purpose of recruiting and organizing Kosovo citizens to join foreign armed conflicts (Ibid.,). Therefore, from the legal perspective all returnees from the war zones of Syria and Iraq are inherently suspects and therefore are required to undergo legal screening to determine if they committed an offense. As part of the European integration process, Kosovo is obligated to ensure that its national legislation is in line with EU standards. Accordingly, the EU has monitored the development of the anti-terrorism legislation and it has recognized the achievements in this sector. The European Commission considers that "Kosovo's legal framework is in line with the

EU acquis and international instruments on antiterrorism” and “legislation criminalising the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014)” (European Commission, 2018, p. 31). Kosovo institutions have arrested and prosecuted a significant number of individuals who joined terrorist organizations in the conflict zones in Syria and Iraq or intended to do so, as well as those who recruited them, and most of these cases ended in convictions (Ibid.,).

Kosovo Correctional Services (KCS), started to receive foreign fighters for the first time in 2014, according to government officials. While the KCS had previous experience with religious radicalized individuals who were incarcerated for variety of reasons, including planning of potential attacks in Kosovo, the repatriated foreign fighters presented a different challenge for the system. According to officials from the Ministry of Justice the KCS was not ready, or as they put it “we were absolutely not prepared to treat them, and we did not have the awareness to deal with the sensitivity of this phenomenon” (Gashi S. , 2019). An internal assessment of the correctional services of Kosovo was conducted with the support of the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), a program of the US Justice Department, in order to determine the most suitable approaches for the KCS to follow in dealing with the returnees. The assessment found that incarcerated returnees from the war zone in Syria and Iraq were spread throughout the correctional services, and accordingly suggested that, if conditions permit. they are all brought into one place, or a pavilion. The assessment, among others, also proposed that the KCS develops a dedicated program for rehabilitation of the incarcerated returnees, as well as develop the capacities of the KCS personnel to build the necessary know-how and skills in dealing with the returnees, and ICITAP supported training of the KCS personnel. Other suggestions included improving communication and exchange between key security institutions, including the police.

This is how the KCS developed a dedicated approach in dealing with the returnees, which started in 2016. Before this the government had no “comprehensive program for rehabilitating returned fighters.” (Naddaff, 2018). In the discourse of KCS these approaches are often referred to as ‘rehabilitation and resocialization’ programs, and consist of, among others, educational programs to enable them to complete high school, as well as vocational trainings to prepare them for the job market on areas such as carpentry, water supply system, welding, etc. According to KCS official, returnees that are incarcerated in the high security prison can access a program for communication skills as well. These efforts collectively seek to achieve both deradicalization as well as support reintegration of returnees in the society and prevent



likelihood of relapse to violence or commitment to radical religious beliefs. It is not clear how the system determines who goes to high security prison or is sent to other detention centers, besides the well-established criteria in the justice system that are based on the magnitude of the sentence as well as the threat the individual poses for the society. However, if the goal is to support the deradicalization and rehabilitation of incarcerated returnees, then it is important to also take into account which facilities have well established programs that facilitate their rehabilitation. Also, it is not clear from the available data how many returnees participated in the programs or how effective it has been. According to KCSS data, many returnees refused to participate in these programs. This is also corroborated by other accounts. For example Kujtim Bytyqi and Sam Mullins discuss the case of an RFF called 'Abu Albani' by his *nom de guerre*, who refused to cooperate with the deradicalization program in the prison and remained loyal to radical religious beliefs and was 'resentful of the government of Kosovo' (Bytyqi & Mullins, 2019)

According to KCS officials, even after four years of implementation, the program is considered to be 'in its infancy' and they do not have any significant success story to share yet but believe that the program is working well. Majority of the participants of this program in the KCS participate on volunteer basis, because it is not obligatory. However, one of the major challenges that impeded the success of the rehabilitation programs in the KCS, besides the red tape that prevented earlier start of the program, the poor planning also contributed. By the time, that KCS established the rehabilitation program in 2016, majority of incarcerated returnees had already concluded their sentences. Additional challenges for those who attend programs is the lack of a follow-up after they are released. This means that the returnees that are processed out of the KCS do not have an institutional address to help them utilize the skills, such as by connecting them with appropriate companies (Gashi, 2019).

KCS does not have a policy or a mechanism in place to maintain constant communication with the family of the foreign fighter. However, when an incarcerated returnee approaches the conclusion of the sentence, the KCS deploys its social workers to visit his/her family in order to better understand the living conditions, the environment where the individual will be returned, and conduct an overall socio-economic assessment of the situation. They also examine the ideological dimensions and try to understand if the respective individual is still committed to radical religious ideology and likelihood of him/her acting on those beliefs. KCS prepares a report based on their findings and submits it to the MIA. However, despite this there are often challenges with communication. KCS data shows that at least in two instances,

the specially established division in MIA to coordinate reintegration of returnees was only informed of release of incarcerated returnees via media. KCS officials, hold that while they have the necessary capacities to manage the existing programs, they would welcome additional trainings in order to advance their skills.

In 2018, the Ministry of Justice (MJ) and Islamic Community of Kosovo (ICK) signed an agreement to implement a new program in the KCS that aims to facilitate deradicalization and ideological disengagement of incarcerated returnees (Ministry of Justice, 2018). According to the Agreement of Cooperation ICK provides verified imams to conduct religious lectures in the KCS, while the MJ organizes the logistics of conducting such lectures in the KCS facilities. The purpose of this program is to debunk radical religious ideologies, that inspired the returnees to participate in the war zones in Syria and Iraq. However, while the program was well intentioned it faced unpreparable damages from the start, because of the publicity of the program. For instance, Ministry of Justice stated that the imams from ICK that will participate in the program would be verified by the Kosovo Intelligence Agency (KIA), effectively damaging the credibility of the imams before they even got to work. According to government officials, some incarcerated returnees did not accept the imams that appeared to be in collusion with the government and especially the security institutions (Perteshi S. , 2019). While lectures were organized, according to KCSS data, those for whom the lectures were intended did not participate. KCS also did not view the program in a positive light. KCS officials are quoted as saying that ‘politics destroyed the program’(Ibid.,)

Overall, KCS officials interviewed for this report maintain that there are serious challenges with respect to effectiveness of rehabilitation approaches of incarcerated returnees. According to these officials some incarcerated returnees continue to exhibit radical behavior and refuse to recognize Kosovo’s legislation and only adhere to Sharia law (Gashi S. , 2019). A similar finding is also supported by the Kujtim Bytyqi and Sam Mullins who argue that some of the returnees remained committed to extremist ideas including the “use of violence against ‘enemies’ of Islam” (Bytyqi & Mullins, 2019). KCS officials argue that incarcerated returnees pose a continued threat to the national security of Kosovo.

## 3.2 SOCIETAL REINTEGRATION SUPPORT

For the returnees who are not found to have committed a criminal offense, they are supported by the government of Kosovo to resettle in their communities. In order to coordinate these efforts, the government of Kosovo established a special unit MIA, respectively in the Department for Public Safety, called the Division for Prevention and Reintegration of Radicalized Persons (DPRRP). DPRRP works on daily-basis specifically and directly on reintegration of returnees from the war zones in Syria and Iraq. DPRRP approaches prioritize community and family in their efforts and also coordinate with other government institutions. The DPRRP has managed to develop trust and strong partnership with returned families. The work of DPRRP started in 2017 when they approached those who returned on voluntary basis and provided for them emergency relief support. The DPRRP has limited resources and often relies on support from donors and access to the resources of another department in MIA called the Department for Reintegration for Repatriated Persons (DRRP) that works mainly with repatriated citizens of Kosovo from the EU Member States.

DPRRP has conducted a number of activities to support societal reintegration including training for parents on how to approach the children, efforts to include the families in social schemes in order for them to receive monthly financial stipends, as well as coordinated efforts with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) of Kosovo to reintegrate children in the schools. DPRRP has made efforts to establish close coordination with the KCS in order to effectively respond to the challenges for those individuals who are released on parole or concluded their prison term, but according to them, these efforts have not been very successful. DPRRP holds that inclusion of the KCS in the process of social reintegration is very important. With respect to local level cooperation, while it communicates with the donors, the DPRRP does not have an institutionalized mechanism to ensure coherent coordination and inclusion of municipalities.

Interviews with government officials, show that some government ministries, such as Ministry of Health that have the potential to play a significant role in government's efforts to reintegrate repatriated foreign fighters, for example by providing counselling, are not properly included in the process, do not have a defined understanding of their responsibilities and even have had difficulties communicating effectively with established structures of the government of Kosovo to coordinate prevention and countering of violent extremism (Morina,

2019). The last meeting officials from Ministry of Healthcare of Kosovo could recall with the SPVERLT 2015-2020 national coordinator is in 2017 when they agreed to make the necessary preparation and created teams to respond to potential calls for support and shared them with Ministry of Interior. According to the same officials the University Hospital and Clinical Service of Kosovo (UHCSK) has assigned a coordinator, a psychiatrist who has been involved in assessing the mental health needs of the returnees as well supporting their treatment. Government support also includes “home visits, individual and family sessions” (Manisera, 2019). The returnees from the April 2019 were provided with all healthcare services. Six of the children were injured, as well as several women had complications with their health. One case included a liver infection, and the person could not be treated in Kosovo so the government organized treatment in Turkey for a liver transplant (Perteshi S. , 2019).

Ministry of Education of Kosovo has been rather effective in reintegrating in the school system the repatriated children from the war zones in Iraq and Syria. For example children of ages 6-7 have been registered in the first grade, however, there were cases of children between 12-13 who did not complete any grade they were enrolled in the so called technical learning track, enabling them to start from the first grade and catch-up with their peers (Jaha, 2019). In other words, as it concerns children repatriated from Syria and Iraq, they have all been successfully enrolled into the education system. During the time of the writing of this report, the Ministry of Education was making efforts to enroll 3-5 year old children in the kindergartens, although the exact number of children was not shared. MEST has also conducted training for schoolteachers on the subject of religious extremism. Some children also need support for improving their understanding and speaking of the Albanian language (Focus-Group-Kaçanik, 2019) However, this progress by the Ministry of Education, is worth noting refers to the technicality of enrolling children in the school system and it does not seem to address social aspects of the process of reintegration of these children. Ministry officials also recognized this during the interviews. It is not clear how children have responded to their schools, including the syllabus. Additionally, there also seems to be a missing link of communication with the parents of the children, in order to understand how their approach to what their children learn in the school and how they have managed to reintegrate in the community, which is also something officials from the Ministry of Education agree they need to do (Jaha, 2019).

Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) shared a significant portion of responsibility on behalf of the government of Kosovo on issues pertaining to reintegration of repatriated foreign fighters as well as family members returned from the war zones in Syria and Iraq. MLSW

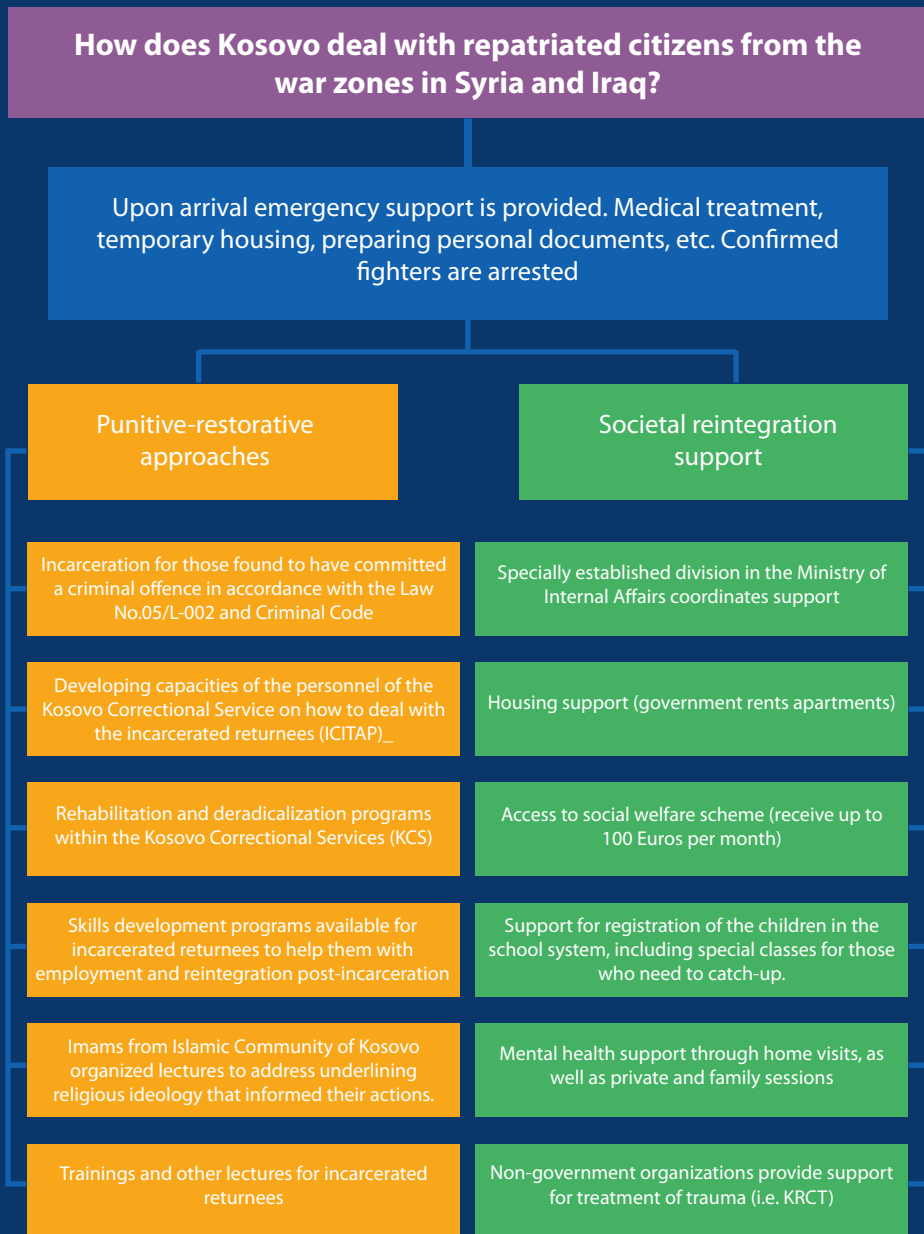
responsibilities include social reintegration as well as supporting reintegration in the labor market (Aliu, 2019). However, this is not an implication that MLSW has dedicated programs to deal with these two priority areas, but rather that it utilizes existing institutional and policy framework on social welfare and employment support and extends them to returnees from the war zones in Iraq and Syria. According to MLSW there are 11 families with 52 members that have returned from war zones in Syria and Iraq and benefit from the social welfare scheme (Ibid.,). However, MLSW is not clear if such families were included in the social welfare scheme after they returned as part of reintegration support or they had been beneficiaries of the scheme prior to leaving Kosovo (Ibid.,).

It is also unclear how the government approaches families and ensures their inclusion in the social welfare scheme. For example, a woman returned from Syria and Iraq complained that, in her words: “[a]lthough the state had told us it would help us, so far there has been no help in this regard. We have been back for seven months and we have only received social assistance this month [December, 2019]” (RTK, 2019). With respect to employment, the MLSW officials were not in position to say if there had been any successful cases of repatriated reintegrating the labor market foreign fighters who had finished their prison term. According to the MLSW officials they do not refer themselves to the offices of the MLSW in their respective municipalities, or even if they do they would not be registered as former-foreign fighters, and they have no reason to do so, since there are no dedicated programs for them. Part of the problem, in the personal view of MLSW officials is that returnees from Syria and Iraq tend to have a particular distrust of the public institutions. MLSW does have the infrastructure to develop particular tailor-made programs to support development of skills of repatriated foreign fighters, through their vocational training centers, that are managed by the Employment Agency.

With respect to community-based programs in the local level, there are limited resources and municipalities feel ignored by the government efforts to prevent violent extremism, including deradicalization and reintegration of repatriated foreign fighters. For example in one of the focus groups held in Mitrovica, it was noted by local government officials that there are four families that have returned from the war zones, and while the Municipality does not have any dedicated program or mechanism in place to work with these families and support their reintegration, they claim that they have cooperation agreements with psychologists and sociologists to provide support (Focus-Group-Mitrovica, 2019). It is unclear though if they have been utilized and if their services were accepted by families. Returnees have been treated

mainly through the existing social welfare scheme and families with children under the age of 18-years old can receive around 100 Euros per month per child. The municipal center on social welfare is considered the most suited institutions to oversee reintegration efforts, but they do not have a program in place to deal with returned families and their personnel lacks the necessary training. From the local perspective, it is important that the reintegration process is not securitized and handled by the police or intelligence agency. Municipal officials also noted that there are cases when families who have incarcerated members cannot even afford to visit them in the KCS, so municipality should be able to cover those costs. There are also concerns in regard to any potential of making public the identity of families who return from war zones out of fear of prejudices and further marginalization of such families by the community.

In general, municipal officials felt that they lack the needed resources for reintegration. The focus group in Municipality of Gjilan also showed similar results. Lack of resources, and lack of a dedicated program to work on reintegration of repatriated foreign fighters in municipal level exacerbates the challenges to manage an effective reintegration of returned families from war zones and repatriated foreign fighters (Focus-Group-Gjilan, 2019). In Gjilan most participants of the focus group did not know about the existence of the municipal Referral Mechanism. Despite heavy promotion of the Referral Mechanism, this structure remains largely unknown to many, and reasons for this perhaps are connected to its limited competencies and perceived overlap with the Municipal Community Safety Councils (MCSC). Although it was promoted as a model, its mandate could have been easily integrated within the MCSC. One member of the focus group shared a development in one of the schools of Gjilan, when an alleged student announced to friends, he/she intended to go to Syria, the entire school revolted and parents did not want to allow their children to return to school. Of particular interest, they also expressed concern over influence of politics both in government approaches as well as among religious institutions with respect to violent extremism.



**Figure 1: Summarized and simplified approach of how Kosovo deals with repatriated foreign fighters from and other citizens from war zones in Syria and Iraq.**

### 3.3 KEY GOVERNMENTAL AND INTERNATIONAL ACTORS INVOLVED ON REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES

The government of Kosovo has established the position of National Coordinator, as part of the Office of the Prime Minister to oversee the implementation of the government policy on counterterrorism and counter-violent extremism (CT/CVE). National CT/CVE coordinates all the activities with respect to preventing and countering violent extremism, and therefore it plays a significant role in the process of repatriation and reintegration of Kosovo citizens from the war zones in Syria and Iraq. However, when it comes to the procedural and practical aspects, the actual process of repatriation of citizens from the camps in Syria is primarily coordinated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), Ministry of Justice (MJ), and Kosovo Security Council Secretariat (KSCS) of the Office of Prime Minister among others. There is also a government Technical Working Group on Prevention of Violent Extremism that brings together government and non-government actors to facilitate communication and coordination. Department of Public Safety of MIA is also closely involved in repatriation and reintegration process. MJ is responsible for overall legal procedures for the repatriation process. All organized repatriations of Kosovo citizens have been closely coordinated and supported by the US. The April, 2019 repatriation of 110 citizens was coordinated by an ad-hoc governmental coordinating group are established to manage specific process of repatriation. In a press conference announcing the results of the operation, Minister of Justice, thanked the United States for the support and stated that:

“[t]he realization of this operation, for which we are very grateful to our partners and the security mechanisms in the country, sends a clear message that our state shall not abandon its citizens regardless of their experience. In addition, this sends a clear message that violent extremism, radicalism, and terrorism have nothing to do with us, neither with our tradition and the reality we are part of, nor with our state and social vision, and as such, shall be fought at every turn” (Tahiri, 2019).

In regard to the government approaches of deradicalization and rehabilitation programs for incarcerated returnees, as already explained primary actors include Ministry of Justice and Kosovo’s Correctional Services. With respect to reintegration as already stated, there are several government institutions that share responsibility, but the primary actor that works on daily basis with the process of reintegration is the Division for Prevention and Reintegration of Radicalized Persons which is part of the Department for Public Safety of the Ministry of



Internal Affairs. Head of the Division, Mrs. Ganimete Gërbovci, interviewed for this research, explained that their approaches to reintegration focuses on including the community and family in the process (Gërbovci, 2019). DPRRP works closely with the Department for Reintegration for Repatriated Persons (DRRP) of MIA. Services of this Department are mainly focused on repatriated citizens from EU Member States whose asylum requests were denied.

The DRRP implements the Government Regulation no. 13/2017 on reintegration of repatriated persons (Government of Kosovo, 2017). While this regulation was not written having in mind reintegration of returnees from the war zones in Syria and Iraq, it provides the following definitions of the two key concept with which this analysis is concerned: "Repatriated person - means a Kosovar who, for lack of legal basis for staying in a foreign country, is readmitted in Kosovo regardless their repatriation manner" while "Reintegration - means the reinclusion of repatriated persons into the society of Kosovo and promotion of their economic, social and political conditions" (Ibid., p. 2). The regulation specifies types of assistance the government provides for the repatriated persons, including assistance upon arrival and emergency benefits such as temporary housing or rent support, as well as support for sustainable reintegration, which includes vocational training, inclusions of children in education system, etc. The DRRP manages with financial resources to provide these services, and DPRRP depends on access to those resources to provide similar support in the process of reintegration of foreign fighters. But it is clear that, considering the number of foreign fighters and their families that have been and are expected to be repatriated in Kosovo, adopting a similar government regulation can provide resources as well as policy clarity.

Another set of important actors includes the coordinators for SPVERLT 2015-2020 that are appointed in all government ministries. For example, Ministry of Education has a appointed a SPVERLT 2015-2020 coordinator who manages a team of 13 officials that come from different departments and sectors of the Ministry and are accordingly responsible to cover reintegration measures from their portfolio. However, these coordinators when interviewed for this report, point out that while they have been assigned the respective position and received some trainings they are not specialized on the subject-matter, in reference to religious extremism or reintegration of repatriated foreign fighters (Jaha, 2019).

In local level there are several relevant institutions that directly or indirectly deal with issues of countering and prevention of violent extremism, but there is no coherent approach on the issue of reintegration of returnees. Besides the Municipal Community Safety Councils (MCSC)

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that brings together key security actors and addresses community concerns, as discussed earlier there is a Referral Mechanism in place that was established as part of the Action Plan of SPVERLT 2015-2020. For example, in the Municipality of Gjilan, it was established in 2016 and it consists of various local actors including: psychologists, teachers, community police, legal advisors, etc. This mechanism works on early detection of violent extremism. In 2017 the Referral Mechanism in Gjilan reported that eight cases of violent extremism were referred to them (Kika, 2017). But this mechanism does not deal with reintegration of repatriated foreign fighters and returned citizens from the war zones in Syria and Iraq. Even the leaders of this mechanism state that they do not have information about reintegration efforts (Hyseni, 2019).

Members of the Referral Mechanism would prefer that they are granted the necessary mandate to also coordinate reintegration efforts, in order to address the serious gap in the existing institutional framework. Some municipalities have shown self-initiative, in trying to formulate their own policies concerning P/CVE. For example, in 2017 Municipality of South Mitrovica in cooperation with local civil society organization, Community Building Mitrovica (CBM) developed a municipal strategy for countering and preventing violent extremism among youth (South Mitrovica, 2017). This marked the first time a municipality in Kosovo designed such a policy, but it has not been approved yet and it does not contain measures concerning reintegration of foreign fighters and radicalized individuals.

With respect to international actors involved in reintegration process. UNDP has provided support in establishing the Referral Mechanisms in municipalities of Kosovo, starting with pilot project in Gjilan. This process though largely ignored civil society in the process. The International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law in collaboration with ICITAP and the US, provided capacity building support, for example by sponsoring a three-day workshop on the Role of Psychologists and Religious Leaders in Rehabilitation and Reintegration in Kosovo in 2017. The OSCE Mission in Kosovo “began to develop the “VERLT Database” (VERLT: Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism), that was to include a database of the relevant government and non-governmental P/CVE stakeholders in the country. However, this effort, which was intended to support the Kosovo Security Council Secretariat (KSCS) of the Office of Prime Minister, to follow-up and coordinate VERLT related activities of all stakeholders, partners, and supporting organizations, stalled. The creation of the database was meant to assist the KSCS in avoiding possible duplication and repetition of activities, and to enable them to produce more qualitative periodical reports on the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan on the Prevention of VERLT.”

### 3.4 OVERVIEW OF KEY GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR ROLES IN DERADICALIZATION AND SUPPORTING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES FROM THE WAR ZONES IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

**Note: This table only refers to governmental institutions who specifically deal with deradicalization and reintegration efforts of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo**

No	Institution	What do they do?	What challenges they face?	What do they think about the reintegration efforts?
1	<i>Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA)/ Department for Public Safety/</i> <b>Division for Prevention and Reintegration of Radicalized Persons (DPRRP) which is part of the</b>	They work on daily basis with reintegration process. They have developed close partnerships with the families and are trusted by them. They offer relief support, coordinate with other government institutions to ensure reintegration of children in the school system and make efforts to include the returnees into the social welfare scheme in order for them to receive a monthly stipend.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key challenge is that this division does not operate on a particular policy, like it is the case of the MIA/DPRRP, which implements a government regulation clearly outlining services and policy of the government with respect to reintegration of citizens;</li> <li>• DPRRP is limited in resources and lack of budget. Division relies on external support as well as using resources from other departments in the Ministry;</li> <li>• Coordination with other institutions and civil society.</li> </ul>	Family is the key factor for effective reintegration. Kosovo Correctional Services needs to be involved more actively in the process of post-incarceration reintegration efforts.

2	Ministry of Justice/  <b>Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Offers rehabilitation and resocialization programs to inmates. Participation is on volunteer basis, there are no specific requirements for the inmates to participate. These programs include skills development courses, such as carpentry, but also other areas such as communication.</li> <li>• Additionally, the KCS provides access to verified imams by the Islamic Community of Kosovo who organize lectures for inmates to address the ideological underpinning of the incarcerated foreign fighters.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of a program to maintain continued engagement with the returnees in the aftermath of their release;</li> <li>• Lack of resources to develop new programs;</li> <li>• Lack of accreditation weakens the benefits and attractiveness of the courses for the inmates;</li> <li>• Lack of engagement with the families of the inmates.</li> </ul>	Government officials believe that the incarcerated foreign fighters remain a security concern. While some have shown signs of resocialization with others through, the KCS program, there still those who remain committed to the ideologies that informed their actions to go to Syria and Iraq in the first place. These individuals are loyal to the Sharia law.
3	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) /  <b>Technical Team for Prevention of Violent Extremism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are two key areas of responsibility under MLSW: supporting social reintegration and employment. Some families that have returned from the war zones in Syria and Iraq have been included in the social welfare scheme and should receive a stipend of around 100 Euros per month. However, not everyone is benefiting from this yet. DPRRP coordinates with MLWS on this issue. With regards to employment, the employment offices of the Agency of Employment are available for the returnees to apply. However, there are no particular incentives or policies for them, they are treated as other citizens, and it is highly unlikely that an individual applying for employment with Agency for Employment would introduce him/her-self as a returnee from Syria and Iraq.</li> <li>• Municipal Centers for Social Welfare, usually assign case managers when a family asks for support in reintegration process, for instance to support registration of children in the school system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Major challenge is that MLSW does not seem to have specific policies that are dedicated for the returnees from war zone in Syria and Iraq, but simply utilizes the existing institutional and policy framework to include them. While this is working to some degree, returnees deal with particular challenges in their efforts to reintegrate in the society, and MLSW needs to take that into account;</li> <li>• Inadequate coordination, especially with the municipal level;</li> <li>• Lack of referral of cases to employment offices, so that returnees upon clearing judicial screening or having completed their sentences can receive services to help them find jobs</li> </ul>	If returnees from war zones in Syria and Iraq are not properly treated than they have the potential to turn into a serious security threat. It is not only social and economic challenges, but ideological and psychological problems are also major challenges that need to be addressed by the Islamic Community of Kosovo

4	Ministry of Health (MH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Created a group of doctors to be at the disposal of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to treat the returnees from the war the zones in Syria and Iraq if needed;</li> <li>University Hospital and Clinical Service of Kosovo in cooperation with the Ministry of Internal Affairs assigned a coordinator on dealing with the returnees from the war zones in Syria and Iraq, who is a psychologist.</li> </ul>	Lack of specialized capacities on among public healthcare institutions on how to deal with the returnees from war zones in Syria and Iraq.	Addressing economic grievances of the returnees is essential for reintegration
5	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST)/  <b>Technical Team for Prevention of Violent Extremism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MEST has established a team of 13 to coordinate implementation of responsibilities pertaining, among others, to reintegration of returnees.</li> <li>MEST primary role in the framework of social reintegration has been in supporting registration of returned children in the school system. MEST has done this in close cooperation with MIA.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From available data it seems that MEST approaches have been successful so far in returning children to school, but it is unclear how has the reception of the children been and their engagement with their peers and the school material. Accordingly, MEST officials see this lack of a policy on continues support to children to ensure they are not marginalized because of perceptions;</li> <li>Lack of specialized trainings on dealing with reintegration of returnees;</li> <li>Need to engage with parents of the returned children and respond to their educational needs as well.</li> </ul>	Education sector needs to be utilized more than just for registration of returned children to the school system.

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## 4. AN OVERVIEW OF CIVIL SOCIETY APPROACHES OF WORKING WITH RETURNEES

Civil society organizations in Kosovo have a limited engagement with respect to actively and directly supporting reintegration of returnees. There lacks a constructive partnership between government and non-government organizations, which is a missed opportunity since, civil society organization can play a significant role in supporting effective reintegration of returnees. One area for instance where the partnership between government and civil society can be very helpful is in ensuring a gender-responsive policies. A UNDP report finds that “[o]ften invisible in the eyes of international policy and law are the women and children associated with violent extremist groups” (UNDP, 2019, p. 9). Another area where civil society organizations in Kosovo can be very helpful is engaging with returnees, especially young adults, where NGOs in the country are very well experienced. With respect to how, the first and most important step is inclusions and coordination. An OSCE report notes that: “There are a number of practical steps that can help support and advance efforts by government actors in developing productive non-instrumentalized relationships with civil society organizations (CSOs). They include establishing flexible multi-agency co-ordination mechanisms and codifying partnerships between government and non-government actors by delineating roles and responsibilities” (OSCE, 2018, p. 10). In the case of Kosovo, majority of NGOs work on issues pertaining to violent extremism are mainly focused on advocacy and oversight of government’s approaches, and they are not directly involved reintegration efforts of returnees, albeit with some exceptions. Therefore, there is an avenue that can be further explored to establish constructive partnership between non-government organization and government institutions in tackling key challenges emanating from social reintegration process.

Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) is the leading think-tank on security related issues in Kosovo, including prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE). As of November 2019, KCSS is implementing the project titled “Youth for Youth- increasing resilience among the vulnerable youth in Kosovo”, focusing on rehabilitation and resocialization of the children returned from conflict zones of Syria and Iraq. The aim of this project is to facilitate the pro-

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cess of reintegration of children returnees through adequate educational approaches. This project tends not to limit its activities to those returned from conflicts but has targeted other vulnerable children's such as those who have dropped out from their schools. The dropping out is known to have a negative impact on children's future opportunities. Such an inclusive approach avoids stigmatization and reaches a wider public within the country. The returnee children are known to remain isolated and marginalized which may significantly hinder their inter-personal communication skills. Through activities of this project, e.g. weekend camps, these children can improve these skills and increase their social tolerance. The project will be implemented in Prishtina, Vitia, Fushe Kosova, Ferizaj, Gjilan, Podujeva, Prizren, Mitrovica, Klina, and other municipalities who have returned individual from conflicts in Syria and Iraq. The project is supported by the Embassy of United States of America in Kosovo.

The Kosova Rehabilitation Centre for Torture Victims (KRCT) is a well-established Non-Government Organization (NGO) that provides treatment and rehabilitation support for victims of torture in Kosovo (KRCT, n.d.). In 2019, KRCT was supported by the US Embassy in Kosovo to provide reintegration support for returnees, with a particular focus on children as well as developing capacities of public institutions, especially the primary care institutions, that often serve as the first contact for the returnees, in order for them to be able to identify signs of trauma or radicalization at an early stage. The project also foresees awareness raising activities, that include development of informational materials for schools and families on health-care services available to them as well as information sessions for teachers and educators. These trainings are provided by professionals.

Other NGOs that are implementing P/CVE activities and have the potential to play an important role in supporting directly societal reintegration include, among others CBM, Partners Kosovo and FCI. Community Building Mitrovica (CBM) is one of the most credible local NGO, that works on peacebuilding related activities. With respect to P/CVE they are leading a consortium of organization consisting of Open Data Kosovo (ODK) and Mundesia, in the framework of the project "Building strong and resilient communities in Mitrovica" funded by Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF). Mitrovica's particular context as a divided city, has added to the challenges that communities face. According to the project document the purpose of the consortium is to adopt a grassroots approach to directly influence the most vulnerable population group – youth between ages of 15 and 25 – by creating a network of positive role models (change agents). Through youth development programs targeting the most vulnerable population groups the consortium aims to create a more moti-

vating and engaging environment for youth, through positive youth development programs, vocational trainings, employability programs, and cultural events and opportunities to increase youth's resilience and decrease vulnerability to violent extremist agendas. As part of the project CBM supported Municipality of Mitrovica South to develop a municipal strategy to prevent violent extremism among youth, which marked the first time a municipality developed such a strategy (Municipality of Mitrovica South, 2019).

Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) Kosovo Country Support Mechanism (CSM) supports or has supported a number of other NGO-s to work on C/PVE projects, including S'Bunker, Democracy Community Development Fund (CDF) – BRICK 'Building Resilience for Individuals and Communities in Kosovo', Advocacy Training and Resource Center (ATRC)- 'With Democracy Participating for a Kosovo without Radicalization.' However, majority of projects by Kosovo NGOs, in reality, are highly focused on P/CVE, and based on available data, NGOs have not been directly involved on reintegration of returnees. Civil society organizations highlight as a challenge lack of a coherent approach and coordination between institutions and complain that central government institutions ignore them. According to local officials for example: "There is no good coordination between the community and educational, health institutions at the municipal level. The National Coordinator never answers our questions and when we ask for help, he neglects us." (Focus-Group-Mitrovica, 2019). This report recommends that the government develops mechanism to include civil society in the process, by establishing an advisory council.

Like with the findings of this research, ideological decoupling of returnees from the war zones in Syria and Iraq present the most formidable challenge, that inhibit efforts for social reintegration as well as hold the potential for relapse of returnees to violent extremism. Also, another important common feature seems to be an unintended consequence of government approaches which has to do with further marginalization of returnees living them to feel dehumanized. These will be further explored in the next section on the way forward.



## 5. APPROACHES OF OTHER COUNTRIES WITH RESPECT TO REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES FROM SYRIA AND IRAQ

Like Kosovo, other countries faced the challenge of how to support effective reintegration of the returnees from the war zones in Syria and Iraq. For example, Denmark considers the issue of returnees and especially those who participated in the fighting (Foreign Fighters/FF) a major threat to security. When FFs return to Denmark, they are screened by police and given assistance by the Danish Security and Intelligence Service. Instead of threatening imprisonment and arrest, Danish authorities seek to prevent participation in conflict zones by providing reintegration and rehabilitation programs involving health care, schooling, and assistance in finding work and housing, referred to as the Aarhus Model. An additional approach is involvement of parents and their families in a dialogue with local authorities. They help parents to deal with radicalized children. Denmark has two strategic initiatives: an Early Prevention Program (EPP) to prevent further radicalization of those who do not, but may in the future, pose a security threat; the second is the Exit Program, which is aimed at radicalized people and includes medical treatment for war wounds and psychological trauma, as well as assistance with finding work or resuming education. Education is seen as an important tool and includes a “network of facilitators, mentors, comprehensive training and workshops with instructors on de-radicalisation process, risks and potential risks, as well as conflict management” (CEP, n.d.). The municipal council, police, and local NGOs cooperate extensively with Muslim communities to prevent radicalization. Authorities help families maintain contact with those still in Syria, and also help to get relatives home via speaking with government officials, consulates, and intelligence agencies. The Aarhus plan also has an element of community policing and dialogue with teachers, counselors, and parents. The approach does not focus on changing ideology, but rather focuses on ensuring unlawful behavior does not occur (Ibid.,).

In other EU countries, such as Belgium, Germany and Netherlands, there seems to be an emphasis on punitive measures in dealing with the returnees from the war zones in Syria and Iraq. Rik Coolsaet & Thomas Renard, find that returnees in Netherlands are placed in high-

security detention centers, in Belgium they are kept in ‘solitary conditions’ in order to prevent influencing others, while in Germany there is no ‘defined regime for returnees’ (Coolsaet & Renard, 2018). All three countries focus on “tailor-made disengagement trajectories (from the violent behavioural aspect of their extremist ideology) rather than deradicalisation programmes (changing their thinking and ideology). This means that inmates are regularly approached by caretakers with a wide variety of expertise.” (Ibid., para. 8). When incarcerated returnees are released all three countries have different approaches how to support their reintegration in the society, as explained by Coolsaet and Renard:

“Tailor-made accompaniment is available to help their re-insertion process. Decisions are made by local authorities and the Dutch Probation Service. In comparison, Belgian post-detention arrangements remain rather tentative, but are now rapidly being professionalised. A major distinction exists between jihadis released under probation (disengagement programmes are often imposed as a probation condition) and those who refuse the probation regime and decide to stay in prison until the very end of their sentence (therefore refusing participation in disengagement or counselling programmes). In Germany, as in the Netherlands, re-integration efforts are supported by the regular probationary system, and decided upon on a case-by-case basis.” (Ibid., para. 9)

Outside Europe, in the case of Pakistan the focus is on helping rebuild identities of foreign fighters and giving them meaning and purpose. This includes providing psychosocial support as bonding and attachment are essential to rebuilding identity. The Sabaoon facility encourages critical thinking, recognizing and valuing diverse opinions, and “identifying values to justify their decisions as part of intellectual discourse.” Aims are to provide direction, meaning and purpose, and ways to help individuals engage in more positive activities rather than returning to criminal activity. Instilling a higher purpose may help keep individuals away from violent extremism. Pro-social activities may also aid in reintegrating foreign fighters because they help build a bridge between individuals and their communities to take away stigma of having been a FF. Some activities the report focuses on include providing charity and acts of altruism locally, including making donations, washing streets, paying tuition to provide basic literacy classes, using skills to help neighbors’ lives, including assisting with transportation and participating in weddings. Community leaders can help facilitate these actions and help others in the community understand the FF’s experience, their process of reintegration, and show how they plan to contribute to the community. Interaction and monitoring from a net-

work of family members, close relatives, community members, and elders can be important in ensuring progress. Lastly, establishing trust with individuals and law enforcement agencies is vital. They sometimes have returnees write a confession statement to help them come to terms with what they've done while expressing a willingness to change. These are submitted anonymously and may contain information to inform law enforcement of militancy present in communities so they can address it. In Indonesia the government seems to actively support economic reintegration of returnees, in order to make them both financially viable as well as give them a new purpose as business entrepreneurs. For instance, in Indonesia: "Typically, an officer will turn up at a former prisoner's house with up to \$350-700 in Indonesian rupiah and offer to buy provisions for establishing a business. Ideas include a sewing machine for clothing alterations, a wheeled cart for selling street food, or a fridge-freezer for storing cold drinks and ice. [...] While the strategy is well-intentioned and offers are appreciated, the problem is that the process is generally rushed with very little follow-up." (Sumpter, 2019, para 11-12)

Kosovo government can benefit from these approaches, particularly in integrating a community element to their reintegration support, which means engaging community leaders and family members more actively and extensively. The DRRP in Ministry of Internal Affairs has already developed a good relation with family members of the returnees and therefore this can be further developed in order to give community a role as well in ensuring that the returnees feel welcomed but also re-connect with their societal identity and disengage from radical religious ideology. One concrete idea in this regard is creating support groups for the returnees where they meet on regular basis. This also presents an opportunity for the government to cooperate with civil society in implementing this kind of policy. Compared to other countries in EU, in the case of Kosovo, a major contributing factor for reintegration process in the society of the returnees is undoubtedly the close community lifestyle and commitment to family ties. Dr. Florian Qehaja holds that "most Kosovars belong to 'indigenous communities' and accordingly there is more systematic and accordingly there is more systematic knowledge about them compared with EU member States" (Qehaja, 2019). In other words, in Kosovo, the success of social reintegration of the returnees is credited to family and community.

## 6. CONCLUDING NOTES AND THE WAY FORWARD

This report examined how the government of Kosovo as well as non-government actors deal with the returnees from the war zones in Syria and Iraq. The report shows that the government of Kosovo is committed to repatriation of its citizens and has established dedicated programs and institutions to support their societal reintegration as well as rehabilitation for incarcerated returnees. Kosovo has two overall approaches in dealing with the returnees: restorative-punitive approaches and societal reintegration support. Punitive-restorative approaches have to do with the returnees who are found to have committed a criminal offense by participating in a foreign conflict in accordance with the Kosovo legislation. Kosovo's Correctional System with the assistance of the US government has developed special programs that seek to support their rehabilitation and disengagement from radical religious beliefs. These include skills development courses and other trainings. Access to these programs was intentionally made available to all inmates in order to avoid the perception that the returnees were seen differently and stigmatized. KCS personnel also received training in dealing with the returnees. Other measures to address the ideological beliefs of the returnees also included the failed religious lectures by Kosovar imams. Other problems with the punitive-restorative approaches include low participation by returnees in the programs as well as lack of a follow-up system and support in the aftermath of their release. In the words of officials from the KCS, they 'do not have anything to present as successful in their lives' (Gashi S. , 2019). Furthermore, these officials note, that while the programs have managed to get some returnees to become more social and engage, there are others who remain committed to their religious radical beliefs

In regard to societal reintegration support, the government and non-government actors are actively involved. The government has established a division (DPRRP) within the Department for Public Safety of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to deal specifically with coordinating reintegration of the returnees. Upon arrival in Kosovo, returnees have been welcomed by social workers and doctors, placed in a temporary government housing center and were taken care for an emergency period of 72 hours. During this time their personal documentation were prepared, received medical treatment, including mental health support and an assessment

of their needs for their settlement in the community was prepared. Kosovo government has assigned psychologists to provide care for their mental health, which includes house visits. Most returnees have exhibited, among others, symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), although there is lack of clarity with respect to the methodology that was followed to determine these symptoms. Government facilitated the process of reintegration of children in schools, including special classes for those children that required catching-up in cases when they did not attend any grades. Government officials as well as non-government actors have been involved as well, by supporting parents and families through trainings, among others. Orphaned children were welcomed back by family members of their parents. Families in need were supported to be registered with the social welfare scheme and receive monthly financial stipend, albeit complains from some returnees that they did not receive such support. Social reintegration supported by government also included renting houses for those families who needed shelter. These approaches speak of a commitment by the Kosovo government to prevent participation in foreign conflicts through rehabilitation and reintegration support programs. However, DPRRP lacks resources and a comprehensive policy on reintegration which impedes with their efforts and potential. While, the government has shown willingness and commitment to help reintegration of returnees from the war zones in Syria and Iraq, there are important shortcomings. First and foremost, every government institution that was interviewed for this research, has pointed to lack of coordination.

While the government commitment to actively supporting reintegration should be applauded, there are several challenges with the current approaches. First of all, the myriad of government mechanisms that are engaged in reintegration support are not effectively coordinated. As a result, this affects not only delivery of much needed support to returnees but weakens government's ability to effectively monitor the situation. In this context of particular concerns, is the lack of effective and meaningful participation and inclusion of municipal level in the process, although the Referral Mechanisms were a step in the right direction, they are not included effectively in the process. Also, government should think about including gender-responsive policies which can be facilitated by bringing in the process other institutions, such as Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality and women-led NGOs in the process of supporting reintegration.

Another important challenge has to do with cohesion. While the government has established special division within MIA, the DPRRP does not implement a particular government policy with respect to returnees, like the case with the Department for Reintegration for Repatriated

Persons (DRRP) which implements the government Regulation No.08/2015 on reintegration of repatriated persons and management of the reintegration program. DPRRP heavily depends on access to the resources of the DRRP. Creating a similar regulation for the DPRRP would greatly improve government cohesion with respect to reintegration of returnees. While community approach to reintegration efforts is part of the DPRRP approaches, it is not properly developed. Civil society organizations can become an important partner in this context. Moving forward the government of Kosovo needs to rethink its approaches towards supporting reintegration of returnees from war zones in Syria and Iraq and understand the value of such an engagement also as essential for overall prevention of violent extremism. Government shortcomings can exacerbate grief and grievances of the returnees and inspire new narratives of social injustice. In this sense, the government should take into consideration, the need for a community-based awareness raising activities to ensure there are no stigmatization, marginalization or dehumanization elements vis-à-vis the returnees.

From the policy perspective, the government should:

- 1) Conduct a comprehensive review of the policies and institutions that coordinate and implement activities aimed at supporting reintegration of returnees from the war zones;
- 2) Adopt a concept-document on how to reorganize the existing institutional mechanism dealing with deradicalization and reintegration and establish a coherent government policy on social and economic reintegration of returnees. Such a document needs to consider also if the placement of the DPRRP in Ministry of Internal Affairs is most suitable option for its task, considering that MLSW is the primary holder of resources the DPRRP would require to support social reintegration;
- 3) Conduct a review into efforts of deradicalization of foreign fighters that are incarcerated in the Kosovo Correctional Service, as well as examine the extent to which the lectures from sanctioned Islamic Community imams have had any impact, and modify existing arrangement;
- 4) Ministry of Internal Affairs should establish the Civil Society Reintegration Advisory Group in order to include NGOs in reintegration efforts through partnership with government institutions.

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