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Edited by Claudia Annovi, Marco Di Liddo e Skender Perteshi   September 2022

BUILDING RESILIENCE

R&R comparation of practices between Kosovo and Italy

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| Introduction

Despite the relevance other transnational challenges have acquired over the last years (namely, the Covid-19 pandemic and the current war in Ukraine), the phenomenon of violent extremism, radicalization and terrorism still represent a major challenge both to Europe and to Western Balkans. As highlighted in the 2021 EU Terrrorism Situation & Trend Report[1], Europe continues to suffer the effects of jihadist radicalization and recruitment in prisons and the threat from released prisoners. In 2020, for example, several jihadist attacks in Europe involved perpetrators who were either released convicts or prisoners at the time they committed the attack, such as in the case of the of the 2020 Vienna incidents. At the same time, there is reason to believe that the socio-economic grievances linked to the pandemic might act as a radicalization multiplier, hence reinforcing the assumption that violent extremism will continue to be a significant threat to European society.

The threat violent extremism and terrorism pose to security is equally – if not more fundamentally – relevant for Western Balkans, and specifically for Kosovo. Since the beginning of the civil wars in Syria and Iraq and the establishment of the so-called Islamic State (IS) in 2014, almost 400 Kosovar radicalized individuals have left to join the ranks of IS as foreign fighters[2]. The impressive wave of jihadist Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) in relation to the population of Kosovo (the highest ratio in the Balkan region)

[1] Europol, T. E. S. A. T. (2021). European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report.
[2] Shtuni, A. (2019). Western Balkans Foreign Fighters and Homegrown Jihadis: Trends and Implications. *ctc Sentinel*, *12*(7), 18-24.

and the threat returnees pose to the fragile country situation prompted authorities to elaborate ad-hoc strategies. Over the last years, Kosovo has undertaken various preventive measures to avoid violent extremism to spread in society, while monitoring and dismantling several terrorist cells. At the same time, Kosovar authorities have implemented repatriation, disengagement and rehabilitation programs for Kosovar jihadist returnees to ensure their reintegration into society.

Despite the efforts into these programs, one of the major challenges the country faces today is the substantial lack of capacities of Kosovar Probation Services (KPS) in dealing with the risk of relapse of radicalized individuals. So far, in fact, investments and capacity building programs have mainly targeted the early phases of disengagement and reintegration of violent extremists, while less attention has been paid to the post-release phase and the risks it entails, such as lack of monitoring, marginalization by the local community, stigma and discrimination. The issue, far from being solely a Kosovar national matter, might also impact directly European and, more specifically, Italian security, as underlined also by the arrest of a Italo-Kosovar young girl recruiting jihadist women in November 2021.

Against this backdrop, the aim of this project, conducted jointly by CeSI (Centro Studi Internazionali) and the KCSS (Kosovar Centre for Security Studies) and funded by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is to understand the main challenges faced by the Kosovar Probation Services in dealing with the reintegration of foreign fighters in society to help define better the design and implementation of trainings for first-line practitioners. In order to achieve this goal, the

consortium conducted 4 focus groups and various interviews
with different local actors – Kosovar Probation Services,
Ministries, NGOs, and civil society organizations – to assess
how R&R programs are currently organized in the post-
release phase in Kosovo and the main challenges faced in
their implementation.

In addition to this, given the importance that Italo-Kosovar
cooperation on this specific issue might have, the
consortium agreed to investigate also the Italian strategy for
the reintegration and resocialization of violent extremists
and jihadist returnees. This analysis has two goals. First,
given the longstanding history of Italian authorities in
fighting terrorism and political violent extremism, the
Italian legislative example might offer fundamental insights
to Kosovar counter-terrorism agencies. Secondly, the well-
structured PCVE strategies Kosovar institutions have
elaborated throughout these years might help fill the gaps of
Italian practices.

On the basis of these premises, the present report gathers the
results of the project and the analysis conducted on this
issue. In order to propose an in-depth overview of the topic,
the report is composed of two chapters. The first chapter,
edited by Claudia Annovi with the support of Aline Blanchard,
focuses on Italian current legal framework regarding PCVE
strategies, counter terrorism and, more specifically, the
management of jihadist returnees. This section includes an
analysis of the main challenges and gaps of Italian strategy
on this issue based on interviews conducted with two Italian
experts. The second chapter, edited by Skender Perteshi,
delves into Kosovar approach to R&R programs of foreign
fighters and the main challenges faced by Kosovar Probation

Services on the basis of the interviews and focus groups conducted on the field in the first months of 2022. Finally, the conclusion proposes a comparative analysis of the two examples and proposes some recommendations.

Italian approach to R&R programs for Foreign Terrorist Fighters

DOMESTIC EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM IN ITALY: AN OVERVIEW

For decades, Italy has struggled with various forms of violent extremism. The first evidences of the phenomenon after World War II date back to the 1960s with the so-called "Years of Lead", a period that lasted until 1981 and was characterized by high levels of internal political violence and terrorism conducted both by far-left and far-right paramilitary organizations[3]. Furthermore, Italian authorities had to come to terms with the socioeconomic, financial, and security threat posed by organized crime - namely Mafia, Camorra, Ndrangheta - which continues to pose a serious and pervasive threat to both national and international security[4].

Nowadays, the landscape of violent extremism in Italy is complex and encompasses a greater range of organizations and ideologies. In the past two decades, Italy seemed to have been spared by the wave of Islamist extremist violence that has disrupted other European countries, to the extent that analysts and scholars started to refer to a so-called "Italian exceptionalism"[5]. However, some new violent episodes and

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[3] Stortoni, L. (1992). La repressione del terrorismo in Italia: L'intervento delle forze dell'ordine fino all'inizio degli anni ottanta.
[4] Maniscalco, M.L. and Rosato, V. (2017). Comparative analysis of existing policies: Italy. TRIVALENT Project. Pp. 17-29.
[5] Groppi, M. (2017). The Terror Threat to Italy: How Italian Exceptionalism is Rapidly Diminishing. CTC Sentinel, 10(15), 20-28

> **For decades, Italy has struggled with various forms of violent extremism**

the rise of terrorism- or extremism-related arrests demonstrate that Italy is not immune to this phenomenon. For instance, from August 2016 to July 2020, the number of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) increased from 125 to 146, hence highlighting on a number of jihadist cells in Italy[6]. At the same time, a significant growth of online hate speech against Muslims and immigrants has been recorded over the last years[7], and in 2019 Italy accounted for the highest number of far left- affiliated arrests in Europe[8]. Hence, the various manifestations of violent extremism in Italy should be given further attention.

Four categories – far-left extremism, far-right extremism, separatism and Islamist extremism – can be applied to categorize the landscape of violent extremism in Italy. The far-left extremist movement, which included a wide range of organizations, swept through Italy in the late 1960 and was mainly grounded on Marxist-Leninist ideology. The Red Brigades (Brigate Rosse, BR), a countrywide, centralized, and well-organized movement, was the most well-known and long-lasting far-left organization. The BR primarily targeted politicians, law enforcement, managers, and business executives throughout the 1970s[9]. In 1978, the group abducted and eventually killed Aldo Moro, a former Prime Minister and the leader of the Christian Democracy Party.

Even though far-left extremist groups are not as powerful as they once were, they are still considered a fundamental

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[6] Statista (2020, September 7). Monitored Foreign fighters in Italy 2016-2020. Statista.
[7] Tondo, L. and Giuffrida, A. (2018, August 3). Warning of 'dangerous acceleration' in attacks on immigrants in Italy. The Guardian.
[8] Europol, T.E.S.A.T. (2020). European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report.
[9] CISAC. (2012). Red Brigades. Centre for International Security and Cooperation.

threat to Italian security. In 2019, Italian authorities recorded the highest number of far left-related arrests (98) and of left wing failed, foiled, and completed attacks in Europe[10]. Additionally, the far-left extremist landscape has gone through a process of fragmentation over the past 15 years, making it more challenging to monitor it. As an illustration, a significant number of anarchist cells connected to the Informal Anarchist Federation (Federazione Anarchica Informale – FAI) are still active today in several Italian towns[11] and have managed, in some cases, to carry out disruptive attacks.

Far-right extremism is the second type of violent extremism that needs to be addressed. Italian right-wing extremism has its roots in several fascist cells that continued to exist after World War II. These factions aspired to reestablish the fascist regime and overthrow the democratic government in Italy[12]. The most prominent extreme right groups in the 1960s were Ordine Nuovo (ON), Avanguardia Nazionale (AN) and, eventually, their direct offshoot, Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari (NAR). The rise of the NAR – the most violent far-right organization in Italy accused of the Bologna 1980 massacre – was in fact fueled by the rise of political violence and the dissolution of other far-right organizations during the 1970s[13].

Due to domestic and global political factors, far-right extremist groups have recently incorporated new narratives and frameworks. On the one hand, the 2008 economic crisis fueled societal unrest and hostility toward the government.

[10] Europol (2020). Ibid.
[11] Mantici, A. (2017, October 13). La minaccia anarchica in Italia. Babilon Magazine
[12] CISAC. (2012). New Order. Centre for International Security and Cooperation.
[13] Stortoni (1992). Ibid.

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> **Even though far-left extremist groups are not as powerful as they once were, they are still considered a fundamental threat to Italian security**

On the other, since 2015, the refugee crisis and a new wave of Islamist terrorism have fueled anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sentiment throughout Europe, feelings that constitute part and parcel of far-right extremist narratives. The far-right extremist group that have engaged the most in anti-Muslim and anti-refugee mobilization is Forza Nuova (FN), which combines ultra-nationalism and Christian ultra-conservatism and whose ideology is principally articulated in opposition to immigration, globalization, and Islam[14]. Since 2015, FN has engaged in several low-intensity violent acts, including attacks on leftist, pro-human rights, and pro-immigration civil society organizations. It has also engaged in several hate speech-fueled anti-immigration and anti-Islam campaigns, further dividing Italian society. Proving the increasing influence and development of far-right ideology in Italy, from August 2020 to July 2021, 18 far-right extremists were arrested, hence registering an increase of 350%.

Separatist extremism represents the third category of violent extremism in Italy. This type of extremism is highly localized and, consequently, it is deeply rooted in some specific areas of the Italian territory, namely South Tyrol and Sardinia. As for the first case, the separatist extremist militancy started in the second half of the 1950s with the aim to obtain independence from Italy or to annex to other countries. The Committee for the Liberation of South Tyrol (Befreiungsausschuss Südtirol, BAS) was the most significant illegal organization, whose first noteworthy act was the so-called "Night of Fires" in which terrorists detonated 350 explosive devices to bring attention to the

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[14] Castelli Gattinara, P., & Froio, C. (2019). Getting 'right'into the news: grassroots far-right mobilization and media coverage in Italy and France. *Comparative European Politics*, *17*(5), 738-758.

South Tyrol issues[15]. This form of terrorism became more radicalized in the years that followed, and it began to target Italian police personnel. Although the 1970s were a comparatively "soft" decade, the 1980s were marked by the return of South Tyrol terrorism in the form of the neo-Nazi criminal group Ein Tirol, which carried out a number of dynamite assaults. Similarly, Sardinian separatist extremism spread across the island in the second half of the 1960s.

Barbagia Rossa and Movimento Armato Sardo were the most well-known separatist paramilitary organizations in Italy, merging elements of the Marxist-Leninist ideology with Sardinian separatism. Despite their militant activity was limited in time – 1978-1982 for Barbagia Rossa and 1982-1983 for Movimento Armato Sardo – they were responsible for numerous assassinations, kidnappings and attacks[16]. Islamist violent extremism is the third kind of extremism to be examined. The first evidence of jihadist cells in Italy emerged in the 1980s, when the first groups of militants from North Africa started to settle in Italy, especially in Lombardy[17]. Despite not being the ultimate target of jihadist militancy, Italy represented a fundamental melting pot and a crossroad for jihadist foreign fighters during the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, for its geographical position, Italy represented a valuable transit point for militants seeking to travel to conflict areas and join terrorist organizations in the Balkans and in North Africa, such as the Algerian Salafist Group for Preaching and Combatant, Ansar al-Sharia, and, ultimately, al-Qaeda. Most notably, the Islamic Cultural Institute (ICI) in

[15] Romeo, C. (2011). Il confine sotto attacco. La 'Notte dei Fuochi'" nella storiografia e pubblicistica italiana.". *Geschichte und Region-Storia e regione*, *20*(1), 122-134.
[16] Lisai, G. (2013). *Sardegna giallo e nera* (Vol. 129). Newton Compton Editori.
[17] Vidino, L. (2013). The evolution of jihadism in Italy: rise in homegrown radicals. CTC Sentinel/Combatic Terrorism Center at West Point, 6(11-12), 17-20.

Milan served as a valuable gateway to the Balkans during the Bosnian conflict, hence laying the foundations for a well-structured jihadist network between Italy and the neighboring region[18]. However, the finding and dismantlement of jihadist cells has increased in the first years of the 2000s – specifically, after announcement of the Italian participation to the U.S-led invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and Afghanistan (2003), hence reducing the threat.

More recently, with the rise of the so-called Islamic State (IS) and the start of the Syrian civil war, Italy has shifted from being a simple crossroad for foreigner jihadist militants to being the incubator of homegrown jihadists. Indeed, despite Italy did not report a number of foreign fighters as high as other European countries' – nearly 1/13 of France's contingent - various evidences raise concerns regarding a potential growth of Islamist violent extremism in Italy. For instance, according to a survey conducted between 2015 and 2016 among the Italian Muslim communities, 24% of 440 interviewed individuals stated that violence in defense of Islam is justifiable, 10% endorsed al-Qaida, 13% supported the Islamic State and almost 30% agreed with the duty to punish whoever insults Islam and its sacred tenets[19].

Moreover, the most recent events raise concerns regarding the size and the strength of such a threat in Italy. In March 2021, for instance, an Algerian IS supporter involved in 2015 Paris attacks was arrested in Bari, and, a month later, an Albanian citizen who supplied weapons to the 2016 Nice attacks was found in Salerno. In addition to this, it is also worth noticing that in November 2021 a 19-years-old

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[18] Vidino, L. (2013). Ibid.
[19] Groppi, M., & Chin, W. (2018). Islamist radicalisation in Italy: Myth or nightmare?. PhD diss., King's College London, 19.

> **While generating few foreign fighters when compared to other European countries Italy exhibits some interesting features that require further attention**

Italian-Kosovar woman was arrested in Milan for spreading IS content online and attempting to recruit young women to join the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

THE PHENOMENON OF FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS IN ITALY

In October 2019, Federico Cafiero de Raho (Italy's national prosecutor against organized crime and terrorism) stated that there were only 10 returnees in the country (3 were detained and 7 were closely monitored by national authorities)[20].

While generating few foreign fighters when compared to other European countries (one per million residents, compared to 41 per million in Belgium), Italy exhibits some interesting features that require further attention.

In contrast to the trend observed in other European countries and in the Western Balkans, the majority of jihadist foreign fighters leaving Italy did not have the Italian citizenship, but were born abroad and have eventually radicalized in Italy. According to recent data, in fact, nearly 50% came originally from North Africa, 16% were Iraqi or Syrian nationals and 9.6% were citizens of Balkan countries. Most of these left Italy after 2014 to join the Islamic State. However, evidence of previous departing to fight in other conflicts and/or to join different organizations, as well as data regarding homegrown Italian jihadists, should be equally taken into consideration. On the one hand, a small number of foreign fighters had already fled from Italy to jihadi theatres in the Balkans during the Bosnian conflict in the1990s and, later, to Iraq after the start of the conflict in 2003. Aspiring warriors

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[20] Marone, F. (2020). Tackling Italy0s Foreign Fighters. ISPI.

during those first two waves tended to use the existing network of mosques (mostly in Milan) to make contact with foreign jihadist organizations and organize the travel. Most notably, the majority had prior connections to foreign parties. On the other hand, the majority of non-Italian and Italian individuals that have joined the Islamic State as foreign fighters seemed to have weak connections with mosques and local Islamic communities. Indeed, despite a unique profile for foreign combatants does not exist, the path of radicalization of Italian foreign fighters rarely shows a direct influence or pressure from friends, relatives, or the religious community. Conversely, their radicalization process seems to be strictly individual and it often takes place online. Many jihadist militants have radicalized through online networks, serving as a conduit for the development of relationships with foreign players, or in online channels offering a wide range of jihadist contents and materials.

Moreover, it is interesting to notice that the phenomenon of jihadist foreign fighters in Italy does not limit to the case of the Islamic State, but includes also FTFs joining the Syrian Kurdish-majority militia of the YPG and the Peshmerga of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government. From a motivational point of view, drivers of radicalization leading Italian citizens to join the ranks of anti-IS militias are similar to those motivating IS supporters – such as the quest for a sense of belonging or the commitment to a specific cause. However, the ideological underpinnings motivating them are slightly different, as in this case adherence to the Marxist-Leninist cause merges with other elements. However, the number of anti-IS foreign fighters is still limited (less than ten militants) when compared to the quota of FTFs in other

European countries.[21]

THE ITALIAN FRAMEWORK FOR THE DISENGAGEMENT AND REINTEGRATION OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS

Despite the gaps that still exist in the Italian approach to R&R programs of jihadist returnees (that are discussed in-depth later in this report), laws and practices on this issue refer to three levels of policy frameworks and/or recommendations: the international, European, and national framework. Broadly speaking, plans to reintegrate foreign fighters underline a paradigm shift from the post-9/11 response.

While in the first years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks countries generally adopted a highly securitized approach based on short-term and repressive measures, in the latest period they elaborated more holistic directives for member states to deal with this issue. Indeed, to effectively reintegrate former foreign fighters, it is essential to understand how people become radicalized, the benefits they may have by joining terrorist organizations and the major challenges they may face in society after their disengagement. Moreover, although the focus is on male foreign fighters trained to fight and exposed to extremist ideas that might return, the idea that returnees should be effectively reintegrated is often extended to their family and children, as they represent sensitive categories.

Although the phenomenon of foreign fighters existed in the past, the unprecedented wave of FTFs that fled various countries to join IS in Syria and Iraq raised concerns over the

> **While generating few foreign fighters when compared to other European countries Italy exhibits some interesting features that require further attention**

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[21] Dambruoso, S. & Conti, F. (2019). I profili giuridici dei foreign fighters. Tecnica, Professione e Società.

scale and size of the threat, hence leading both international, supranational and national bodies to address the problem. For this reason, considering the recommendations and measures provided by each of them is deemed necessary.

International Recommendations and Requirements

The international community has addressed the issue of foreign fighters consistently over the last eight years. As the conflict in Syria erupted and the so-called Islamic State emerged in that area, the United Nations addressed the problem by issuing a number of binding resolutions that called on Member States to engage in developing a new strategy for R&R programs. Specifically, three Security Council resolutions are considered foundational for the development of a new strategic framework: Resolution 2178 (issued in 2014), Resolution 2349 (issued in 2017), and Resolution 2396 (issued in 2017). These documents are the groundwork for the Global program on Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (PRR) of returnees and their families.

Resolution 2178 is considered essential for three reasons. Firstly, it provides a first definition of Foreign Terrorist Fighters, conceived as "individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict, and resolving to address this threat". Moreover, it calls upon Member States to cooperate over the issue of foreign fighters and to develop and implement rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for returning foreign terrorist fighters. Finally, it suggests that reintegration and

rehabilitation programs, as well as PCVE measures, should address the underlying factors of radicalization – e.g. intolerance, socio-economic grievances, marginalization – to achieve long-term results.

Resolution 2349 – addressing specifically the conflict area of the Lake Chad Basin Region – is considered foundational for two reasons. On the one hand, it stresses the need to pay particular attention to the treatment and reintegration of women and children formerly associated with extremist groups. On the other, it introduces the issue of assistance to former foreign fighters released from custody after serving their sentence or after completing the rehabilitation program in alternative settings.

Finally, Resolution 2396 laid the foundations for a more comprehensive approach to R&R programs. Indeed, this document emphasizes the role of civil society organizations and local communities for the sustainability of rehabilitation and reintegration programs, including mental health and education practitioners as well as social welfare actors. In addition, it encourages Member States to engage actively with local communities when developing these plans, as they might be able to confront the challenge of the relapse of a returnee or his family.

Besides UN Resolutions that have been issued throughout the years, it is worth also mentioning the Malta Principles for Reintegrating Returning Foreign Fighters[22], an international initiative launched in 2016 by the Hedayah Research Centre and the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of

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[22] Hedayah Research Centre & International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (2019). Malta Principles for Reintegrating Returning Foreign Fighters.

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The foundational EU strategy is the European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy (EUCTS), adopted by the European Council in 2005

Law. The project proposed 22 principles to guide Member States in the construction of R&R programs for FTFs. Most notably, the initiative emphasizes three core aspects of the reintegration phase. Firstly, the engagement with returnees should be individualized and based on an in-depth understanding of the drivers of radicalization in order to better define a specific assessment framework of the risk of relapse of the individual. Secondly, it underlines the fundamental role of LEAs as intermediate actors to help cooperating with local communities and ensure a sustainable reintegration of a returnee and/or his family. Accordingly, it also stresses the importance of training programs for staff and law enforcement agencies to effectively pursue this objective. Finally, it underlines that R&R programs should be cross-disciplinary, hence including different societal actors, such as social workers, psychologists, religious figures, and teachers.

European legal framework

Despite the primary responsibility of counter-terrorism actions and the reintegration of returnees lies with Member States, the European Union provides a framework acting as a legal benchmark for States engaging in these activities. The EU policy framework regarding the reintegration of foreign fighters draws from the UN resolution mentioned above and relies on two types of mechanisms: criminal measures to legally manage the return of high-risk individuals and preventive measures dealing with radicalization in society. Considering the goal of this report, the overview focuses on preventive measures, as they include those activities aiming at effectively reintegrating FTFs.

The foundational EU strategy is the European Union

Counter-Terrorism Strategy (EUCTS), adopted by the European Council in 2005. The EUCTS – which is technically non-binding – commits the European Union to combats terrorism and violent extremism globally while respecting human rights. This document established the four pillars of EU counter terrorism strategy: *preventing* people turning to terrorism by tackling the root causes of violent extremism; *protecting* citizens and infrastructures to reduce the vulnerability to attacks also through the improvement of security borders; *prosecuting* terrorists across borders and globally to prevent them from travelling and building transnational networks; and *responding* to terrorist attacks by minimizing the consequences and coordinating the response. The first draft of the EUCTS did not mention directly foreign fighters, neither their reintegration in society, but stresses the fundamental importance of tackling the driving forces of radicalization as a key aspect of PCVE strategies. However, the subsequent 2014 revision sheds light on the importance to support disengagement activities helping violent extremists to renounce violence, leave a group or movement, and reject a worldview promoting an extremist ideology linked to terrorism. Specifically, the later revision invites Member States to design and develop exit strategies adapted to specific cultures and contexts and share best practices.

A fundamental step taken by the European Commission in 2011 was the establishment of the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN). RAN represents a network of first-line practitioners – such as civil society organizations, social workers, teachers, police and prison officers – engaged in both preventing and countering violent extremism in different areas. The network was established to foster the sharing of best practices in different sectors dealing with

these phenomena – among these, also the reintegration of foreign fighters returnees. RAN is organized in nine working groups[23] that discuss and share details regarding their experience in their specific area of expertise, so as to give national authorities recommendations to handle a particular issue.

An interesting RAN outcome was the RAN MANUAL *Responses to returnees: foreign terrorist fighters and their families*[24], issued by the RAN Centre of Excellence in July 2017, that provided several valuable recommendations to Member States. Among these, RAN practitioners also provided several guiding principles for reintegration of returnees after their release from prison, shedding light on five good practices. Firstly, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies should be taken into consideration in the sentence as early as possible, so as to create a plan that might continue, and be reinforced as well, during the phase of reintegration in society (e.g. religious programs should consider as earlier as possible the local religious community where the returnee will be later included). Secondly, a multi-disciplinary team should evaluate the offender's needs and risks before his or her release in order to recognize a potential contribution it might give to society and provide practical guidelines to probation services. Thirdly, transition management from a prison environment to the local community should envisage a closed cooperation between different actors – prison staff,

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[23] The Communication and Narratives Working Group (RAN C&N); the Education Working Group (RAN EDU); the Youth, Families and Communities Working Group (RAN Y,F&C); the Health and Social Care Working Group (RAN H&SC); the Local Authorities Working Group (RAN LOCAL); the Prison and Probation Working Group (RAN P&P); the Police and Law enforcement Working Group (RAN POL); the EXIT Working Group (RAN EXIT) and the Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism Working Group (RAN VVT).
[24] RAN. (2017). RAN MANUAL. Responses to returnees: foreign terrorist fighters and their families. RAN Centre of Excellence.

> **Italy has developed throughout time several criminal mechanisms to prevent extremist violence and fight terrorism**

probation services, local authorities, support organizations etc. – to avoid a risk of relapse of the returnee. Fourthly, RAN practitioners stressed the importance of trust in the transition phase; therefore, they suggest that probation officers that share a cultural or religious background with the offenders might contribute to the success of this phase. Finally, the document recommends involving various actors from the local community that might help to ensure long-term results, such as job-seeking organizations, religious or spiritual communities etc. Hence, the RAN manual provided a valuable document to reshape R&R programs across European countries.

Italian legal framework

Given its longstanding history of political violent extremism and organized crime, Italy has developed throughout time several criminal mechanisms to prevent extremist violence and fight terrorism. Moreover, in the past 20 years, the Italian authorities have integrated new measures to counter violent extremism in accordance both with UN Resolutions and European recommendations. The emergence of global jihadism in the 2000s and the rise in the mid-2010s of new international terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State, followed by a new wave of jihadist attacks in Europe, have encouraged a reconfiguration of Italian P/CVE policies, that were mainly focused on left wing and right-wing extremism.

However, Italy still lacks a more holistic and multi-stakeholders national plan to prevent homegrown violent radicalization, as well as a well-constructed R&R strategy. So far, the Italian system has always adopted a highly securitized and repressive approach that relies more on

criminal measures than preventive ones. Therefore, to give account of the Italian strategy to foreign terrorist fighters, a specific overview of the laws concerning terrorism and radicalization is deemed necessary.

The Italian legal framework regarding the prevention, prosecution and repression of terrorist offenders is largely based on the Criminal Code and the Code of Criminal Procedures[25]. Specifically, 5 laws that have included new mechanisms for countering violent extremism in Italy are worth mentioning.

Law 438/2001 equated international terrorism – such as al-Qaeda's transnational political violence – to the criminal category of associations with the purpose of terrorism and introduced the sanction of the financing of international terrorist organizations.

Law 155/2005 – issued after the 2005's London bombings and 2004's Madrid attacks – created the crime of recruitment and training with the purpose of international and national terrorism. The law also reinforced the powers of State Police, the National Gendarmerie (Arma dei Carabinieri), the judicial police and the Financial Guard to conduct investigations regarding terrorism. Moreover, the law allows to conduct investigative hearings with detainees and inmates to gain useful information for the prevention and repression of terrorism.

Law 124/2007 significantly strengthened institutional

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[25] Valiente-Ivañez, V., Gómez-Bellvís, A. B., Miró-Llinares, F., Castro-Toledo, F. J., & Fernández-Castejón, E. B. D. 6.3. Legal Analysis of Counter-Radicalisation in a selected European Union Member States Report.

cooperation among State agencies, public officers and institutional and non-institutional actors that have to deal with violent radicalization. The aim of this law was improving the monitoring, detecting and management of radicalized or radicalizing individuals.

Law 43/2015 – issued after 2015's Charlie Hebdo attacks and the brand-new massive IS mobilization of European foreign fighters and based on 2178 UN Resolution – aimed at harmonizing the legislation developed until then by introducing a "two-track" strategy of preventive and sanctioning measures against violent extremism and radicalization. Firstly, it introduced new and harsher measures to prosecute new figures of terrorists, such as foreign fighters and transnational terrorist recruiters or preachers. Foreign fighters are sentenced to 5 to 8 years of imprisonments, while the prison term for terrorist recruiters is 7 to 15 years. Secondly, the law strengthened the capacity of Postal and Communication Police to monitor online propaganda, which is considered a flourishing "market" for extremist recruitment and self-radicalization. Thirdly, in order to fight the increasing phenomenon of lone-wolves terrorism, the Law 43/2015 provides also new mechanisms to prosecute either trainees or the radicalized individuals that have self-radicalized, self-trained and are willing to conduct a terrorist attack. Finally, from a procedural point of view, the law has integrated new measures to allow the Judicial Authority to remove sites used for terrorist activities and propaganda whenever is necessary.

Law 153/2016 incorporated into the Criminal Code new mechanisms to prolong the prison term for terrorism-affiliated individuals and included new indictable

> " Italy has prioritized a law enforcement approach to the phenomenon of violent extremism through the implementation of a largely security-oriented and centralized system

categories – namely, anyone gathering, offering or lending goods or money to be used in terrorist activities.

As can be deduced from the considerations above, Italy has prioritized a law enforcement approach to the phenomenon of violent extremism through the implementation of a largely security-oriented and centralized system. Italian P/CVE policies has focused first and foremost on Islamist violent extremism in the past 20 years. Moreover, the social environments that are believed to be conducive for violent radicalization are prisons and online platforms, which P/CVE policies focus on. As a result, the activities of the Italian authorities to counter violent extremism can be summarized in 7 categories:

1) intelligence and police investigations and surveillance;
2) monitoring webpages and social media;
3) countering the financing of terrorism;
4) administrative expulsions;
5) personal preventing measures;
6) judicial measures and
7) monitoring and counter-radicalization programs within prisons.

This set of measures, combined with the longstanding capacity of Italian authorities in detecting and deterring terrorist activities, helped Italian law enforcement and judicial authorities to conduct lengthy surveillance operations and pre-emptive raids. Moreover, the synergy between different intelligence agencies and between them and police forces, including penitentiary forces, has raised the effectiveness of Italian capabilities to counter terrorism recruitment and networking.

Nonetheless, the Italian P/CVE system is still flawed and directly affects R&R strategies to foreign terrorist fighters, especially those belonging to jihadist extremism. On the one hand, indeed, Italian authorities resorted to a set of measures that were conceived to deal with far right and far left extremism when countering Islamist violent extremism. For the different ideological background Islamism-inspired violence refers to, the strategy to fight Islamist violent radicalization should integrate different approaches and perspectives, especially when attempting to reintegrate jihadist offenders in society. Therefore, it emerges that Italian authorities has not made clear distinctions between different forms of violent extremism until today – even if, *de iure* they have been focusing on Islamist violent extremism since 2001. On the other, besides the specificity of the radicalization path of Italian foreign fighters, one of the main issues when dealing with the repatriation and reintegration of foreign jihadists is their citizenship. As most of them are foreign-born and, hence, have temporary residency permits in Italy, Italian authorities make extensive use of expulsions, both preventive and after the foreign criminal has served his sentence. Moreover, even in cases where the Italian citizenship has been granted to foreign individuals, the most recent legislative decree 118/2018 (the so-called "Decreto Sicurezza") has decided that the citizenship can be revoked whenever he/she has been accused of terrorist offences. This dual strategy to deal with foreign fighters raises some issues regarding various sensitive categories, such as wives and children of jihadist foreign fighters that are still held in prison camps in Syria and Iraq.

However, the growing threat of FTFs in Europe since the

emergence of the Islamic State has laid the foundation for further discussing these issues at institutional level. In 2016, for instance, the Italian government established the *Study Committee on the phenomenon of radicalization and jihadist extremism,* chaired by Prof. Lorenzo Vidino, with the aim of providing new recommendations to tackle jihadist violent radicalization in the country. Moreover, the 2017 so-called "Dambruoso-Manciulli" law, introducing "Measures for the Prevention of Jihadist radicalization and Extremism" (act 3558), aimed exactly at filling the gaps in the Italian legal system regarding P/CVE policies. Indeed, the proposed law revolves around two goals. On the one hand, it aimed at developing a new strategy for the prevention of violent radicalization by tackling all social environments. On the other hand, new programs of education and information for civil society as well as all institutional and non-institutional actors dealing with violent extremism, such as teachers, social educators and public officers, were conceived. This twofold strategy would operate at different levels through the creation of ad hoc institutions and centers for the coordination of the preventing plan. In this perspective, the Dambruoso-Manciulli law envisages to build a National Centre for radicalization (Centro Nazionale sulla Radicalizzazione – CRAD) within the Department of civil liberties an immigration of the Ministry of Interior Affairs. This center would be charged with drafting annually a National Strategic Plan underlining the evolution of violent extremism and defining the initiatives and projects to be realized (act 3558, art.2). Moreover, the new strategy includes also the institution of Centres for the Regional Coordination on radicalization (Centro di coordinamento regionale sulla radicalizzazione – CCR) and a Parliamentary Committee for monitoring jihadi extremism in various social environments (art.4). The backbone of the Dambruoso-

> **In the case of convictions for terrorist offences, authorities prioritize detention in high-security sections of penitentiaries without envisaging any structured rehabilitation program**

Manciulli law is also the inclusion of an educational plan for all those that might deal with early stages of radicalization as well as disengagement of returnees, such as police forces, educational actors and social and health workers. Finally, the law also laid the foundation for the development of a well-structured disengagement program that also involves the social, cultural and professional reintegration of former radicalized individuals.

THE CHALLENGES OF THE MANAGEMENT OF FTFS IN ITALY: CURRENT PRACTICES AND FUTURE TRENDS

As highlighted in the previous paragraph, despite Italy has developed fundamental tools to prosecute terrorist offenders, it still requires a national strategy to deal with the reintegration and disengagement of foreign fighters. So far, the lack of Italian citizenship of several foreign fighters has enabled Italian authorities to resort to the administrative expulsion for reasons of state security or, in some cases, to the withdrawal of the citizenship in accordance to the legislative decree 113/2018. Moreover, in the case of convictions for terrorist offences, authorities prioritize detention in high-security sections of penitentiaries without envisaging any structured rehabilitation program.

Nonetheless, as for the case of other crime offenders, the post-release phase of violent extremists and their reintegration into society is increasingly integrating several best practices. Probation services are supported actively by civil society organizations, health care workers (e.g. psychologists) and scholars in order to create ad-hoc pathways to reintegrate foreign fighters. Hence, despite a homogeneous strategy does not exist yet in Italy, considering

how R&R programs have been conducted so far in Italy is deemed necessary to understand the current Italian practices.

In order to understand better which practices Italian authorities adopt to deal with this issue, the consortium has interviewed two of the main Italian experts working on the reintegration of extremist offenders in society. The following analysis is hence based on their answers and considers both the current practices, potential strategies and the main challenges of R&R programs in Italy.

Italian approach to R&R programs

Exit programs and R&R plans had, so far, limited and only experimental application in preventive and pre-trial phases for adult foreign fighters or in probation cases dealing with minors. The features and pathways vary from case to case, and many of them are covered by confidentiality. Moreover, as in other European countries, the strategy to reintegrate former foreign fighters in society relies on approaches elaborated to deal with other types of detainees having psychological, social, and relational issues.

Broadly speaking, exit programs and the resocialization of FTFs and foreign fighters usually resort to a pre-existing set of activities adopted for other inmates approaching their end of sentence.

There are known cases where judicial authorities authorized former FTFs to be transferred to health care facilities in psychological and drug therapies for adults and minors. During their stay, there were psychological therapy sessions supported both by psychologists and health care workers, as

well as other social activities conducted by specific social actors (e.g. job-seeking organizations, teachers, professors, religious communities). In the case of minors, R&R programs included also specific plans to reintegrate them in local schools. All the phases of these programs were periodically reported to the judges of the proceedings, discussed and opened for evaluation/action by the defense lawyers. This two-track strategy has mainly two goals: on the one hand, to heal cases of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) linked to the experience of conflicts or other psychological disorders; on the other, to find sustainable and long-term strategies to reintegrate them effectively in society.

Capacity building for Italian prison and staff officers

Concerning the ad-hoc training of the probation officers, the current Italian practice envisages two training methods that include the participation of experts (e.g., psychologists, sociologists, lawyers):

1. Internal courses regarding radicalization, terrorism and PCVE strategies organized and held by the Penitentiary Administrative Department;
2. Courses organized by universities, think tanks or specific networks (e.g. RAN) focusing on PCVE strategies.

Despite these trainings lay the foundation for a deeper understanding of such a complex phenomenon, the scarcity of ad-hoc trainings for prison and probation staffs in Italy still represent a fundamental challenge. On the one hand, in fact, courses created and delivered by the Penitentiary Department risk being excessively focused on repressive and containment measures. On the other hand, the fact that officers have to resort to their own financial resources for

> **The lack of awareness and preparedness of the local community might result in social discrimination**

external trainings if they are interested might discourage them to strengthen their preparation. Conversely, comprehensive trainings for both prison and probation staffs and civil society organizations working with these categories might help them to cooperate and build effective and holistic programs for the disengagement and resocializations of FTFs and violent offenders.

The social challenges of R&R programs

In addition to this, a sensitive topic when dealing with R&R programs for FTFs are the response of the local community and their acceptance of such a process. Indeed, as it has been observed in various cases both within and outside Europe, local communities might have some problems in accepting the reintegration of a violent offender, seeing him/her as a potential threat. The lack of awareness and preparedness of the local community might result in social discrimination, or, in cases of former jihadist extremists, Islamophobia. As a result, the societal hostility during this sensitive phase of reintegration and resocialization might exacerbate the risk of relapse into radicalization. However, there are still few activities aiming at raising awareness and building resilience in local communities, also in light of the complexity of carrying out these activities within society.

Future trends and proposal from practitioners

The FAIR Project (Fighting Against Inmates' radicalization), funded by the European Union's Justice program (2014-2020) conducted a feasibility study, involving several stakeholders working with terrorist and violent offenders from various field of expertise, regarding the effectiveness of alternative ways of detention for violent extremists and

foreign fighters aimed exactly at rehabilitating and reintegrating them in society in Italy. These facilities, dedicated to the prevention and contrast of radicalization (hence also the risk of relapsing), might in fact represent ad-hoc centers to facilitate R&R programs for offenders and, in some cases, their families as well. Hence, the project has indicated 5 target groups of violent offenders/terrorists that might potentially be eligible for these specialized centers:

1. Radicalized detainees or terrorism-related detainees, provided that they decide to cooperate with Italian authorities and that any link with terrorist organizations can be excluded;

2. Radicalized individuals that are considered socially dangerous and that are subjected to security measures. Some stakeholders envisaged the possibility, should these individuals be considered (even partially) incompetent to stand trial, to place them under probation measures in these centers;

3. Individuals charged for minor offences related to terrorism and forms of extremism, such as propaganda and incitement to crime for racial, ethnic, or religious discrimination. Indeed, these suspects are nowadays often put under probation measures as early as the preliminary investigation stage begins, and this period should end with positive outcomes, he/she may be acquitted. Hence, this type of suspects might access the specialized centre during this probation period;

4. Detainees that are not specifically charged for terrorism-related offences but that might be at risk of violent radicalization according to the staff monitoring them in prisons. According to the evaluation of stake-holders, this category might access the specialized centres and might

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> **This feasibility study represents a valuable potential strategy to accompany FTFs, violent extremists and their families through a process of disengagement and to fill the gaps of the current Italian system**

concern, potentially, also the families of terrorist returnees, provided that they are Italian according to the current legal framework;

5. Foreign terrorist fighters *strictu sensu*, given also the limited number of foreign fighters detained in Italy (in 2016, 6 detainees).

This feasibility study represents a valuable potential strategy to accompany FTFs, violent extremists and their families through a process of disengagement and to fill the gaps of the current Italian system. Indeed, the introduction of these facilities might offer an intermediate step for foreign fighters to be gradually reintroduced in society, hence eliminating the shortcomings of an over-repressive system. In addition to this, this type of facilities might reinforce the cooperation between prison and probation services, local authorities and civil society organizations.

However, as highlighted by the interviewed stakeholders, the current Italian prison system, which is still highly restrictive, as well as the Italian legal framework, substantially based on criminal measures to deal with violent extremist offenders, still represent a clear obstacle to the creation of effective national R&R programs. So far, in fact, the only category that might concretely access this type of alternative security measures is a sub-group of the fourth target cluster – namely, detainees at medium or low risk of radicalization that are Italian or European citizens.

Kosovar approach to R&R programs for Foreign Terrorist Fighters

Domestic Extremism and Terrorism in Kosovo: an Overview

Since 2011, Kosovo has faced security challenges in preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism. Hundreds of Kosovar citizens have flocked to Syria and Iraq as foreign terrorist fighters, recruited by terrorist networks and organizations. Despite limited resources to combat this new phenomenon, subsequent governments in Kosovo have prioritized the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism and its regional spillover. After the collapse of Daesh's control of territory - at least as a territorial state-like entity – the flow of Kosovo citizens traveling to Syria and Iraq drastically ebbed; however, the threat remains acute as the country struggles to hone its overall approach to deradicalization and R&R.

In addition to Islamist violent extremism, as democratic transition has stalled and given way to authoritarian tendencies in the Western Balkans, ethno-nationalism and far right extremism have evolved into major emerging threats to security in Kosovo and the wider region. While research on Islamist violent extremism has attracted much attention due to its violent nature but also its trans-border nature, the far-right violent extremism in the region, particularly among the region's Serbian communities and Serbia, which inspired several mass murders globally in

recent years, remains understudied.[26]

Kosovo's law enforcement agencies focused on preventing individuals from joining foreign wars as well as prosecuting those who recruited Kosovo citizens to join foreign conflicts. Since 2014 some 405 Kosovar citizens have joined the conflict in Syria and Iraq.[27] Of these, nearly 100 foreign terrorist fighters have been killed while fighting for the Islamic State and related organizations such DAESH and Al Fateh Al Sham. The remainder of the FTFs have since returned from the conflict zones. The majority have enrolled in rehabilitations and reintegration (R&R) programs conducted by Kosovo institutions, civil society organizations and international donors, including most notably the European Commission, the Council of Europe and The International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance program (ICITAP).

In recent years, Kosovo's approach to preventing and combating violent extremism adapted to the size, the nature and the level of the threat in Kosovo and in the Western Balkans. In 2013 and 2014, the main threat of violent extremism and radicalization was the growing number of Kosovo citizens joining the Islamic State. After the fall of Daesh in Syria and Iraq in 2018 many of Kosovo's foreign fighters have returned home, bringing in Kosovo their ideology, fighting skills and their ties to international terrorism and terrorist networks, posing a fundamental threat to the Kosovar institutions and society. At the community level, there is a growing anxiety over the presence of these radicalized individuals and the potency of

> " **Kosovo's law enforcement agencies focused on preventing individuals from joining foreign wars as well as prosecuting those who recruited Kosovo citizens to join foreign conflicts**

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[26] Kursani 2019.
[27] Shpat Balaj &Skender Perteshi "Citizens Perception on Violennt Extremism" 2021.

their propaganda. At the institutional level, the management, rehabilitation and reintegration of the foreign terrorist fighters and their families from the once IS-held territory has represented the greatest challenge for the Kosovar security agencies as they lacked the capacity, resources, and the experience in countering violent extremism and rehabilitation programs.

The recruitment trajectory of foreign terrorist fighters from Kosovo followed closely the rise of Daesh in Syria and Iraq and was closely connected to the terrorist groups' propaganda efforts. Until 2014, the recruitment in Kosovo mainly took place through a tightly knit social network of individuals with ties to a new generation of imams. These imams and their followers mostly functioned outside the Islamic Association of Kosovo (BIK), which runs and regulates the mosques and religious affairs in Kosovo, though some prominent imams were also accused of spreading religious intolerance and failed to explicitly distance themselves from the IS. The process of recruitment and dissemination of IS-related propaganda also took place online and through social media platforms, namely through Facebook and YouTube. This form of recruitment and strategy of communication has changed since 2015 due to the interventions of Kosovo Police and prosecution, which have intensified their communication with social media platforms to clamp down on key influencers and IS-related content online. In 2022, only remote traces of IS propaganda can be found online.

While the overt threat of IS has diminished from the public sphere, the covert threat of the group's efforts in disseminating violent extremist ideologies continues

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> **The threat that has generated most concern recently is the Serbian far right movements**

unabated. The terrorist networks have now shifted their strategy to end-to-end encryption messaging apps such as Telegram and WhatsApp, as well as through the private channels, posing a renewed challenge to law enforcement agencies to investigate and counter these groups.[28]

The threat that has generated most concern recently is the Serbian far right movements, which represent a mixture of ethno-nationalism and extremist ideology that is centered on the shared Russian and Serbian Slavic Orthodox tradition and a skewed reading of history that elevates Serbian identity at the expense of other region's nations. For the most part, the far-right extremist groups in the Balkans were established after the 1990s in former Yugoslavia. Leaders and members of these groups are former war criminals, which glorify wars and the atrocities committed in Bosnia and Kosovo. Rallied around a narrative grounded on purported victimhood and anti-Western, anti-democratic, and anti-NATO rhetoric, these groups advocate a redrawing of borders in a region still reeling from ethno-nationalist conflicts.[29] These relatively new forms of extremism, while a continuation of the ethno-nationalist ideology that inspired the 1990s war in Kosovo, have taken a new urgency since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Coupled with the Islamist extremism threat, far right extremism and ethno-nationalism will pose the main security threats in Kosovo and region, in particular in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Many far-right groups, particularly in Serbia have direct ties

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[28] Interview with Fitim Flugaj. Imam at Kosovo Islamic Association. March 2022. Prishtina
[29] For more please see:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d309f7aed915d2fe9ea6aec/620_Western_Balkans_far_Right.pdf

to Russian state and the Russian Orthodox Church, in particular on social issues such as LGBT rights and Kosovo's independence, which they vehemently reject. [30] Traditional religious ties between Serbia and Russia and the respective Orthodox churches are a key driver motivating Serbian foreign fighters to join Russian forces in fighting in Syria and Ukraine.

Given the relatively new threat from the far right in Kosovo and the region, this report will assess the institutional capabilities in Kosovo in the rehabilitation and reintegration of former terrorist fighters through the management of radicalization and violent extremism pertaining to the Islamist international terrorist networks and their followers in the country.

The Phenomenon of Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Kosovo

The Kosovar society perceives the former foreign terrorist fighters who returned to their former dwellings in Kosovo following their engagement with the Islamic State as a threat to their safety. Data from the Kosovo Security Barometer shows a deep polarization in its perception of the FTFs within the society, with the majority, or 51% of the Kosovo public, considering the returnees as a threat or a high threat for Kosovo and 41 percent trusting they pose very little or no threat at all to their security. Safety concerns were also shared in KCSS-led discussions locally. The public's anxiety over the FTF threat increases the stigmatization of the returnees and the community's hesitancy over their return challenges the reintegration process and negatively impacts their rehabilitation. The recurring stigmatization has led to

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[30] Kursani 2019.

> **The public's concern over the former FTFs underscores the urgency of engaging with the local community in Kosovo to educate them about the returnees and the programs to reintegrate them**

the returnees' isolation, confining them to the same circumstances and ideology that bred their radicalization. Thus, the public's concern over the former FTFs underscores the urgency of engaging with the local community in Kosovo to educate them about the returnees and the programs to reintegrate them. The failure of the state and the community to fully integrate the FTFs and their family members will further increase their level of radicalization and will dimmish the trust between returnees and the state.

This threat is further compounded by the refusal of those FTFs deemed as high and average risk to engage in the rehabilitation and reintegration activities conducted by Kosovo's institutions and supported by the donor community.

Kosovar Approach to R&R programs for foreign fighters

While Kosovo conducted rehabilitation and reintegration programs in the past aimed at former combatants of the now-defunct Kosovo Liberation Army, the guerrilla army that fought in the 1998-1999 Kosovo war, the rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorist fighters is an entirely new concept and a major challenge for Kosovo's security institutions.

The implementation of R&R programs requires an institutional infrastructure equipped with knowledge on prevention of radicalization and violent extremism, as well as on the treatment and oversight of individuals convicted of terrorism, including in treating trauma, stigma and mental health issues. In addition, an important component of the rehabilitation process is also the involvement of the

community. Kosovo institutions LACKED professional capacities, financial resources and the practical know-how of R&R programs, but by 2022 it has set up most of the services to deliver R&R programs.[31]

The need for R&R programs for the former FTFs surfaced in 2018 following the collapse of the Islamic State when scores of former fighters and their families returned or were repatriated to Kosovo.

As a result of this emerging threat, Kosovo has resorted to a two-pronged approach to prevent and to counter radicalization and violent extremism. Most of its early efforts focused on a punitive restorative approach, also dubbed as "the hard approach," which saw the arrest of recruiters, financial and ideological influencers that raised recruits for terrorist groups such as Daesh and al-Nusra.[32] In its restorative approach, or the so-called "soft approach" Kosovo's institutions have provided the returnees with the opportunity to become part of the programs that facilitate their process of rehabilitation and reintegration as they transition back into their community.

Kosovo's punitive approach

Kosovo was among the first countries in the Western Balkans that approved the Law on Prohibition of Joining the Armed Conflicts Outside State Territory[33] and the Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and radicalization Leading

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[31] Skender Perteshi and Ramadan Ilazi "Unpacking Kosovo's response to returnees from war zones in Syria and Iraq. KCSS 2021.

[32] Ibid:

[33] Kosovo Assembly. (2015, March 12). Retrieved from Official Gazette of Republic of Kosovo: https://gzk. rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=10763

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Kosovo's law enforcement agencies have arrested and criminally prosecuted a considerable number of members of terrorist organizations

to Terrorism (SPVERLT 2015-2020). The law and the strategy were both promulgated by Kosovo's parliament in 2015 at the height of the IS recruitment efforts in the Western Balkans. While the law has provided judicial institutions and law enforcement agencies with more legal power to counter the phenomenon of violent extremism and terrorism, the strategy contained specific provisions on the rehabilitation and reintegration of the returnees,[34] providing an opportunity to returnees to reintegrate in the Kosovar society.[35]

Kosovo's law enforcement agencies have arrested and criminally prosecuted a considerable number of members of the terrorist organizations operating in Syria and Iraq or individuals who planned to join them, as well as those that carried out recruitment for and propagated on behalf of terrorist groups.[36]

By April 2019, some 135 Kosovars returned from Daesh-held territories. They were subject to investigative procedures and sentenced according to applicable laws, with prison sentences ranging from 2 to 3 years. In May 2019, the Government of Kosovo, supported by US law enforcement agencies, repatriated another 110 Kosovar citizens from refugee camps in Syria and Iraq. Four of the returnees were foreign terrorist fighters, while the rest were women and children. In July 2021, Kosovo repatriated another 11 Kosovar

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[34] Ministry of Internal Affairs . (2017). Documents/Strategic documents. Retrieved from Office of the Prime Minister: http://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/ANG-StrategjiaShtet%C3%ABrore-per-Riintegrimin-e-Qendrueshem-te-PR-2018-2022....pdf

[35] Ibid:

[36] Skender Perteshi and Ramadan Ilazi "Unpacking Kosovo's response to returnees from war zones in Syria and Iraq. KCSS 2021.

citizens from the conflict zones.[37]

Until 2019	Returned individually (mostly FTFs)	135
2011-2019	Repatriated individuals voluntary with state support (mostly women and children)	121
2011-2022	Killed or dead in the conflict	Around 100
2011-2022	individuals with unknown status (still present in the conflict or in prisons in Syria and Iraq)	Around 49
Total	Total number of Kosovo citizens who traveled to IS-held territory or joined terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq between 2011-2018	405

Kosovo institutions showed great effectiveness in investigating and arresting those who directly or indirectly were involved in terrorism or violent extremism activities. Overall, some 150[38] foreign terrorist fighters were arrested and convicted for their involvement with terrorist activities. Among them are 32 women[39] involved in terrorist activities and repatriated from conflict zones, most serving 2-year sentences in house arrest.[40] These rulings were taken in conformity with legal basis for great mitigation of punishment, considering mitigation measures, such as plea bargaining and good behavior after criminal offences were committed.

[37] Official data from Security institutions in Kosovo.
[38] Ibid:
[39] Skender Perteshi and Ramadan Ilazi "Unpacking Kosovo's response to returnees from war zones in Syria and Iraq. KCSS 2021.
[40] Perteshi Skender. 2021. Baseline Assessment of Kosovo Probation Service in the Process of R&R. < https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/SHSK.pdf

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The Government of Kosovo has created a special division in the Ministry of Internal Affairs to work exclusively on coordination of all the R&R activities

In addition to countering instances of violent extremism, Kosovo institutions\ successfully prevented several terrorist plots in Kosovo and beyond, targeting state authorities, police, international missions in Kosovo and critical infrastructure. Those thwarted attacks included the terrorist plot against the Israeli soccer team on November 28, 2016 in Albania,[41] a planned attack against NATO-led peacekeepers in Kosovo and against Kosovo's institutions by two members of the diaspora with Kosovo origins in 2018. The last terrorist plot to attack Kosovo institutions with explosives was prevented in 2021 by the Kosovo Police.[42]

Kosovo's restorative approach

The restorative approach refers to programs and activities implemented by the Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS), Kosovo Probation Service (KPS), the Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoIA) and civil society organizations (CSO). This approach provides the repatriated individuals access to programs that focus on skills development, integration into Kosovo's education system, vocational training to support their reintegration in the community as well as to counter their radical and ideological extremist views.[43]

The Government of Kosovo has created a special division in the Ministry of Internal Affairs to work exclusively on coordination of all the R&R activities and provide support for returnees and repatriated individuals.[44] This division,

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[41] Perteshi Skender 2018 New threat from Violent Extremism in Kosovo.
[42] Perteshi Skender 2018 New threat from Violent Extremism in Kosovo. Perteshi Skender and Shpat Balaj 2021. Public Perception report on Violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo. 2021
[43] Data from the Focus Groups organized with Government representatives and CSO's organized in Prishtina on 18th of March 2022.
[44] Interview with Sami Gashi senior officer of Kosovo Correctional Service. Prishtina, 20 Mars

together with the KPS and Kosovo Correctional Service have carried out most of the R&R activities and programs for individuals convicted for terrorism and offenses related to violent extremism. [45] Yet, despite the establishment of the state mechanism for coordination and streamlining of R&R activities, this process faces many difficulties.

The implementation of R&R programs in Kosovo remains a key challenge. Most of the programs were implemented on ad-hoc basis, lacking proper community-based assessment and national planning. R&R programs were often implemented by staff without prior expertise on radicalization and violent extremism.[46] Often these projects failed to include key institutions such as the Kosovo Probation Service and local municipal authorities.[47]

The exclusion of the KPS and local authorities from the rehabilitation programs complicated the implementation of key R&R activities, in particular those dedicated to the post-penal period of the former FTFs,[48] limiting the institutional capacities to monitor the FTFs behavior and to measure the general progress of their reintegration process.[49] The limited community engagement as part of the R&R activities had an impact on the community's negative perception of the

2022. Interview with senior officer of Ministry of Interior Affairs, Department for Public Safety. 22 March 2022. Prishtina
[45] Interview with senior officer from Kosovo Probation Service. 24 Mars 2022, Prishtina. Interview with Sami Gashi, senior officer from Kosovo Correctional Service. 20 March 2022. Prishtina.
[46] Perteshi Skender. 2021. Baseline Assessment of Kosovo Probation Service in the Process of R&R. < https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/SHSK.pdf >
[47] Perteshi Skender. 2021. Baseline Assessment of Kosovo Probation Service in the Process of R&R. < https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/SHSK.pdf
[48] Data from the Focus Group organized with representatives of MoIA, MoJ, KPS, KCS. 8 March 2022. Prishtina.
[49] Interview with Milot Sfishta and Ganimete Musliu from MoIA. September 2022. Prishtina

FTFs.[50] In addition, the mis-communication between the local and central institutions with local communities and local CSOs on R&R programs had a direct impact in furthering stigmatization and isolation of returnees from the larger community.[51]

The limited number of activities with local authorities and community representative to facilitate the process of the reintegration of the returnees was also identified by the community based on various public perception reports. Seventy-five percent of the respondents of KBS claimed they had no information regarding rehabilitation and reintegration programs in their communities, while 9% had limited knowledge and only 6 percent said that they were informed of the ongoing reintegration efforts.[52]

R&R and Kosovo Correctional Service

Kosovo Correctional Services (KCS) received the first cases of foreign terrorist fighters from Kosovo for the first time in 2013 and 2014.[53] During this period, the KCS was not prepared to receive and manage individuals involved in terrorist activities. In 2016 with the support of International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance program (ICITAP), a program of the US Justice Department, an internal assessment was conducted in the facilities of KCS to analyze

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[50] Inteview with Fitim Flugaj, imam from Kosovo Islamic Association. 13 March 2022. Prishtina.
[51] Perteshi S. Ilazi. R "Unpacking Kosovo's response to returnees from war zones in Syria and Iraq" Prishtina 2021. < https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/violent-extremism-eng_978757.pdf>
[52] Perteshi Skender and Shpat Balaj 2021. Public Perception report on Violent extremism and radicalization in Kosovo. 2021 < https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/Extremisem-Barometer-ENG_672182.pdf>
[53] Interview with senior international R&R expert working in Ministry of Justice in Kosovo. 11 March 2022. Interview with Linda Shala, PCVE expert. August 2021. Prishtina

best approaches to manage the prisoners convicted with terrorism offences.[54] This assessment recommended that KCS should not spread terrorism convicts among the prisoner population in the various detention centers and prisons, but if the logistical conditions permit, the convicted FTFs should be brought in one place, preferably in high security prison or a safer detention center.[55] The KCS management implemented the recommendation and sent all the FTF convicts to high security prison in Gerdovc, and safest detention center in Dubrava to serve their sentences.[56] This measure alone allowed the KCS to contain the threat of dissemination of the IS ideology in Kosovo prisons among the prison population, which the literature on IS recruitment practices has consistently .

Other reforms included the establishment of two internal units specialized in P/CVE and R&R management, namely the unit on the Management of Violent Extremism within KCS and the unit of Intelligence and Analysis. These two internal mechanisms in KCS support the correctional services as a whole in analyzing, monitoring, and working with returnees.[57]

Capacity building in KSC

The KCS has undertaken a series of trainings to increase the professional capacities of its officials on key topics related to

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[54] Ibid:

[55] Internal Report of Kosovo Correctional Service on the reforms of KCS. September 2016. Prishtina

[56] Data from the Focus Group organized witih representatives of KCS, KPS, MoJ, MOIA and Police in Prishtina. 6 March 2022.

[57] Orana A. and Perteshi S. "Disengagement, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Returned Terrorist Fighters in Kosovo. Dribe Project. 2022. < https://qkss.org/images/uploads/files/Kosovo_report31_03_22.pdf>

radicalization and violent extremism, R&R, terrorism, and different ideologies. Those reforms have curbed the dissemination of violent extremism and radicalization in KCS centers which was went largely unnoticed by the KCS officers.[58] Other organizations that implemented R&R programs in KCS were the European Union mechanisms, which provided these institutions with training for KCS staff and the Council of Europe, which supported the KPS and KCS through a specialized P/CVE and R&R program. The aim of these tailor-made programs was to help Kosovo correction and probation service with the development of basic tools needed for identification and screening of radicalized individuals, risk and needs assessment of violent extremist prisoners and radicalized inmates.

R&R and Kosovo Probation Service

The focus of international institutions and donors with regard to P/CVE and R&R programs was in KCS and MoIA. In the beginning, the donor community largely neglected the Kosovo Probation Service in their approach to R&R programs in Kosovo. The KPS was not part of R&R training programs, conferences or state-level working groups for implementation of R&R programs and P/CVE activities. The limited presence of KPS in the capacity building projects and R&R programs left this institution unprepared to manage the repatriation and the returnees from the conflict zones.

According to a senior KPS officer, the correctional authorities were not ready professionally for the rehabilitation of the returnees. As one official put it, "the individuals convicted for terrorism mainly had to go to court and prison. After their conditional release we had to treat them, to monitor them

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[58] Ibid:

and to provide services for them."[59] In fact, dealing with individuals who are convicted with terrorism offences requires expertise and experience to manage and deal with them. Along with the interventions such as providing of vocational training, support on social welfare and accommodation, there is a need for interventions to tackle their ideological and radical extremist views, an expertise which KPS as an institution does not have. The KPS manages and treats terrorism convicts using similar procedures as for other convicts. The KPS needs a specific unit or professionally experts who are trained and have expertise to treat the returnees under the institution's supervision.[60]

Legal gaps and challenges in the KPS

The KPS is currently managing some of the 30 women convicted on terrorism-related charges, which have been sentenced to two years in prison on June 2021.[61] During the serving of this sentence, the convicts will be treated by KPS probation staffers who lack professional training on R&R programs in addition to the lack of institutional knowledge on violent extremism, drivers of radicalization and extremism, R&R programs, and mental health issues. Social workers interviewed for this report expressed concern about the institution's capacities to work with women convicted of terrorism. "We have no previous experience and knowledge managing cases of individuals who are subject to terrorism and violent extremism. I am afraid that without solid experience and knowledge on R&R working with these cases,

[59] Interview A.SH, senior officer in Kosovo Probation Service. 5 March 2022, Prishtina.
[60] Interview with Luljeta Berisha. R&R expert and psychologists. 27 Marcg 2022. Prishtina.
[61] Perteshi Skender. 'Baseline Assessment on R&R in Kosovo" KCSS report. Prishitna < https://qkss.org/al/publikimet/cat/4>

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The lack of data and information sharing between KP, MoIA, Kosovo Correctional Service with KPS poses another obstacle to the successful implementation of the R&R programs

I could make more damage than help those women," said one social worker who was assigned three convicts.[62]

Similarly, a social worker in Gjilan, said he found the lack of previous experience and training on how to manage former foreign terrorist fighters daunting. According to him, the convict "refused to be part of any activity or service that we have provided." "He kept to himself and did not want to have any contact with other prisoners or KPS staffers. We had no idea on how to intervene and address his personal concerns or intervene to change his ideological or radical views," the social worker said.[63] Both cases prove that without proper training, for KPS will not be able to address the challenge posed by terrorism convicts.

Data sharing between institutions

The lack of data and information sharing between KP, MoIA, Kosovo Correctional Service with KPS poses another obstacle to the successful implementation of the R&R programs. KCS and MoIA possess heaps of data and detailed reports for every individual who was arrested and convicted on terrorism charges. Those data and reports include drivers of radicalization and violent extremism at the individual level, the behavior of individual FTFs in prisons, progress made on R&R programs, risk assessment data and other important data which could help KPS staffers to offer proper services to the cases now under their management.[64] To date, those data and reports are not shared with KPS and the lack of data

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[62]Data from the Social Worker (female) of Kosovo Probation Service in the Focus Group with representative of KCS, KP, MOIA, CSO, KPS. 18 March 2022. Prishtina
[63] Data from the Social Worker (male) of Kosovo Probation Service in the Focus Group with representative of KCS, KP, MOIA, CSO, KPS. 18 March 2022. Prishtina
[64] Perteshi Skender. 'Baseline Assessment on R&R in Kosovo" KCSS report. Prishitna < https://qkss.org/al/publikimet/cat/4>

sharing from MoIA and KCS with KPS is a major obstacle in the implementation of the R&R activities for KPS. The researchers of this report could not find any serious legal barriers or arguments on why the KPS are denied access to the database of terrorism convicts, even though both KCS and KPS are independent agencies within the Ministry of Justice and have key roles in the R&R process.[65]

Management of FTFs, women and children returnees

Contrary to the KPS, the KSC staff has the professional capacities to manage the reintegration of the former terrorist fighters. It has provided vocational training for those returnees who enlisted in such activities as part of their rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. These programs were supported by ICITAP and other international organizations that ran R&R activities in prisons. The majority of the FTFs, however, did not participated in R&R activities organized in prisons primarily due to ideological reasons. This was particularly the case with those returnees deemed as high and average risk, who have refused to take part in rehabilitation programs.[66]

Once they completed their prison sentences and upon their release, the FTFs encountered stigma, isolation and rejection by the community. The state authorities and different CSOs have supported the family members of FTFs and their children with accommodation, food, social welfare, educational support, health support and other needs. Some of the family members of the FTFs received grants to support

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[65] Interview with Senior international R&R expert. February 2022. Prishtina. Data from the Focus Group organized in Prishtina with representative of state actors engaged in R&R projects. 18 March 2022. Prishtina.
[66] Data from the Focus Group organized with stakeholders who are engaged in R&R activities. 18 March 2022. Prishtina.

> **Women and children make the majority of the returnees repatriated by Kosovo government from the Daesh-affiliated territories**

their efforts to start up private businesses.

Despite the challenges, the success of the R&R activities implemented in Kosovo is best measured by the very low level of recidivism among the formerly radicalized population that underwent through the punitive and reparative measures undertaken by Kosovo's institutions, donors and civil society organizations. Only 6 convicts re-engaged in terrorist activities after their time in prison.[67]

Women returnees

Women and children make the majority of the returnees repatriated by Kosovo government from the Daesh-affiliated territories. In total, by April 2019, 32 women were repatriated by Kosovar authorities with the support of the US agencies.[68] Upon their arrival, the returnees were provided with accommodation, food supplies, medical support and related services by the Kosovar authorities.

Immediately after their repatriation, Kosovo's authorities conducted a needs assessment for women and designed their interventions based on those findings and to accommodate the diversity within this community as some women were participants in terrorist activities and were convicted, while others followed their husbands in the IS battlefields.[69]

The MoIA and international donors including International Organization for Migration, Community Development Fund through GCERF and KCSS, have organized R&R activities with

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[67] Ibid:

[68] 100 citizens are repatriated from foreign conflicts. Radio Free Europe. Accessed 21st of April 2022. < https://www.zeriamerikes.com/a/kosovo-syria/4884148.html >

[69] Interview with Milot Sfishta and Ganimete Gerbovci senior representatives from MoIA. January 2022. Prishtina

women on their professional development through vocational training focused on economic empowerment. The aim of those activities was to reduce the level of stigma, reintegrate women in the community as contributors while increasing their incomes to make them more economically independent. For instance, CDF and MoIA have jointly organized certified professional courses for around 20 women on tailoring and sewing. All of the women enrolled in the program have graduated and are selling their products in the local market.[70] This approach has helped women returnees in the process of integration and reduced their radical Islamist views.

Compared to the men FTFs, the majority of the women have willingly participated in the R&R programs.

Children returnees

More than seventy-four children, most of which were born during the conflict in IS-held territories in Syria and Iraq, have been repatriated by Kosovar authorities.[71] Among the 74 children that were returned, nine were orphans. The repatriated children were welcomed by their family members. 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 subsidized by the government.[72] In an effort to best respond to the specific needs of children returned from a warzone, authorities and CSOs in Kosovo have conducted a

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[70] Interview with Milot Sfishta and Ganimete Gerbovci senior representatives from MoIA. January 2022. Prishtina

[71] 100 citizens are repatriated from foreign conflicts. Radio Free Europe. Accessed 21st of April 2022. < https://www.zeriamerikes.com/a/kosovo-syria/4884148.html >

[72] Perteshi Skender. 'Baseline Assessment on R&R in Kosovo" KCSS report. Prishitna < https://qkss.org/al/publikimet/cat/4 >

baseline assessment with the aim of designing tailor-made interventions that suit their circumstances. Based on these assessments, the returned children face complex trauma and their emotional state was found to be unstable.

Teachers, educators and other experts who are working with this community of children underline the need for more training on rehabilitation and reintegration programs that respond specifically to children's needs.[73] One teacher, who has worked with repatriated children in school, told the researcher of this report that "there is prejudice against the repatriated children, they are stigmatized, and bullied by their peers." The teacher expressed concerns over the negative comments directed towards repatriated children by other children in the school. This was especially troubling with girls who were prejudiced because of their appearance and dress.[74]

" **The Ministry of Education and local authorities had been effective in reintegrating repatriated children in the public school system in Kosovo**

The Ministry of Education and local authorities had been effective in reintegrating repatriated children in the public school system in Kosovo. In the early stages, education authorities integrated fully the young children of the group age 6-7 years old in the first grade, while older children who did not complete any grade were enrolled in the so-called "technical learning track," enabling them an expedient learning process to catch-up with their peers.[75] However, the grouping of children of different ages in one class presented a challenge for their integration into the education system in Kosovo, forcing authorities to reconsider this approach.

[73] Interview with Luljeta Berisha R&R expert. 13 March 2022.
[74] Opinion from the teacher who was participant at Focus Group organized with stakeholders who are engaged in R&R activities. 18 March 2022. Prishtina.
[75] Ibid:

Presently, the repatriated children are fully integrated in the
public school system in Kosovo together with their peers.
This, however, did not fully address the stigmatization of the
returnees, isolation they faced by the other students,
teachers and community.

The MoIA, international donors and local CSOs have made
important gains in implementing R&R activities and
programs for the children repatriated from IS-held territory.
Organizations such as KCSS, IOM, CDF and GCERF have
implemented extracurricular activities to reduce the level of
radicalization among the children and support their process
of integration.

Various organizations have offered drama and recreational
activities such as painting classes to stimulate children's
creative and positive thinking, self-expression, and the
development of soft skills.[76] These activities implemented by
MoIA together with international and local CSOs had positive
impact from the children. CSO activists involved in the
implementation of R&R activities with repatriated children
interviewed for this report noticed a "difference between the
first day that we met the children at the waiting center and
after three months of working with them." According to
them, the activists they were able to "foster mutual trust, the
children feel more relaxed around the trainers and free to
discuss different topics. They have developed empathy while
socializing with different children and are now more likely to
take self-initiative, such as by starting a new game."[77] Yet,
larger problems related to stigma, isolation and prejudice

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[76] Opinion from the teacher who was participant at Focus Group organized with stakeholders
who are involved in R&R activities. 18 March 2022. Prishtina.
[77] Ibid:

continue to frustrate efforts to reintegrate this group in the community.

Due to these persistent challenges, it is imperative that Kosovar authorities, in particular the education institutions, establish a professional mechanism that monitors the overall development of the repatriated children. These children continue to live in radicalized families and communities who may remain loyal to their previous identity.

Main gaps and challenges of the reintegration phase

The R&R process in Kosovo faced many challenges. Inter-institutional coordination and cooperation are the main obstacles to a smooth implementation process. Due to the sensitive nature of dealing with the returnees and the FTFs, the MoIA has excluded local municipal authorities from the process of rehabilitation and reintegration.[78] Despite being key to grass-root developments and community engagement, local municipalities have no mandate to work with the repatriated individuals and their families. Local authorities have worked with repatriated individuals only with the request of MoIA, based on the needs from the repatriated individuals.[79] The R&R process should be a bottom-up approach that was not applied in case of Kosovo. The community trust in R&R is very low as it is not involved in the rehabilitation and reintegration process at the local level.

Information sharing on CT-CVE efforts and the exclusion of

> **"The R&R process in Kosovo faced many challenges. Inter-institutional coordination and cooperation are the main obstacles to a smooth implementation process**

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[78] MoIA strategy on R&R 2018.
[79] Interview with A.I senior officer from the Municipality of Prishtina. Department of Rehabilitation and Reintegration. March 2022, Prishtina.

the KPS from the implementation of the R&R programs is another challenge in Kosovo. The institutions are dealing with problems in information sharing, but also with preparation of joint and standardized R&R training. Sharing of analytical data and monitoring reports for individuals convicted of offences related to violent extremism and terrorism remains a major challenge.

Due to this approach, the R&R programs are prepared and implemented in Kosovo without coordination with local stakeholders. Those programs were not planned well and were not harmonized with the profile of FTFs as well as their behavior in prison while serving their sentences. In most cases, the time of serving in prison was short compared to the timeline of the R&R programs.[80]

Another failing of the R&R activities in Kosovo was the post-release period, which did not offer assistance in the transition phase for their integration in the community. After the FTFs released from the prisons there was no follow up with R&R activities, which would normally support the integration of FTFs.

R&R and community perception

The community, defined as the immediate circle of acquittances that dwell in the same space as the repatriated FTFs, were not involved in the R&R programs. As a result, the community at large was afraid of welcoming the returned FTFs. [81] The community does not have relevant information of the work done with the repatriated individuals for their

[80] Interview with Fitim Flugaj from BIK. March 2022, Prishtina. Interview with Sokol Haliti, mayor of Municipality of Vitia. March 2022.
[81] Kosovo Security Barometer on Violent Extremism. Prishtina. 2021

> **The lack of communication between the state authorities and community on R&R and PCVE has undermined the trust in the R&R programs**

reintegration back in the community,[82] contributing to their further stigmatization. The lack of communication between the state authorities and community on R&R and PCVE has undermined the trust in the R&R programs.[83] The research data shows that there is a limited presence of psychologists in key education institutions and centers for social welfares which may have an important role to play in the R&R process.[84]

This research into the structural deficiencies of Kosovo institutions also identified the lack of risk assessment tools among several key stakeholders, including the Kosovo Correctional Service, Kosovo Probation Service, Prosecution and MoIA. The lack of such methodology has undermined the preparation of the R&R interventions for the returnees. In response, Kosovo authorities should be encouraged to continue to utilize the existing tools such as VERA-2R and ERG22+, and continue to test their applicability to the Kosovo context. But they should also be acutely aware that the existing risk assessment tools are narrowly focused on male foreign terrorist fighters and are limited in their use for children and women involved in terrorism offences.

Kosovo Police and Kosovo Intelligence Agency used VERA 2 and ERG22 to assess the level of the threat from the FTFs, but the MoIA, KPS and KCS do not utilize any existing tools for risk assessment of FTFs and other returnees.[85]

KCS and KPS conduct risk assessment reports based on their

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[82] Ibid:
[83] Interview with Sokol Haliti, mayor of Municipalituy of Vitia. March 2022.

[84] Interviews with Luljeta Berisha. R&R expert and psychologists. March 2022. Prishitna
[85] Focus Group Discussion with Stakeholders, January 2022

institutional monitoring visits, behaviors of the prisoners, data from police and intelligence, and their interviews with the prisoners.[86]

But, Kosovo institutions are not trained in preparing and using structured risk assessments.[87] To address this issue, Kosovo has benefitted from an EU funded project, implemented by the Council of Europe. This regional project assists Kosovo authorities with the development of a basic tools needed for radicalization identification and to carry out risk and needs assessments of violent extremist prisoners and radicalized inmates in addition to offering a tailor-made rehabilitation programs.

R&R in post-release phase

Nowadays a small number of FTF remain in the Dubrava detention center and the high security prison in Gerdovc. Others have served their sentenced and have returned into their former communities. Many former FTFs were conditionally released and are supervised by the KPS. But, the R&R programs which are implemented in prisons have not followed suit in the post-release R&R activities at the community level.[88] At the same time, some of the released FTFs have refused to be part of the R&R programs provided by CSOs and the MoIA at the community level. The same FTFs who have refused R&R programs after their release have also rejected the R&R programs during their time in prison.[89]

In 2022 the MoIA tried to remedy some of the discrepancies

[86] Ibid:
[87] Ibid:
[88] MoIA internal R&R data. 2021
[89] MoIA and KSC data on R&R 2021.

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Local and international CSOs have been very active in implementing R&R programs for children, women and FTFs in Kosovo

in their R&R approach by decentralizing the R&R activities for repatriated individuals and involving the local authorities in this process.[90] The MoIA's approach to give more role on R&R to the local authorities is also due to the large number of FTFs who are released from the prison into the community. But the late inclusion of the local authorities in the process has limited their capacities and expertise to work and implement R&R activities. In fact, now the local authorities are not prepared to implement R&R programs for repatriated individuals or others who are involved in terrorism offences.[91]

Civil Society role in R&R

Local and international CSOs have been very active in implementing R&R programs for children, women and FTFs in Kosovo. MoIA officials interviewed for this report said that in most cases the FTFs' their biggest concern upon their release is how the community would react toward them.[92] In those cases, close family members have played a supportive role in the integration of the FTFs in the community.

Organizations and donors such as CDF, KCSS, GCERF were effective in the implementation of programs providing vocational trainings for returnees, leadership trainings, cultural and sport activities for individuals and communities affected by violent extremism who return to their community.[93] These initiatives have created a safe environment for the reintegration of returnees from war zones. Moreover, those organizations are helping repatriated

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[90] Interview with senior officer from the MoIA. March 2022.
[91] Focus Group Discussion with Stakeholders, January 2022
[92] Interview with Milot Sfishta. MoIA official. March 2022.
[93] Focus Group Discussion with Stakeholders, January 2022

women by providing professional trainings on tailoring and sewing as well as in starting up their businesses.

MoIA in close cooperation with CSOs and international donors have distributed around 40 grants to those convicted of terrorism and released from prison. There are some individuals who have had success and some less. There are no research data or analyses who have measured the impact of those grants for repatriated individuals. Grants are of various kinds, starting with agriculture, construction, equipment for vehicle repair, and support for small businesses such as car wash.[94]

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[94]Interview with a MoIA official. March 2022

Conclusions: comparing the Italian and the Kosovar cases

The present report aimed at offering useful insights regarding the management of R&R programs of returnees in Kosovo, the challenges faced by KPS in effectively reintegrating former foreign fighters and their families in society and what should be done in the future to improve the current practices. At the very earlier stages of this project, the decision to integrate an entire part concerning the threat posed by violent extremism and terrorism to Italy and an analysis of Italian current practices concerning this issue was aimed at understanding how Italy could reinforce KPS approaches. However, the research over this topic has revealed some interesting insights that might pave the way to future forms of cooperation between these two countries.

The analysis of the Italian case has, in fact, revealed both strengths and weaknesses of the current Italian approach. Given its longstanding history in countering various forms of terrorism, Italy has created, over the last decades, a specific legislative framework to effectively tackle this phenomenon. The set of laws currently in force in Italy, combined with the longstanding capacity of Italian authorities in detecting and deterring terrorist activities, helped Italian law enforcement and judicial authorities to conduct lengthy surveillance operations and pre-emptive raids. Moreover, the synergy between different intelligence agencies and between them and police forces, including penitentiary forces, has raised

the effectiveness of Italian capabilities to counter terrorism recruitment and networking. Today, the Italian counter-terrorism approach hence represents a fundamental benchmark in the European scenario as well a successful combination between international, European, and national directives. Nonetheless, the analysis conducted throughout these months and the interviews with experts shredded light on the fundamental gaps in Italian PCVE strategies that directly affect R&R programs and their implementation.

Italian authorities still rely heavily on a repressive approach to violent extremism and the phenomenon of foreign fighters and R&R programs still lack an overarching perspective. The management of returnees and radicalized individuals differ from case to case since there is not a centralized plan, and approaches vary according to the place and actors that are involved in this process. Hence, the Italian strategy to the reintegration of foreign fighters needs to integrate a more restorative approach to ensure that returnees or former violent extremists do not pose a threat to security in the long run, hence facilitating the cooperation between the plethora of Italian CSOs and NGOS, local authorities and probation services.

On the contrary, the R&R programs and phenomenon of radicalized individuals was a new concept for Kosovo and, for this reason, Kosovar institutions did not have the experience and the expertise in designing and preparing R&R programs. Nonetheless, Kosovo authorities actively engaged in repatriation, reintegration and rehabilitation programs of its citizens from war zones in Syria and Iraq over the last years, displaying to quickly adapt to the new transnational and national challenges. The state authorities have worked with

international donors and local organizations in creating and implementing R&R programs to create a safer environment for both returnees and local communities. However, community and local authorities were not involved in implementation of R&R programs and were invited to participate very late in the process. All the activities are conducted and monitored by MoIA, which has preferred a more centralized approach. As a result of their late inclusion in the R&R process, the local authorities have limited logistical and professional capacities to such programs.

Against this backdrop, some interesting conclusions regarding the potential cooperation over R&R programs can be drawn. On the one hand, in fact, the decades-long expertise in countering terrorism might effectively inform Kosovar authorities and security forces over the best practices to implement to the monitoring, early detection and de-activation of extremist cells or radicalized individuals at national level. At the same time, the complex Italian legislative framework concerning countering terrorism and violent extremism of any form might contribute to reinforce the legal mechanisms to effectively face this challenge in Kosovo. On the other hand, the capacities Kosovar institutions displayed over the last years in creating ad-hoc R&R programs and the strategies Kosovo authorities implemented to effectively reintegrate jihadist returnees in society represent a fundamental example for Italy to develop a proper PCVE strategy.

Organizations and Authors of the Project

Organizations

<u>CeSI</u> – Center for International Studies – is an independent think tank founded in 2004 by Andrea Margelletti, who has been its President ever since.

The activity of the Institute has always focused on the analysis of international relations and the dynamics of security and defense, with particular attention devoted to areas of crisis and the dynamics of radicalization and extremism, afterwards expanding its analytical tools also in the field of geoeconomics and conflict prevention.

The flagship of CeSI is certainly its analytical methodology which is based on an in-depth knowledge of the analised context, on a daily and transversal information research and on a periodic visit in the areas of interest, which allows the analysts of the Institute to carry out timely and dynamic work. Furthermore, the Institute has created a wide network of collaborations and partnerships with other think tanks, universities, institutional and non-institutional stakeholders in the reference countries.

The goal is to provide tools which will contribute to help to better understand the reality and provide useful elements for decision making. What the CeSI intends to provide is a multifaceted approach which, in the complexity of the contemporary world, is based on an understanding at 360° of the dynamics in action by the actor.

<u>**KCSS**</u> – Kosovar Centre for Security Studies – is an independent policy research centre founded in April 2008 and based in Prishtina - Kosovo. KCSS is dedicated to security sector development and reform in Kosovo and Western Balkans. It proactively promotes principle of good governance, integrity and resilience.

Founded in 2008, KCSS's main interest remains to be development of security sector in Kosovo and Western Balkans based on the good governance. In almost a decade, KCSS has been building and offering alternative expertise in security studies, by filling a void in a limited academic contribution in the field in Kosovo.

The KCSS aims to enhance the effectiveness by supporting the SSR programs through its research, events, training, advocacy and direct policy advice. Advancing new ideas and social science methods are also core values of the centre. Each year, KCSS publishes numerous reports, policy analysis and policy briefs. It also, runs more than 200 public events including conferences, round-tables, and debates, lectures – in Kosovo, also in collaboration with regional and international partners. A wide-range of activities includes research, capacity-building, awareness and advocacy.

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