

# *Community Level Recommendations for Preventing Violent Extremism in Kosovo*

**UNDP KOSOVO**



*May, 2017*



*Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.*

This report does not represent the ideas or opinions of UNDP.  
This report was developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

# *Executive Summary*



Researchers, practitioners, and the public institutions have sought to understand the appeal of violent extremism in Kosovo\*, with several research projects having been conducted in Kosovo as well as the broader Western Balkan region. Compared to Kosovo's total population, an alarmingly high number of Kosovar citizens travelled to Syria and Iraq to enlist as foreign fighters in groups such as the Al Qaeda-affiliated Jabhat al-Nusra or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to date, the Kosovo police have identified 316 individuals who fled Kosovo. There remains strong need for deeper understanding of perceptions of radicalisation processes in Kosovo's communities and the perceptions of the role of educational and religious institutions and the media.

\*References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

Based on recommendations of a UNDP-supported assessment conducted in 2015 to inform the Kosovo's CVE strategy, this updated assessment attempts to shed light on the following: (1) the perceptions of radicalisation at the community-level across Kosovo, (2) the perceived role of peers, educational institutions, religious leaders, teachers and communities, and (3) the perceived role and impact of media, the internet, and social media on recruitment and radicalisation in Kosovo. Using mixed methods and based on a Kosovo-wide survey of 608 respondents as well as stakeholder interviews and focus groups, with data disaggregated by gender, age, educational level, employment status, religion and geographical location, the assessment confirms that radicalisation is indeed an issue across Kosovo, with complex routes to radicalisation and varied understandings of profile of radicalisation across communities, stemming from a combination of societal and external factors.

Divides between expert perspectives with those of the public suggest that understandings of the nature and extent of radicalisation may not be fully grasped by the average Kosovar citizen. The assessment finds that contrary to the police records and to the opinions of the de-radicalised returnees, 43 per cent of respondents believe that the main drivers of radicalisation are economic incentives. Asked about the signs of radicalisation, respondents primarily identify individual's changes in physical appearance, followed by aggressive defense of viewpoints, sharing radical and extremist pages on social media or social isolation. This suggests that the public may confuse the signs of extremism with the signs of the newly found conservatism.

The issue of radicalisation of women or the role of women as recruiters remains misunderstood among Kosovars: both men and women tend to describe radicalised women as victims coerced into radicalisation by the male figures in their lives, such as their radicalised brothers or husbands, despite confirmations of women's active role in radicalisation.

Identifying the locations of radicalisation, 12 per cent of respondents' state to have been exposed to radical propaganda in educational institutions, especially at the university-level, and about a third of respondents reported witnessing educational leaders sharing extremist propaganda or questioning others faith. Respondents mention madrassas and after-school activities as main locations of radicalisation. Further, respondents identify media, especially TV and social media such as Facebook, YouTube and religious chat rooms, as crucial for self-radicalisation.

Overall, majority of Kosovars believe radicalisation is occurring in their communities, with almost a third of respondents stating they personally know someone who has been radicalised. While radicalisation takes place across Kosovo, Ferizaj/Uroševac has been re-confirmed as a radicalisation hotspot. It has been however pointed out that radicalisation has been recently diminishing throughout Kosovo.

Responding to suspected radicalisation of an individual, the majority of respondents would choose to talk to a friend or a family member, to an influential member of the community or to the police. Respondents of Muslim confession are more likely to talk to individuals directly and less likely to contact police compared to non-Muslim respondents.

The issue of dealing with returnees, rehabilitation and de-radicalisation remains problematic. The majority of Kosovars are not open to accepting returnees in their communities, fearing for safety for themselves and their families. This suggests that reintegration requires careful management to prevent violence as a response to a perceived self-defense. Overall, the findings of the assessment suggest that anti-radicalisation activities in Kosovo should focus on educating the public about the issue of radicalisation, leveraging the importance of family as a tool for prevention and including more gender-sensitive programming.

Monitoring of existing and developing new extra-curricular activities for Kosovar youth is crucial for preventing youth radicalisation.

Finally, local ownership and buy-in of community members and institutions, as well as strengthening the role of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology is required for any successful preventive and de-radicalisation and reintegration efforts in Kosovo.

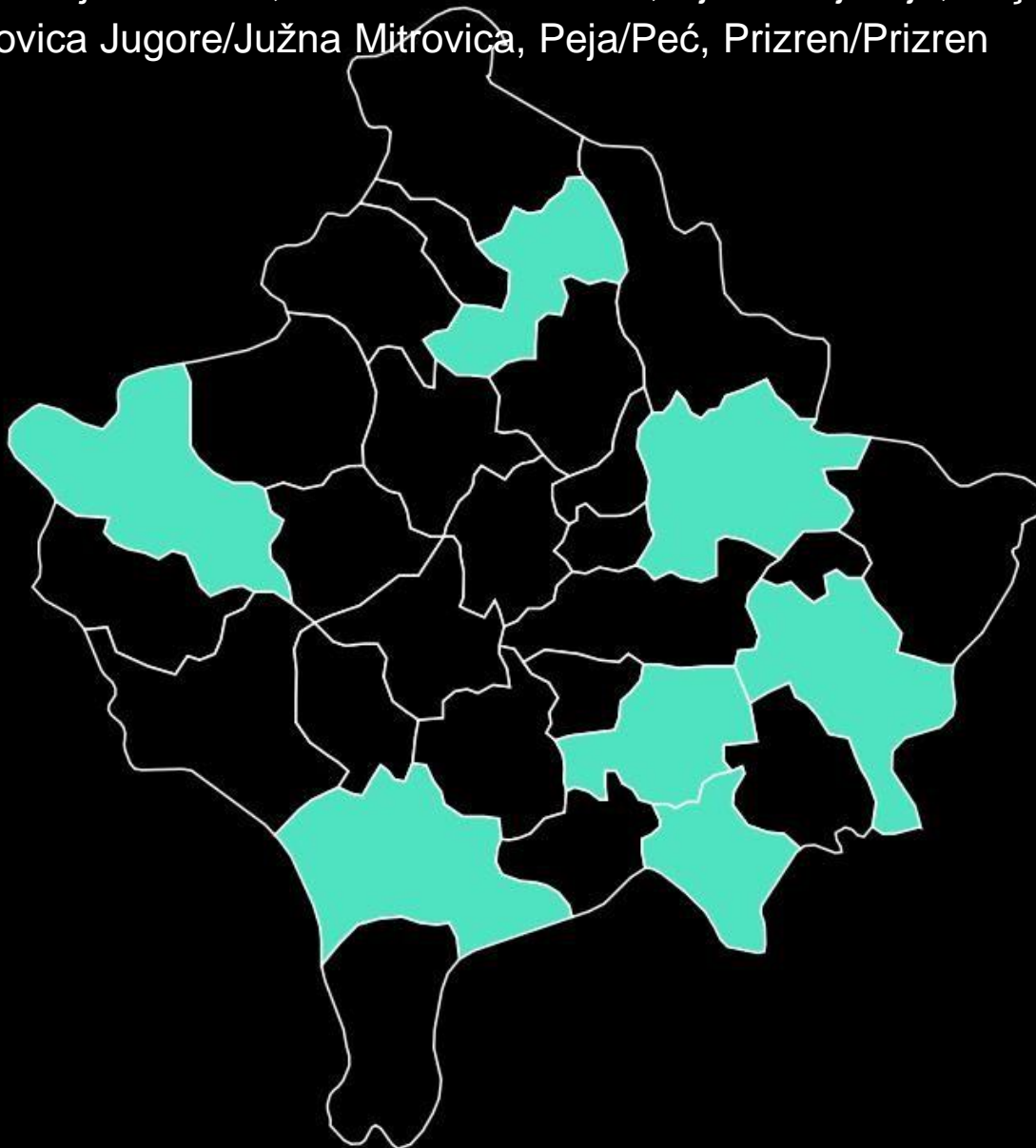
Kosovo is one of the places in Europe most affected by the phenomena of people joining foreign wars per capita. 125 per million inhabitants.

Most reliable figures state that in total 317 Kosovars have joined foreign wars. Out of the 317 persons, 245 are males, 44 female, and 28 children. From the total number of Kosovars who have joined foreign wars, 127 have returned to Kosovo and 120 have been arrested. 59 Kosovars are confirmed as deceased as a result of fighting in foreign wars. Legal authorities have stopped 44 persons at the border based on risk.



# *Hotspots of Radicalisation*

Prishtinë/Priština, Ferizaj/Uroševac, Hani i Elez/Elez Han, Gjilan/Gnjilanje, Kaçanik/Kaçanik,  
Mitrovica Jugore/Južna Mitrovica, Peja/Peć, Prizren/Prizren



# *Incidents*

2 ISIS related incidents were prevented by the Kosovo Police.



## **NOVEMBER 4, 2016**

119 people arrested for preparing an incident at football match in Albania.

## **JULY 18, 2016**

Five people sentenced for a total of 49 years for planning to shoot a pro-ISIS propaganda video at Badovci lake.

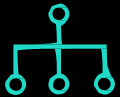
## Sources of Radicalisation



Radical Imams



Online  
Radicalisation



Face to face meetings

Motivating factors for radicalisation in Kosovo are: social and economic factors, low institutional capacity and integrity, identity, helping Muslims in Syria, personal connections, and finances/ battlefield fortunes.

## *Recruitment*

- CERTAIN NGO'S ACTIVE IN THE LAST FIFTEEN YEARS HAVE INTRODUCED A MORE CONSERVATIVE TYPE OF ISLAM VERSUS THE TRADITIONAL HANAFI SCHOOL PRACTICED IN KOSOVO.



Law on prohibition of joining armed conflict outside of territory (05/L-002) of March 25th, 2015.



Comprehensive assessment to counter violent radicalisation in Kosovo (requested by OPM and supported by UNDP).



On August 11th, 40 people were arrested on suspicion of participation in foreign wars and recruitment of insurgents.

On September 15th, 15 persons were arrested and charged with terrorism, threatening constitutional order, incitement of religious hate speech.

Several NGOs were closed.



Roadmap for comprehensive assessment to Counter Violent Radicalisation in Kosovo (requested by MoIA and support provided by UNDP).







Start of the implementation of action plan is mainly focused on early identification and prevention. Referral Mechanism, supported by UNDP, is piloted in Gjilan/Gnjilanje.



Revision and amendment to action plan and further implementation of activities. Start of prison management initiative and planning for reintegration and rehabilitation.



Strategy and action plan on prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism 2015-2020 developed. The action plan includes the following main objectives: (1) early identification of causes, factors, target groups, and radical methods, (2) prevention of violent extremism and radicalism, (3) intervention and (4) disengagement/de-radicalisation and reintegration.

Update of assessment of radicalisation at community level is supported by UNDP.



# Referral Mechanism

The referral mechanism, established in April 2016 by the Municipality of Gjilan/Gnjilane with support from Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoIA) , United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP), adopts a holistic approach to community engagement and community-oriented policing that involves all sectors of society. The referral mechanism uses existing collaboration between local authorities, the police, and the local community to: accept referrals of individuals at risk of being drawn into violent extremism, assess the nature and extent of that risk, and develop the most appropriate support for the individuals concerned.

(1) The Referral Mechanism will be a function to all those vulnerable individuals who may be subject to any form of radicalization and violent extremism.

(2) This mechanism will be in service to individuals of any age, faith, ethnicity, or gender by providing them with appropriate support before they are used by various extremist groups and eventually engage in acts of violent extremism.

(3) Referral Mechanism is not appropriate and will not treat cases that are under investigation by law enforcement institutions.



# *Introduction*

Though violent attacks by violent extremists have fortunately been absent in Kosovo, like other areas in the Western Balkan region, it has nevertheless significantly experienced the trend of foreign fighters. These fighters have flowed to Syria and Iraq to enlist in groups such as the al-Qaeda-linked Jabhat al-Nusra (which now refers to itself as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham) and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/ISIS).

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA), Kosovo police have identified 317 Kosovars – including two suicide bombers, 44 women and 28 children – who have travelled abroad to join ISIS, al-Nusra, and Ahrar al-Sham. Like other actors, Kosovo has acted to stem this flow of recruits.

Researchers, practitioners, and the central level have, in turn, sought to understand the appeal of such groups in particular, and of violent extremism in general, with several research projects having been conducted in Kosovo as well as the broader Western Balkan region.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has supported the development of countering violent extremism (CVE) assessment guidelines, which guided the Comprehensive Assessment to Counter Violent Radicalisation in Kosovo—in close collaboration with Kosovo's institutions. This assessment formed the baseline for the "Strategy Document on the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020" which followed an analysis of the situation in 2015; the extent of the threat and problem within Kosovo; motives of extremism; push and pull factors; strategic objectives for early identification, prevention, intervention and de-radicalisation.

However, due to gaps in the initial research and a changing context, there was a need for more in-depth research on assessing and understanding perceptions towards radicalisation Kosovo-wide.



*Purpose*

Commissioned by UNDP and the MoIA, this research has the explicit aim of assessing (1) perceptions of radicalisation at the community-level across Kosovo, (2) the perceived role of peers, educational institutions, religious leaders, teachers and communities, as well as (3) the perceived role and impact of media, the internet, and social media on recruitment and radicalisation in Kosovo. Its goal is to provide insights that could further complement Kosovo's strategy and its institutions in countering violent extremism. In its essence, this research seeks to understand and, where possible, provide insight regarding perceptions to the following questions at community level:

- What motivates a person in Kosovo to embrace and support extreme ideologies, or participate in such extreme forms of violence, especially in a foreign country?
- How are these motivations shaped by factors at the local level in Kosovo-wide communities?
- What are the specific processes that facilitate an individual's connection to, affiliation towards, and engagement with an extremist ideology and violent extremist groups?

These insights may be used to inform measures that may help communities identify early on, prevent, or potentially even counter-act processes before resulting in an individual's radicalisation. However, it is important to recognise that though the resurgence of interest in understanding radicalisation and combatting violent extremism at the community level was motivated by the rise of groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS, violent extremism is not limited to those attempting to justify their extreme views and/or violent acts with Islam.

# *Methodology*

MIXED METHODS

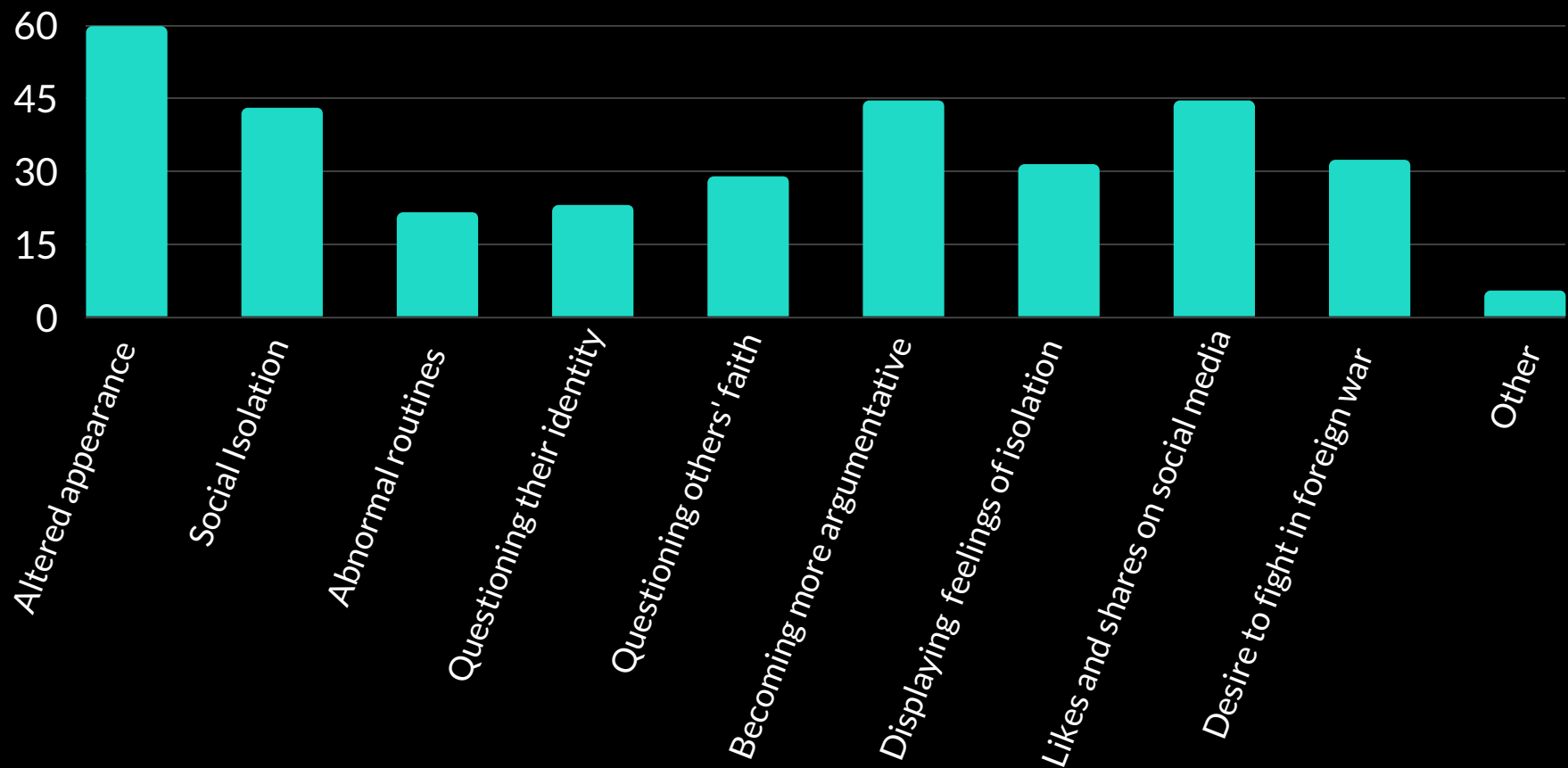
This study used mixed methods, including a literature review and quantitative and qualitative research methods to assess the perceptions of Kosovars regarding the issue of radicalisation. A Kosovo wide survey administered in all 38 of Kosovo's Municipalities, with 608 respondents, gained a breadth of inputs, while a series of four focus group meetings provided depth, with discussions organized as follows: (1) public institution actors, (2) international community representatives, (3) educational leaders and students, and (4) women and youth. Finally, stakeholder interviews were conducted with representatives of Kosovo's religious community, and students in their first year of university. One of the students was a young man from Gjilan/Gnjilane who had formerly become radicalised whilst in high school.

The Kosovo-wide survey and stakeholder and focus group questionnaire were drafted with input from outside experts, including representatives from UNDP and Kosovo's MoIA. They sought to cover a wide range of issues and were informed by the research conducted in the literature review.

Respondents of non-Muslim confession consistently believed that the various signs provided were indicators of radicalisation more than those of Muslim confession. These differences might illustrate the concerns of religious minority communities in a Muslim-confession majority such as in Kosovo, or even a greater propensity to be concerned about the issue of foreign fighters, who have largely joined ISIS—a group notorious for its crimes against non-Muslims (although the vast majority of its victims are actually fellow Muslims). They may also be more sensitive to “questioning others’ faith,” being Kosovo's religious minorities. Indeed, adherents to these religious groups may be experiencing more of this kind of behaviour, which may have informed their responses. Lastly, given that appearance in itself does not denote behaviour, another implication of this finding may be that radicalisation could be perceived as a larger problem than it actually is, especially among some religious groups. More research here is needed.



*Based on the provided definition of radicalisation, which traits would you associate with a radicalised person? (select all that apply)*



Among Kosovars surveyed, there was a majority belief (59.7%) that radicalisation is accompanied by outward changes in appearance. This particular question was included in the survey after finding no references to perceived traits of radicalisation in existing literature. Although not a majority, significant numbers of respondents also listed social isolation (42.9%), increased aggression (44.4%), and engagement with extremist content on social media (44.4%) as traits associated with radicalised persons. Important differences were observed and are also interesting to notice when disaggregated between those respondents identifying as Muslim and otherwise.

First, respondents of non-Muslim confession consistently believed that the above signs were indicators of radicalisation more than respondents of Muslim confession, with the notable exception of altered appearance. The most significant differences were regarding “questioning others’ faith” (56.6% to 26.1%) and “expressing a desire to fight in foreign conflicts” (52.8% to 30.3%).

Respondents identifying with religions other than Islam consistently believed that the various signs provided were indicators of radicalisation more than those identifying as Muslims. These differences might illustrate the concerns of religious minority communities in a Muslim-majority such as in Kosovo, or even a greater propensity to be concerned about the issue of foreign fighters, who have largely joined ISIS—a group notorious for its crimes against non-Muslims (although the vast majority of its victims are actually fellow Muslims). They may also be more sensitive to “questioning others’ faith,” being Kosovo’s religious minorities. Indeed, adherents to these religious groups may be experiencing more of this kind of behaviour, which may have informed their responses. Lastly, given that appearance in itself does not denote behaviour, another implication of this finding may be that radicalisation could be perceived as a larger problem than it actually is, especially among some religious groups. More research here is needed.

percent of  
respondents  
believe there are  
radicalised  
individuals in  
their community,  
local area, or  
village.



Over two-thirds of respondents believe that radicalisation is a problem in their community, even if they said it was only “a little”, though this was not a metric provided as an option in the survey (62.7% of respondents said it was a problem, with 7.2% affirming, but only “a little”). Some interesting disparities were noted upon cross-tabulation. For example, women were more likely to report that there are radicalised individuals in their community than men (73.7% to 66.1%). The 51+ age bracket had the highest reporting percentage at 77.4%, whereas the 36-50 age bracket was the lowest, with 60.8%.

Respondents of Muslim confession were significantly more likely to believe radicalisation is a problem in their communities than non-Muslims — 70.8% compared to 60.4%. This belief was largely consistent across Kosovo, although regional variations were significant. For example, the Ferizaj/Uroševac and Prizren/Prizreni regions, two hotspots, had the highest rates at 77.3% and 76%, respectively.

In order to understand the logical basis for these beliefs, the following question inquired how respondents were able to report the presence of radicalised individuals in their communities. The results presented an interesting array of responses. A surprising 24.7% of Kosovars surveyed (34.2% of those who answered yes to the previous question) personally know someone who is a radicalised individual in their community (over a third of those who said yes to the previous question). Others have been able to observe signs of radicalisation via social media, but 43.2% of those that said ‘yes’ have also heard of the existence of foreign fighters in their communities through media reports, highlighting the important role of both social and mainstream media. However, since media reports on radicalisation may not actually be localised to the specific “community/local area/village” of the respondent (i.e. a resident of Hani i Elezit/Elez Han hearing a specific report of a radicalised individual from Hani i Elezit/Elez Han), some respondents may have reported this based on broader reports from across Kosovo.



**19%**

**percent of  
respondents report  
having a friend or  
acquaintance who  
was directly  
approached with the  
aim of being  
radicalised.**

19% of respondents report having a friend or acquaintance who was directly approached with the aim of being radicalized. For example, two respondents from Vitina/Vitia told of a relative and a friend respectively who tried to radicalise them. Even more interesting were two respondents from Prizren/Prizreni, who admitted that they were directly approached with the aim of radicalisation, with one of them adding, "Yes, a lot of my friends came to me with this purpose."

Housewives were the least likely subgroup to encounter this, with only three percent reporting that this has happened to someone they know. However, the region of Ferizaj/Uroševac had the highest likelihood of this at 28.8%, in line with it being regarded as a hotspot, followed by Pejë/Peć with 23.3% and Prizren/Prizreni at 21.5%. However, importantly, no significant difference was observed between hotspots and other municipalities.

Specifically regarding foreign fighters, Kosovars surveyed were evenly split on hearing about community members leaving to become foreign fighters. This was highest in Ferizaj/Uroševac, where a substantial 69.7% of respondents from the region reported hearing of this issue in their community. Respondents from the Pejë/Peć and Gjakovë/Đakovica regions were the least likely (38.4% and 36.7%). A significant increase was also observed among respondents in hotspot municipalities at 62.9%.

As for other cross-tabulations, affirmative responses were generally positively correlated with an increase in education, and negatively correlated to an increase in age (with the 36-50 year age bracket dipping to only 33.8%). Regarding employment status, housewives were again the least likely to report this (at only 21.2%) while students were the most likely at 62.7%.

# *Perceptions of how individuals become radicalised*

PATHWAYS



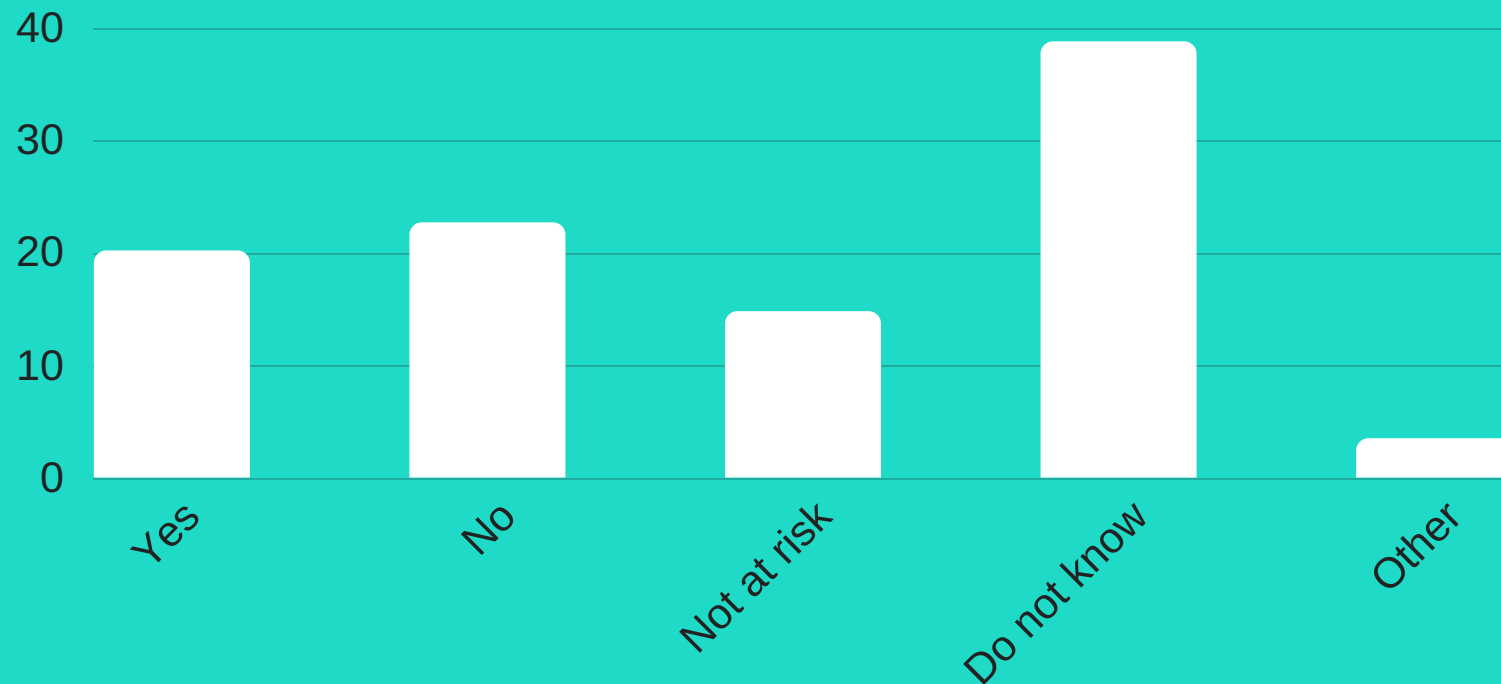
Kosovars' perceptions on how radicalisation occurs yielded that more respondents saw financial compensation as a driver of radicalisation than any other option (at 43.8%), followed by connections with friends (41.7%) and through the internet (41%). However, respondents largely downplayed the possibility that schools and universities were drivers of radicalisation (an issue that will be revisited below). Cross-tabulation revealed no significant gender differences, except that women were more likely than men to believe that religious institutions were contributing to radicalisation (39.1% to 31.9%, respectively). The likelihood that respondents would describe these as drivers in their community generally trended upward as education level increased. A notable spike, however, was observed among respondents with master's degrees, of whom 56.5% saw the internet as a pathway to radicalisation, compared to other groups, which clustered at around 40%. Employed and student respondents were consistently the most likely to attribute the above factors as pathways of radicalisation.

Drastic differences were observed at the regional level, with Prishtina/Priština respondents significantly more likely to offer warnings regarding schools and universities as potential pathways to radicalisation (at 27.7%). The Prizren/Prizreni region was the most likely to cite the internet (51.2%), and Mitrovicë/Mitrovica significantly downplayed the role of religious institutions (at only 19.7%).

At the municipal level, respondents in hotspots generally gave responses that reflected those of respondents in other municipalities with only the following exceptions: they were slightly more likely to indicate friends and meetings or lectures as pathways (45.5% to 40.5% and 40.6% to 31.7%, respectively) and slightly less likely to indicate schools and universities (9.8% to 15.5%), which would match with the statement of the radicalised youth from Gjilan/Gnjilane on the pathways to radicalisation through friends, meetings and lectures, as well as the lack of awareness of its spread through peers in educational institutions.



*Do you believe women are being radicalised in a different manner from men?*



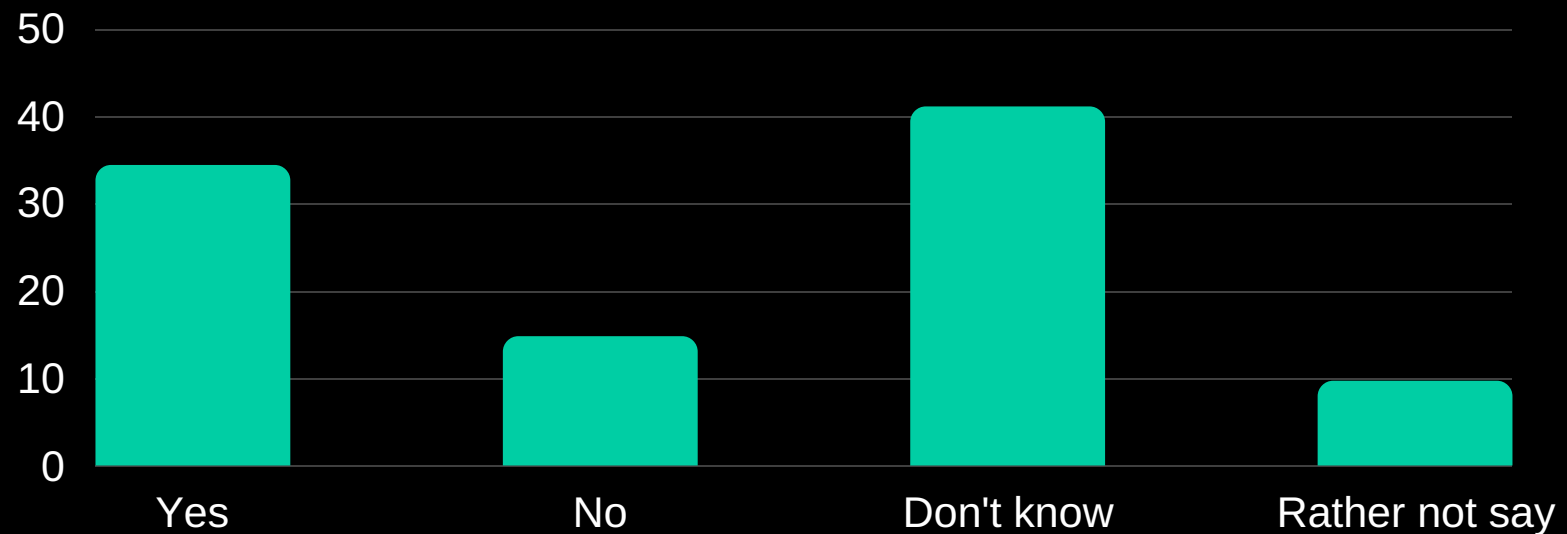
Gender is an important lens through which to analyse the issue of radicalisation. One aspect of this is to understand whether women are neglected in this analysis. Kosovars surveyed, however, expressed a general uncertainty about how women might be radicalised, with nearly 40% saying that they do not know whether women are being radicalised in unique ways. For some, unique pathways for the radicalisation of women may not be necessary, with 22.7% of respondents saying that women are radicalised like men, although 14.8% of Kosovars surveyed said that women are not at risk of being radicalised suggesting that perhaps their particular environment, cultural and societal norms do not attach the same importance to women regarding certain phenomenon generally associated with men.

Women were also less likely than men to report that women are not at risk of radicalisation (11.8% compared to 17.8%). Women were additionally more likely to claim that women are radicalised similarly to men (26% compared to 19.4% of men).

Cross-tabulation by region revealed that Gjakovë/Đakovica was significantly more likely to claim that women were being radicalised similarly to men (with “no” at 34.7%, compared to only 6.1% for “yes”). The region of Ferizaj/Uroševac was the most likely to claim women are not at risk (21.2%). It also revealed that those with only a primary school education were significantly less likely to think that women were radicalised differently than men (9.8%). These low numbers are significant in that they suggest that respondents may not have considered this issue, or that they do not have an adequate understanding of how women are being radicalised.

Among employment status, housewives were the least likely to believe that women are not at risk of radicalisation of any disaggregated group (at only 6%), followed by those employed (11.3%)—although housewives were also the most unsure. The self-employed were also the most likely (among employment statuses) to believe that women were radicalised in unique ways.

*Do you believe that there are specific sites where people are being radicalised in your community?*



Similarly to the radicalisation of women, respondents are unsure about specific places or sites where radicalisation is taking place in their communities. Yet a third reported that these existed. Women were more likely than men to believe that specific sites of radicalisation were present within their communities (with 37.8% saying yes, and only 9.9% saying no).

Respondents in hotspot municipalities were the most likely to report them in their communities, with 44.8% saying that there were, as compared to 31.2% in other municipalities. This was only rivalled by respondents in the region of Ferizaj/Uroševac (with 42.4% saying yes), and were also the most certain. Those older than 51 were the most likely to report them (42.9%), while the 36-50 age bracket was the least likely at only 26.1%. Specific sites of radicalisation were more likely to be reported the more educated the respondents were. Nearly half of those who believed that there were specific sites of radicalisation indicated mosques as hotspots (47.4%), followed by madrassas (34.4%) and churches (27.8%).

Nearly half of those who believed that there were specific hotspots indicated mosques as hotspots (47.4%), followed by madrassas (34.4%) and churches (27.8%). Responses broke into two main groups: religious institutions – which were the largest group – followed by educational institutions or activities.

Women who believed in the existence of hotspots were also more likely to cite the various options, especially madrassas, as hotspots (43.5%, compared to 26.6% of men who said yes). This was also true (albeit at less of an extent) for churches, after-school activities, and schools/universities. A similar trend was observed with non-Muslim respondents compared to Muslim respondents. These divides were largest with madrassas and mosques, with non-Muslims citing them as hotspots 57.1% and 66.7%, respectively, compared to 33.5% and 46.3% among Muslim respondents.

# *Reactions to the possibility of Kosovan fighters returning to communities*

REINTEGRATION



When asked to give their opinion regarding the possibility that Kosovar fighters in Syria and Iraq may return to Kosovo, 356 out of the 608 people surveyed (58% of the sample) chose to comment on this open-ended question. The themes are as follows: Grouped generally, 226 of the 356 (63%) commented that they would feel either at risk, threatened, in danger, scared, unsafe, fearful, worried, scared and disappointed, shocked, very bad, sad or vulnerable at the potential of returned fighters in their neighbourhood. Safety for themselves and particularly for their families and children is the primary concern. The emotions and reactions listed here apply across Kosovo. Comments include:

"I would not socialise with them."

"At risk, but until he or she is released by the state I am okay."

"I would kill that person."

"I would be rough with them, I don't want them in our neighbourhood."

"I am scared of them because they could cause problems in our neighbourhood."

Sixteen out of 356 (4.5%) of respondents said they would give returned fighters in their neighbourhood a second chance, as well as help them to re-socialise and re-integrate into society. Although this is a small number, it is still an encouraging one. All 16 respondents pointed to the need for resocialisation and rehabilitation to ensure returned fighters become part of the community and restart their lives. Respondents also showed interest in understanding the reasons they had radicalised and chosen to fight abroad in the first place, as well as showed willingness to impact them positively by using a direct dialogue approach. Additionally, a number of respondents in this group highlighted the important role that needs to be played by the institutions in the form of immediate rehabilitation programmes upon return. Thirty-seven out of 356 of respondents (10.3%) expressed neutrality towards any return of fighters to their communities.

# *Key Findings*

OVERVIEW



# *Why do individuals become Radicalised in Kosovo?*

**Beliefs that radicalisation is driven by economic incentives continue to persist in Kosovo**, with 43.8% of respondents believing so—more than any other choice. However, this is in contrast with police records of 112 returned known foreign fighters (mostly self-declared after arrest) where 64% are in average or above-average economic circumstance, and only 36% in poor circumstances as reported in Adrian Shtuni's latest work on the "Dynamics of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in Kosovo." These contrasting views between the public's perception and what is reported by returned FTFs further highlight the need for bespoke and holistic policies and programmes of information, awareness-raising and prevention tailored to different strata of Kosovar society.

**In an in-depth interview with a former radicalised individual, the view of economic incentives and one's financial situation was refuted as a reason for radicalisation in Kosovo.** The youth in question cited the dissemination of wrong and/or untruthful facts alongside the incorrect interpretation of religious texts (particularly the Hadith) by radicalised Imams to people who have not previously read them as key reasons.

**Only a third of respondents selected "express[ing] a desire to fight in foreign wars" as a sign of radicalisation**, therefore most respondents did not believe that radicalisation was solely related to the issue of foreign fighters.



# *How Do Individuals Become Radicalised in Kosovo?*

**42.9% list social isolation as an indicator of radicalisation and becoming radicalised**, with 44.4% listing aggression and a further 44.4% engaging with extremist content on social media.

**59.7% of Kosovars look to outward signs in changes of appearance as indicators of radicalisation.** This raises questions of whether community members may over-report incidences of radicalisation in their community, such as via a hotline or to the police.

**Women were consistently more likely to report that radicalisation is occurring in their communities.** This finding calls for further analysis on why this is the case, such as whether women have differing definitions of what classifies as radical or whether women face increased exposure to radicalised individuals.

**34.7% of respondents reported witnessing educational leaders liking and sharing extremist pages or media on social media.**

**Lack of stimulating extra-curricular activities coupled with the lack of employment and other opportunities for Kosovar youth** – a place with the youngest population in Europe – is a key issue intimately linked with driving radicalisation in particular, and one that needs to be seriously addressed in general.

**The overall results from the quantitative and qualitative research of this study on why Kosovars perceive their fellow nationals become radicalised are congruent with those of the literature review;** there is no one single profile and no one set of circumstances or reasons leading to radicalisation.

**There is a need for public education about pathways to radicalisation as these are diverse and continue to be poorly understood in Kosovo.** The variety of responses received on this subject illustrates the difficulty in confining the discussion on the pathways to radicalisation to only a number of options.

**28.9% and 30.2% of the sample above reported witnessing educational leaders questioning other's faith, becoming more argumentative or aggressive in their view-points respectively.**

**12% of respondents have been exposed to radical propaganda and material intolerant to religious peace or freedom in educational institutions.** This figure increases to 16.74% in the 18-25 age bracket, and is highest among those with university-level education.

**Respondents in hotspot municipalities were more likely to report this coming from staff (19% to 11.5%), student groups and clubs (28.6% to 23.1%) and educational materials (19% to 9.6%) than those from other municipalities.**

**Almost half of Kosovars surveyed believe that the media has a role to play in radicalisation. 48.9% cumulatively, compared to 23.7% who said no.**

**44.7% of respondents (from a pool of 219 who chose to address the question) identified online media as a key contributor to radicalisation** particularly through radical or extremist video content, including freely available lectures from radical Imams.

**92.6% (cumulatively) of Kosovars surveyed believe the internet plays a clear role in self-radicalisation.** Facebook, YouTube, and religious chat rooms or forums are seen as the most used platforms in self-radicalisation. Interestingly, Instagram and Twitter – two platforms used by ISIS recruiters – were not labelled as such.

**Numerous statements by survey respondents and focus group participants do warn that a person's new-found conservatism can also be mistaken for radicalism.**

# *Where are individuals being radicalised in Kosovo?*

**62.7% of Kosovars surveyed believe that radicalisation is occurring in their local communities.** Nearly one in four respondents claim to know someone personally who is or has been radicalised.

**24.7% of Kosovars surveyed (and 34.2% of those who answered yes to there being radicalisation in their communities) personally know someone who is a radicalised individual in their community.**

**Results support previous findings regarding the idea and locations of geographical hotspots in Kosovo.** However, the differences between the hotspot municipalities (Kaçanik/Kaçanik, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, Vushtrri/Vučitrn, Gjilan/Gnjilane, Hani i Elezit/Elez Han, Skënderaj/Srbica, and Ferizaj/Uroševac) and other municipalities were not to the extent to justify focusing solely on hotspot municipalities.

**47.4% of those who believe there were specific sites of radicalisation of radicalisation indicated these to be mosques, and 34.4% indicated madrassas.**

**Respondents from the Ferizaj/Uroševac region consistently report higher rates of radicalisation and hotspots.**

**57.1% of those who answered yes to believing there are specific sites of radicalisation in Ferizaj/Uroševac pointed to after-school activities.**

**31.9% of respondents who believe radicalisation is happening in educational institutions placed madrassas as a top concern for radicalisation followed by after-school activities.**

**Radicalisation is likely occurring in Kosovo's educational institutions.**

## *Reporting and Preventing*

**60.2% of respondents would seemingly opt to talk to an individual suspected of becoming radicalised personally.** 42.3% would talk to a friend or family member, 38% would talk to an influential member of the community, and 34% to the police.

**Respondents in hotspot municipalities were more likely than respondents in other municipalities to talk to the police (41.3% to 31.8%).**

**Muslims demonstrate greater willingness to engage with at-risk individuals, when compared to non-Muslims.** This is a key insight, demonstrating that Muslims express a greater confidence to get involved with the issue of radicalisation. However, Muslim respondents were far less likely to talk to law enforcement. Greater trust might be needed to ensure that Kosovar Muslims would be more willing to reach out to the Kosovo's security services.

**The vast majority of respondents see the family as the most important social structure to help in the prevention of radicalisation.**

**67.4% of respondents said they would be willing to use an anonymous hotline to report instances of radicalisation. Kosovars surveyed also seem to prefer to call religious leaders over public institution actors.**

# Recommendations

Commission additional research on identified Kosovo-specific gaps in the literature. This includes pathways to radicalisation – such as in educational institutions – the gendered dynamics of recruitment in Kosovo, and on Kosovar groups that do not claim adherence to Islam, but are rather motivated on nationalistic or ethnic lines.

Educate the public about the issue of radicalisation and ensure they know that a CVE strategy exists. This should include what the term means, how radicalisation is occurring in Kosovo, what the Kosovo is doing to counter it, and how women may or may not be radicalised in unique ways.

Leverage the importance of family in Kosovar society as a tool for prevention. Family consultations fashioned after Germany's HAYAT counselling programme could be one example to consider, study further, and adapt to Kosovo's context.

Establish an anonymous hotline where citizens can report suspected cases of radicalisation in their families or communities. However, before doing so, educate the public on how they can distinguish between what constitutes common dangerous traits of violent extremism and how it differs than nonviolent religious conservatism.

Develop effective alternative messaging and public campaigns to provide alternatives to those disseminated by violent extremist groups. In addition, actively seek to remove radical propaganda in the Albanian language and diminish its reach.

Empower local actors to develop ways to prevent and counter the radicalisation of community members. A growing consensus argues that locally led efforts are the most effective, being more sensitive to the context and perceptive to the problem.

Avoid focusing exclusively on hotspots of radicalisation. Although resources may be limited, these findings caution against focusing overwhelmingly on those locations identified as hotspots. While higher reporting was noted in specific areas, the problem of radicalisation was observed across all areas—often closely behind particular hotspots. Like the survey’s geographic reach, CVE initiatives should seek to cover all Kosovo.

Find ways to leverage the perspectives and abilities of Kosovar women to understand and prevent radicalisation. Although often overlooked, women may provide key roles in this important issue, including the crucial issue of prevention. Include more gender-sensitivity in CVE programming to be aware of the ways men and women are radicalised through gendered mechanisms and narratives and work to provide healthy alternatives.

Delve deeper into what role school break times and after-school activities may play in driving radicalisation. These activities were highlighted by a significant number of respondents, particularly those in the region of Ferizaj/Uroševac, where a majority cited them as hotspots. This was also a significant finding on the municipal level, with hotspot municipalities also identifying them as an issue.

Emphasise critical thinking and the critical consumption of information in the educational system. These skills are crucial to build resilience to misleading information, such as propaganda disseminated by violent extremist groups. This requires student to be taught how to interpret information logically in order to arrive at an informed conclusion. Such skills are already an integral part of literature, writing, mathematics, and debate curricula.

Develop empowering extra-curricular activities as well as other opportunities for Kosovar youth in general and youth in high-risk areas in particular.

A lack of active, engaging programming for youth is likely contributing to their radicalisation. Programmes and Kosovo strategies that address the pronounced lack of cultural, sporting and scientific activities to keep youth interested and overall opportunities to keep them occupied have been identified as crucial and urgently needed as part of prevention.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MASHT) and other key actors should play an increased role in the execution of the national strategy on countering violent extremism. International actors should take responsibility in aiding its implementation.

Allocate MASHT and other ministries on the frontline of executing the national CVE strategy a budget for delivering their action plans regarding radicalisation and prevention and facilitate “know-how training.” At present, MASHT has responsibility for delivering 48% of the action, but no budget and technical know-how to implement it.

Design de-radicalisation and reintegration programmes that secure the buy-in and enlist the support of Kosovo’s communities. If communities are sceptical and distrustful of returned fighters or others targeted for deradicalisation programming, such individuals may be marginalised by the community or even violently targeted by others.

Enlist public support in identifying and responding to threats of radicalisation requires obtaining the buy-in of community members and institutions. Whilst openness to the re-integration of returned fighters and their families alongside the willingness to re-socialise them in their communities is positive, a lax approach towards others’ beliefs (as demonstrated by some survey respondents) may prove to be an issue for enlisting community assistance in these efforts.

# *Ongoing and Planned Activities*

1. Community engagement approach in Gjilan;
2. Roll out referral mechanism in additional municipalities;
3. Support to Ministry of Education:
  - a. Advisor together with USAID;
  - b. Teacher handbook together with European Foundation for Democracy;
  - c. Anti bullying training for teachers;
4. Training of front line workers: Teachers, Social workers and Health workers
5. Training and support to community policing approach
6. Family education ( early signs) and consultation ( Reintegration phase);
7. Monitoring and evaluation at community level;
8. Support to legal framework development of protection of critical infrastructure;
9. Support to development of a communication including crisis communication plan.



# Annex

This research is built on the following definitions set forth by the Kosovo institutions:

**Extreme, Extremism:** might be defined only in relation to a broader ideology that acts, e.g. in the context of extreme nationalism, extreme environmentalism, and religious extremism. The defining feature of extremism is the rejection of one or more basic principles of its main ideology. A nationalist which considers members of other nations to be inferior, or rejects the possibility of coexistence, or believes that others should be deprived of their rights, represents an extreme nationalist. A religious believer who condemns the leaders or the majority of the members of his own religion is an extremist. Extremists are not necessarily violent.

**Violent extremism:** Extremism which involves the use of violence; including but not limited to terrorism. For example, violent extremists who attack police or army members, or who participate in war, usually are not terrorists. Terrorism: use of violence with the purpose of causing terror over the civilian population. Terrorism is a special type of violent extremism.

In addition, **radicalisation** is defined as: a process by which an individual or group comes to adopt increasingly extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo or undermine contemporary ideas and expressions of freedom of choice.

The definition of **self-radicalisation**, therefore, is when someone adopts increasingly extreme political, social, or religious ideals and aspirations that reject or undermine the status quo or undermine contemporary ideas and expressions of freedom of choice without necessarily joining an established radical group but by being influenced by its ideology and messages.

Finally, the field of practice called **countering violent extremism (CVE)** is defined as non-coercive efforts to prevent or respond to the problem of violent extremism, such as preventing or intervening in the radicalisation process. CVE also includes efforts to **deradicalise** or rehabilitate those who have already decided to support or engage in violent extremism.

This differs from counterterrorism, which focuses on only one symptom of violent extremism, that of terrorism, and traditionally includes a more securitised or coercive approach, such as police and military operations, intelligence gathering, arrests, and criminal prosecution. While CVE may be performed by a variety of actors, including civil society organisations, educational institutions, and religious leaders, some CVE efforts may need to work closely with security services, such as when individuals are referred to the police out of concerns for public safety or when such individuals are in prison or other correctional processes (such as parole or probation). These definitions helped to shape and guide the research, maintain consistency with previous research, and minimize variation.

