

Strengthening Civil Society to Build Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism





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1.1. Context of the situation of violent extremism in Albania

In addition to the other challenges to its already fragile democracy Albania has also been confronted in recent years by the issue of violent extremism. This issue poses a potential threat to the religious harmony and coexistence in Albania which is one of the most important pillars of the country's contemporary national identity. It has raised moderate concerns because of reports about the participation by a number of Albanian citizens and ethnic Albanian nationals from other countries, particularly from Kosovo and Macedonia, in the Syrian civil war.¹

The issue of violent extremism became widely known by the general public in Albania after 2012 following media reports about Albanians taking part in the conflict in Syria. The number of citizens leaving the country to fight in Syria reached a high point in 2014 and there has been a drastic decrease since 2015.² Media coverage during the last couple of years of the arrests and trials of a number of individuals on charges related to violent extremism in Albania, as well as in the Western Balkans region, particularly in Kosovo and Macedonia, shows that this issue has already taken on a regional dimension. According to recent estimates 144 Albanian citizens, including 38 children and 27 women, have travelled to the war zones in Syria to join terrorist organisations.³ It has becomes very important for state and non-state actors in Albania to both understand and address not only violent extremism in general but youth radicalisation specifically. The geographical origins of the individuals who have travelled to Syria and Iraq includes the districts and regions of Bulqizë, Cërrik, Dibra, Elbasan, Kamza, Librazhd, Pogradec and Tirana.⁴ Some individuals who have travelled to the Middle East were born in these aforementioned areas but had recently moved with their families to the outskirts of some of the larger urban areas in Albania, where they had been mainly radicalised in improvised mosques there, which are not controlled by the official religious institutions.

According to recent research Albanian citizens travelling to Syria were driven by a number of factors including: a sense of marginalisation and isolation from the other parts of Albanian society; a lack of faith in the rule of law; the increased interest of political parties to use religious communities; by the institutional inefficiency of state actors; by the inefficiency and weaknesses of the Albanian Muslim Community; as well as by deeper socio-economic root causes.⁵ It has also been argued in media reports and official sources that the vast majority of individuals travelling to the Syria come from remote rural and extremely poor areas of the country.⁶

From a development perspective there are also a number of other key contributing factors to the rise of violent extremism. According to the Human Development Index (HDI) Albania is ranked at the 39th position in Europe.⁷ The official national unemployment rate in Albania between 2010 and 2015 period was between 18-21% of the total working force.⁸ The unemployment rate is

See the address of Mr Niko Peleshi, the then Deputy Prime Minister of Albania, at the Conference on the Fight against Violent Extremism (14 September 2016). www.kryeministria.al/al/newsroom/lajme/angazhim-maksimal-ne-luften-kunder-ekstremizmit-te-dhunshem1473933873 (last accessed 5 July 2017)

² Hide, Enri. 2016. "Emerging Security Issues: Countering Violent Extremism in Albania." Strategic Study, Albanian Centre of Excellence, Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, p. 24-26.

³ Azinovic, Vlado & Edina Becirevic, "A Waiting Game. Assessing and Responding to the Threat from Returning Foreign Fighters in the Western Balkans", Regional Cooperation Council, Sarajevo: November 2017, pg. 21-22.

⁴ In any case this is not an exhaustive list of areas at risk.

⁵ Vurmo, Gjergji, et al. *Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania*. IDM, Tirana: 2015.

⁶ See for example the report of Deutche Velle about a number of foreign fighters from Pogradec: www.shqiptarja.com/m/aktualitet/pogradec-babai-i-xhihadistit-nuk-vriste-dot-as-edhe-nj--milingon--379297.html (last accessed 11 July 2017).

⁷ UNDP, Human Development Index, www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/ALB.pdf (last accessed 20 November 2017)

⁸ According to official data from INSTAT: www.instat.gov.al/al/themes/tregu-i-punës.aspx?tab=tabs-5 (30 June 2015). See also INSTAT published data for 2012, compared to previous periods, for each district. www.instat.gov.al/media/206688/shqiperi-trendi_i_varferise_2012_.pdf (last accessed 30 June 2015).

particularly high for the 17-35 age group, where it has reached between 40-45% in some districts. Regarding education the 2011 Census showed that nationally the percentage of the population who completed secondary education was 31.4% and the percentage with a university and post-university education was 11.2% while the illiteracy rate in Albania was 2.8%. Lack of access to education and illiteracy in these isolated areas plays a key role in the religious and ideological manipulation process.

From an institutional and strategic viewpoint Albania adopted the National Strategy for the Fight against Violent Extremism and Action Plan¹¹ in 2016 which focuses especially on education, engagement with religious leaders, socio-economic aspects of radicalisation and communicative tools of de-radicalisation and disengagement.¹²

This study focuses on the municipalities of Tirana, Kamza, Elbasan and Pogradec. It aims to analyse the context at macro (societal) and micro (individual/group) levels in each target area and provide detailed information on what the specific needs, problems and situation are especially with regard to young people. The following sections of this study will present an analysis of the existing legal and strategic framework, a mapping of the actors involved in the prevention of violent extremism, followed by a data evaluation for young people in the Municipalities of Tirana, Kamza, Elbasan and Pogradec.

1.2. Community and youth involvement as preconditions for successful prevention

According to the 2011 Census 31.51% of the total population is aged between 15-34 years old. The Municipalities of Tirana and Kamza both have a high percentage of you which can be attributed to a number of reasons. Their youth population is mainly linked to demographic concentration in these areas due to the large scale population migration to the large urban and suburban areas of the capital. The high percentage of youth in these two cities is also linked to the establishment of large universities in both cities which offer better education opportunities.

According to the latest available data from the second quarter of 2017, the national unemployment rate in Albania was 13.9%. There was substantial fluctuations in the unemployment rate in the four targeted municipalities, from 49.3% in Kamza to 24.3% in Tirana. Nationally the youth unemployment rate was 26.4% and there was extremely high levels of youth unemployment found in Pogradec with 64.8% and 68.3% in Kamza. So in these municipalities despite young people constituting a significant segment of the population they suffer from disproportionately high levels of unemployment. This indicates a lack of opportunities for young people to enter the labour market as well as limited opportunities for social inclusion and involvement.

⁹ According to INSTAT, Ibid. www.instat.gov.al/media/206688/shqiperi-trendi_i_varferise_2012_.pdf (last accessed 30 June 2015).

¹⁰ According to official data from INSTAT: www.instatgis.gov.al/#!/l/prefectures/population/prefpop1 (last accessed 20 November 2017)

¹¹ Council of Ministers Decision No. 930 dated 18 November 2015

¹² The national strategy will be further elaborated in the section 2 of this study.

¹³ See the data for 2011 Census, Table 1.1.1, available at: www.instat.gov.al/al/temat/censuset/censusi-i-popullsis%C3%AB-dhe-banesave/#tab2 (last accessed 27 November 2017).

¹⁴ This also holds true to a smaller scale for the two other targeted municipalities of Pogradec and Elbasan.

¹⁵ See the latest data available from the "Quarterly Questionnaire on Labour Forces" INSTAT, pp. 3-4. http://www.instat.gov.al/media/2539/anketa-tremujore-e-forcave-t%C3%AB-pun%C3%ABs-t2-2017.pdf (last accessed 27 November 2017)

¹⁶ This data will be analysed in details below, in the respective subsections of section 4.

In terms of community involvement, one of the most important mechanisms to build bridges for youth inclusion is the "Schools as Community Centres" model. This model, which was launched by the Ministry of Education and Sports in 2013, aims to challenge the existing status quo and give schools a new role at the centre of each community with a year-long agenda of activities ensuring the participation of a large number of local actors.¹⁷

Since its introduction the "Schools as Community Centres" model has seen ups and downs. There have been more failures, especially in the deeply rural areas of the country, than successes. During the past four years the model has achieved moderate success in the cities with schools with well-established traditions. In many cases the model lacks the necessary human and technical capacities, especially in the deep rural areas of the country, to be implemented on a daily basis. Designing and implementing youth action plans at local level, in accordance with the National Youth Action Plan (2015-2020), is another important tool of youth involvement in the socio-cultural life of the targeted municipalities as well as establishment of local structures to ensure its coordination and implementation.\(^{18}\) While the Municipality of Tirana has seen some progress with a series of recently established structures and institutional arrangements for youth-related activities, this has not been the case for the other targeted areas of this study.

A particular emphasis on teaching human rights to youth in the targeted municipalities is important in shaping identity-building processes for youth and to counteract negative influences such as extremist ideologies. The study will show in section 4, with the detailed findings about these specific areas, that more focus should be put on building key skills and competencies among youth in such areas as critical thinking, dialogue and peaceful conflict resolution. Education is central in developing and promoting shared narratives of tolerance and mutual understanding which are instrumental in tackling discrimination and hate speech.

1.3. Methodology

This Baseline Situation Analysis study is a qualitative study which combines analysis of the legal and institutional framework with field research including both key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The study aims to provide some answers for the challenges facing youth in the targeted Municipalities of Tirana, Kamza, Elbasan and Pogradec.

The analysis of the legal and institutional framework included analysis of the legislation concerning key stakeholders, agencies and institutions, and their main functions and responsibilities in preventing and countering violent extremism in the country. The study applied a wide variety of data collection techniques including qualitative and quantitative methods as well as a review of previous experience and research reports published in Albania. The main data collection methods are listed below.

1.3.1. Desk based research and literature review

This study considers the existing legal and policy framework in the field of violent extremism in Albania. It then includes a desk review of data, evidence, reports, policy documents and strategies. The purpose of this desk review is to identify the local institutional setting and youth oriented civil

¹⁷ See, for example http://www.arsimi.gov.al/al/newsroom/lajme/shkollat-si-qendra-komunitare&page=23 (last accessed 7 July 2017) 18 It will be elaborated further in the coming sections.

society actors in the municipalities of Tirana, Kamza, Elbasan and Pogradec. The review also aims to understand the approaches developed by civil society organisations (CSOs) and community based organisations (CBOs) to prevent and counter violent extremism. Understanding these approaches is crucial to evaluate community cohesion, youth inclusion and social engagement strategies.

In relation to the abovementioned desk review of data, the study also provides a set of indicators to identify radicalisation, with special focus on its early stages, thus targeting the prevention phase of this phenomenon.

1.3.2. Qualitative research with stakeholders and communities

Sixty face-to-face interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in Tirana, Kamza, Elbasan and Pogradec during the study. The interviews were conducted using questionnaires with openended questions. Interviews were held with a broad spectrum of community actors, such as: religious leaders (at local and central level, with special focus on Muslim community leaders); village representatives, municipality officers (including mayors, social workers and municipality officials), local CSOs and representatives from central institutions directly and indirectly related to violent extremism.

For a more accurate elaboration of the data obtained, the range of interviewees is sorted into three groups, corresponding to the targeted questionnaires:

- i) local and central authorities
- ii) non-state/community actors
- iii) young people and local young activists

Sampling selection and the identification of potential interviewees applied an iterative snowball sampling process: interviewees often referred the interviewer to other people whom they thought it would be useful to talk to. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, some interviewees requested their identities be kept anonymous; they are identified in this report by their initials.

In terms of sampling strategy for interviews, good coverage is provided across the following groups of stakeholders:

- i) CSOs and CBOs working with youth and communities
- ii) social workers from the target municipalities
- iii) relevant national institutions including the then Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, the Ministry of Education and Sport, Regional Education Directorates, National Employment Service
- iv) law enforcement institutions
- v) education institutions
- vi) mosques and Islamic centres
- vii) local leaders and local Muslim community leaders
- viii) children, young people and community engagement services
- ix) young students, unemployed youth and those affected by social exclusion, their families and communities

Broadly speaking interviewees were asked to reflect on the following topics:

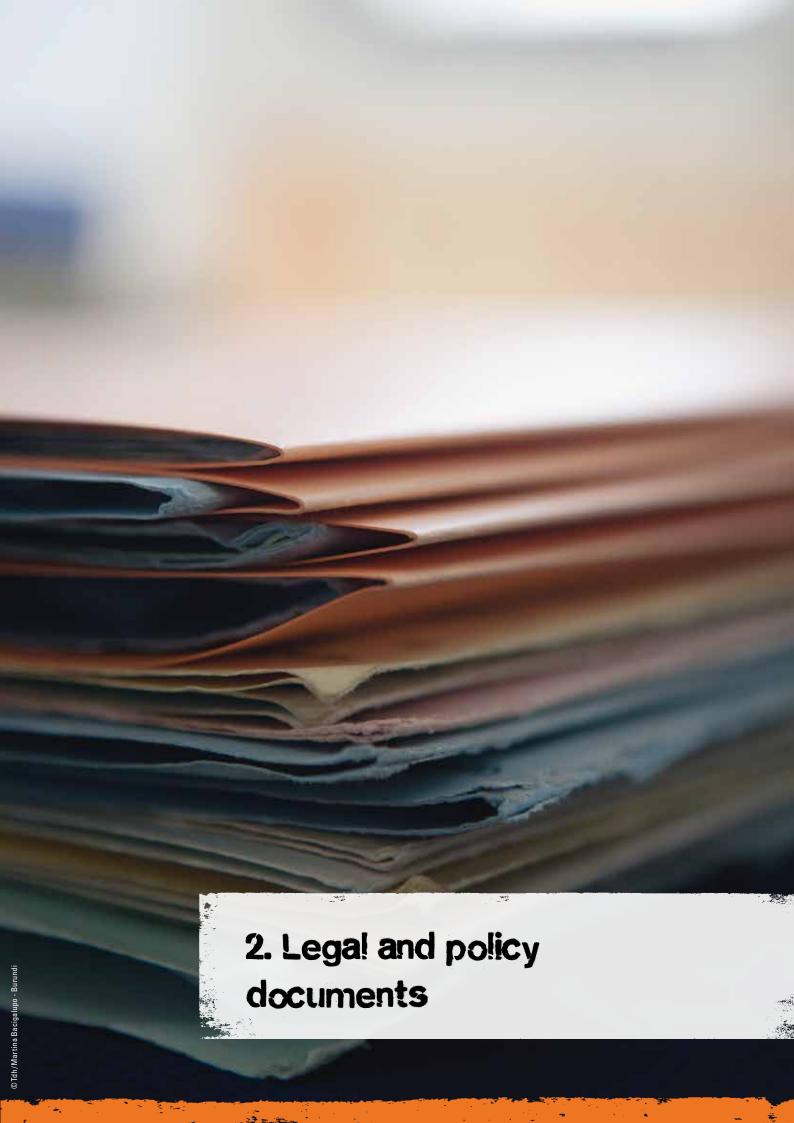
- i) the causes and drivers of violent extremism
- ii) existing resources and potential drivers for change
- iii) existing access of youth to different services and activities that could impact their resilience towards radicalism and extremism
- iv) existing level of empowerment, capacities and resources of CSOs and CBOs
- v) existing capacities and resources of municipalities

Focus groups were another component of the grassroots data collection of the study. Five focus groups were held in all the target cities with grassroots actors, institutions and other stakeholders and there was a special emphasis on youth participation. Focus group participants, though different from those interviewed, were from the same range of actors and stakeholders who took part in the in-depth interviews. During the focus group sessions due attention was paid to ensure that a range of perspectives was gained and that group dynamics enabled all participants to speak openly and comfortably about preventing and countering religious radicalism and violent extremism.

1.3.3. Methodological limitations

It is important to acknowledge that the study also has some methodological limitations. One limitation is linked to the difficulties in obtaining current raw data from the targeted areas. The latest available Census data was from 2011, while some data, especially those related to overall and youth unemployment rates require more current information. This was overcome by accessing the most recent information available from the Albanian Institute of Statistics (INSTAT).

Another limitation is linked to obtaining data about violent extremism from state actors. This was due to the secretive dimension of the issue and to the classified nature of some information about the number of individuals involved in these processes. This limitation was overcome using information from recent research on the issue from various non-state actors, both institutes and think-tanks, as well as from the field interviews conducted for this purpose.



Albanian institutions have recently developed some instruments and mechanisms, both in a domestic or an international context, to confront violent extremism. Albania has a dense domestic legal, institutional and strategic framework to deal with terrorist activities, their financial resources and finally the phenomenon of violent extremism.

2.1. Existing legal framework

Legal provisions relating to the war against terrorism and violent extremism are part of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania. Article 28/2 states that "terrorist organisations are a distinct form of criminal organisation, composed of one or more individuals that cooperate with each other for the purpose of carrying out terrorist acts." Chapter VII of the Criminal Code includes 17 more articles which specify in detail all forms of terrorist violence, such as: the establishment of a terrorist organisation; financial support to terrorist organisations; gathering money in support of terrorist activities; recruitment of one or more individuals with the purpose of carrying out terrorist acts.¹⁹

Recent changes to the Criminal Code include the amendment to Article 230 to include crimes of a terrorist nature, with the purpose of disseminating panic among the population, or targeting and destroying fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of the State. Such crimes include:

- i) kidnapping of persons;
- ii) serious harm to public property and critical infrastructure, transport system, information systems, hijacking of airplanes or other transport means;
- iii) the production, purchasing of explosives or biological, chemicals and nuclear weapons, or the search to possess weapons of mass destruction; etc.²⁰

Article 230/a deals with financial support for terrorism and is an offence punishable with a minimum term of 15 years in prison. Article 230/b deals with the hidden financial support for terrorist acts. Other amendments to the Criminal Code, in particular to Article 231, were adopted in 2007 to reflect Albania's obligations after it ratified the Council of Europe's Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism. These amendments made "the recruitment of individuals that intent to carry out terrorist acts or to finance terrorist acts, including when these acts are directed against another state, institution or international organisation" a criminal offence. ²¹ In addition Articles 6, 7, 232/a, 232/b, 233 and 234 deal extensively with different juridical dimensions of terrorism.

Penal legislation does not foresee any special investigative procedure for cases related to terrorist activities, although there are some special provisions regarding property confiscation.²² These provisions are mainly a result of Albania's international obligations to fulfil the recommendations of UN Security Council Resolutions 1267 and 1373.

¹⁹ See Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania. www.pp.gov.al/web/kodi_penal_2013_shtatordoc_823.pdf (last accessed 12 July 2017).

²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹ Ihid

²² Law No. 10192, 14 November 2009, on "Prevention of Organised Crime and Trafficking through Preventive Measures against Crime Properties".

In October 2013 the Albanian Parliament approved the Law on "Measures against financial support for terrorist activities". Recently, the Albanian Government asked Parliament and obtained its consent to amend Articles 265/a, 265/b and 265/c of the Criminal Code. These articles foresee the punishment of individuals participating in combative activities in a foreign state (Article 265/a); the organisation of participation in combative activities in a foreign state (Article 265/b); and the calls for participation in combatant and violent actions in a foreign state (Article 265/c). These provisions of the Criminal Code complete a wide and deep juridical framework on terrorist activities, violent extremism and financial support for terrorist activities in Albania.

2.2. Existing policy and strategic framework

The strategic framework for the fight against terrorism intensified after 2001. The National Security Strategy (2004) stated for the first time that terrorism was a threat to Albanian national security. The strategy was fundamentally revised in 2014 when terrorism was contextualised as an internal threat and not exclusively an international one.²⁴ The National Security Strategy (2014) integrates for the first time in a strategic document the ideological, religious and nationalistic extremism that fuels terrorist activities. According to the strategy (2014), "[e]xtreme ideologies are based on the lack of knowledge, poverty, lack of state institutions and multiple connections on national and international level. These root causes create favourable premises for the recruitment of vulnerable individuals to participate in international conflicts. Because of its expansionist tendency, extremism might threaten the cohesion and values of Albanian society."²⁵

The strategic framework is completed with two other strategic documents:

- i) National Strategy against Terrorism (2011-2015) and its related Action Plan (2011-2015);²⁶ and,
- ii) Inter-Sectorial Strategy against Organised Crime, Illegal Trafficking and Terrorism (2013-2020) and its related Action Plan (2013-2016).²⁷

In November 2015 Albania adopted a National Strategy for Fighting against Violent Extremism and an Action Plan.²⁸ This strategy and action plan focuses especially on education, engagement with religious leaders, socio-economic aspects of radicalisation and communicative tools of de-radicalisation and disengagement. The strategy outlines the country's priorities, measures, and proposed actions. It aims for a whole-society approach to violent extremism, including all possible stakeholders and capacities, from schools and teachers, to social workers and religious communities, with a special focus on youth. The strategy is focused on four main areas:

1. Education

To better explain the issue and dangers and "vaccinate" students against extremism; to develop modules for teachers and students; to consider introduction of a culture or history of religions approach; the Ministry of Education is the lead.

²³ Abolishing previous Law No. 9258, 2004.

²⁴ Albanian National Security Strategy (2014): "international terrorism dominates the spectrum of asymmetrical threats and constitutes a direct threat to regional security as well as to the national security of the Republic of Albania. Albania is exposed to the risk of a potential terrorist attack as a NATO country and due to its contribution in operations protecting global peace and security." www.parlament.al/web/pub/teksti_17880_1.pdf (last accessed 13 September 2016).

²⁵ Ibid. p. 23.

²⁶ Adopted by the Council of Ministers Decision No. 675 (6 July 2011).

²⁷ Adopted by the Council of Ministers Decision No. 663 (17 July 2013).

²⁸ Adopted by the Council of Ministers Decision No. 930 (18 November 2015).

2. Engagement with religious leaders

To ensure religious leaders participate in awareness activities, religious education initiatives and implementation of de-radicalisation mechanisms, and can play a constructive role; to improve the education system for imams to ensure support and continuation of Albanian values.

3. Social aspects

To engage teachers who are in a position to reach out to their students; as Albania is a centrally organised state, and the central government is represented in all communities through the medical system, schools, social welfare etc., to use the social welfare system to reach out to additional thousands of people, including the unemployed, the marginalised, youth, and to offer a new perspective through jobs, training, etc.

4. Academia and media

To engage academics to provide facts via studies and research to ensure a better systematic understanding of the phenomenon; to motivate universities, professors, journalists and researchers to work on such topics.



In addition to its legal and policy framework, Albania has statutory institutions responsible for preventing and countering violent extremism. In order to effectively implement the National Strategy for the Fight against Violent Extremism, the Albanian Government has developed relevant procedures and inter-institutional structures.

New mechanisms to improve coordination and cooperation between state authorities have been established at local level. Institutions at local and central levels should work together in the process of tackling violent extremism. The following list of stakeholders reflects the holistic involvement of the various actors.

3.1. Central Institutional Actors

The Parliament of Albania is the only institution in the country that can approve laws in the areas of security and defence. It has the constitutional authority to declare war or a state of emergency; to authorise a partial or general mobilisation; to ratify agreements; and to approve, manage and scrutinise the defence budget. In addition the Parliament has the power of oversight. It approves the National Security Strategy, the Defence Policy and the Military Strategy, the Defence laws and budget. It also exerts parliamentary control over activities related to the armed forces. Its oversight authority is exercised through the Parliamentary Committee on National Security. The competences of the Committee are outlined in the Parliament's internal regulations.

The President of the Republic of Albania, under the Constitution, is the Commander in Chief of the military and exercises the leadership of the Armed Forces through the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence in peacetime. The President is the Head of the National Security Council (NSC). The NSC is an advisory body to the President and exercises its role under the Constitution, laws and other obligations derived from international agreements which have been ratified by Parliament. The NSC advises the President on issues concerning the security and defence of the country.

The Government of Albania is the most important institution in country ensuring the implementation of state policies and legislation. In order to ensure a holistic approach to countering violent extremism (CVE), a broader spectrum of different ministries and agencies of the Albanian Government, including municipalities, are involved. As the national CVE strategy outlines, not all its ministries have an equal role in implementing the legislation and other strategic policies in this area.

The following governmental bodies and agencies are responsible for countering violent extremism:

- i) The National Coordinator on Countering Violent Extremism, based in the Office of the Prime Minister, is one of the most important CVE structures at national level. The National Coordinator's role is to oversee the implementation of Albania's CVE strategy and coordinate all institutional and non-governmental actors and activities in this regard.²⁹
- The Ministry of Education has a crucial role in CVE as the quality of education is considered an important component in preventing violent extremism. In line with the national CVE strategy the ministry is responsible for and leads activities related to education, in which teachers will have a primary role in implementing objectives by targeting students, parents and communities. The strategy lacks information though on budget lines or other financial

²⁹ The Office of the Prime Minister, (14 September 2016). Angazhim maksimal në luftën kundër ekstremizmit të dhunshëm. www.kryeministria. al/al/newsroom/lajme/angazhim-maksimal-ne-luften-kunder-ekstremizmit-te-dhunshem1473933873 (last accessed 16 October2016)

- means which will be provided to ensure these activities are implemented.30
- iii) The Anti-Terror Directorate was established in the General Directorate of State Police in 2014.³¹ The mission of the Directorate is to detect, prevent and react against potential terrorist acts and any other activities related to violent extremism. This includes collecting, assessing, analysing and using information on extremist trends. The Directorate coordinates all law-enforcement activities regarding CVE with other institutions, such as the National Informative Service, the Defence Intelligence Agency and the Financial Intelligence Unit. All these structures have an important role to play in preventing the financing of terrorism and terrorist acts.³²
- iv) The Ministry of Defence, according to the strategy, shall be committed to play a facilitating role during the implementation of the strategy.
- v) The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth³³ is the lead institution in terms of alignment and engagement in community, as well as targeting vulnerable groups. Unemployment and a lack of institutional care are considered key drivers moving young people closer to extremist ideologies. Despite the fact that a considerable number of programmes to help unemployed citizens enter the labour market have been implemented recently, unemployment remains one of the main concerns issues in the targeted areas.
- vi) The General Directorate of Borders and Migration, in accordance with Law No. 108/2014 on State Police,³⁴ monitors all the borders and the border crossing points in Albania. The Directorate has human and logistic resources which enable the monitoring and control of the green and blue border.
- vii) The Intelligence Service performs a key role in the fight against religious extremism leading to violence. The Intelligence Service, although it does not have executive powers, through its network of regional contact points closely cooperates and exchanges sensitive information on extremism and terrorism-related activities with Albania's law enforcement agencies and the General Prosecutor's Office.
- viii) The Albanian Armed Forces (AAF) does not have direct responsibility and accountability for preventing and combating terrorism, the Military Intelligence Service (MIS) performs important support tasks in the prevention of terrorist acts. The MIS, in particular, collects, analyses and submits information on activities related to terrorism. Furthermore the AAF may assist the State Police in guarding sensitive national institutions within Albania.

3.2. Local institutional actors and CSOs

Municipalities are key actors for youth activities and social inclusion of marginalised communities. Based on the national CVE strategy their activities in relation to countering violent extremism must be focused on improving the local education system, increasing social welfare for marginalised groups, facilitating sport activities at the local level for youth, and cooperating with the Albanian Muslim Community (AMC) and central government regarding youth. Following the new Territorial Reform (Law No. 115/2014) Albania has 61 municipalities and 12 districts.³⁵

³⁰ The 2014-2020 Strategy for the Development of Pre-University Education in Albania (adopted in 2016) does not mention any direct link between religious radicalism and education, nor does it pays any special attention to deep rural areas where there is a pressing need for better education and more attention. www.arsimi.gov.al/files/userfiles/apu/2016/STRATEGJIA-2014-2020.pdf (last accessed 10 July 2017)

³¹ Internal Affairs Ministry Order No. 548/7 (17 October 2014).

³² The staff recruitment was made in compliance with the new structure. By Order of the Minister of Interior no. 672 dated 31 December 2015 it has been adopted the new staff limit for the Directorate. During 20015 in the new structure were added two more persons.

³³ The Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth was disbanded in September 2017 in a government reorganisation following the 2017 national elections.

³⁴ The Law on State Police was adopted by the Parliament of Albania on 31 July 2014.

³⁵ For a detailed description of the new territorial divisions of Albania after 2015, see: www.reformaterritoriale.al/images/presentations/ Ligji_115_2014.pdf (last accessed 10 July 2017)

Local Public Security Councils, the first structure of this kind in Albania, were established at local level through the initiative and assistance of the OSCE Presence in Albania. The main purpose of these councils is to put in place all the local institutional and non-state actors to tackle issues related to criminality, domestic violence and violent extremism, as well as to identify the challenges faced by the local community in terms of personal security. To date only the municipalities of Elbasan, Cërrik and Librazhd have established this structure.

CSOs are also one of the most important stakeholders in the areas of awareness raising, deradicalisation and prevention of violent extremism. CSOs can develop and implement important and effective grassroots activities for youth engagement and can act as "vehicles of change", raising awareness on a wide range of issues.

The Albanian Muslim Community (AMC) is an important non-state actor. The AMC is legally recognised as the independent religious organisation for Muslims in Albania. In 2009 the AMC signed an Agreement with the Albanian State which regulates many dimensions of their relations.³⁶ The State Committee on Cults represents the state in its relations with the AMC.³⁷ It is essential that the AMC is involved in all activities which aim to prevent extremism and de-radicalise individuals.³⁸ Under Article 3/f of the 2009 Agreement the AMC has an obligation to inform the Albanian authorities in cases of religious deformations, extremist religious behaviour or any other such behaviours among its communities of believers and their environment.

3.3. International Actors and Donors

At international level the United Nations, in response to the challenges emanating from violent extremism, has asked member states for changes in their legal systems to punish these individuals. Security Council's Resolution no. 2178 specifies the obligation on the exchange of information on individuals suspected of participating in terrorist activities.³⁹ The Balkans Regional CVE Initiative was announced on the margins of the 70th Session of the UN General Assembly in September 2015.⁴⁰ It is anticipated that the Government of Albania will establish a Centre for the Fight against Violent Extremism, to coordinate all efforts at national level in the near future.⁴¹

Regarding foreign mechanisms and instruments, Albania as a NATO member country, has been involved for more than a decade in international coalitions against terrorism.⁴² Albania has been very active in international diplomatic forums and organisations, and has been part of anti-terrorism conventions, treaties and initiatives, under the framework of various institutions, such as the UN,⁴³ OSCE, Council of Europe,⁴⁴ or as part of its obligations during the EU integration process.

³⁶ Through this agreement the Albanian State acknowledges the right of AMC to self-regulate and be an autonomous body, while the State will be represented in these relations by the State Committee on Cults. Law No. 10056, dated 22 January 2009 and Presidential Decree No. 6032, dated 29 January 2009.

³⁷ Law No. 10056 (22 January 2009). For the Agreement between the Council of Ministers and AMC, see: www.kshk.gov.al/wp-content/up-loads/2014/03/03_Ligji_10056_Marreveshja_me_KMSH.pdf (last accessed 10 July 2017)

³⁸ For a complete list of AMC activities on countering and preventing religious radicalism and violent extremism, see Section 4 below.

³⁹ United Nations Security Council (2014, September 24), Resolution 2178 (2014). www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2178%20(2014) (12 July 2016).

⁴⁰ See, for example: www.obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/29/fact-sheet-leaders-summit-counter-isil-and-violent-extremism (last accessed 2 July 2017)

⁴¹ The Office of the National Coordinator on CVE has argued that this centre will aim to coordinate all preventive and disengagement actions, as well as improve the participation of all state and non-state actors in the process of fighting violent extremism, in line with the national strategy 2015. Office of the National Coordinator on CVE at the Office of the Prime Minister, Tirana, July 2017.

⁴² US Department of State (2013), Country Reports on Terrorism. www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2013/224822.htm (last accessed 12 September 2016).

⁴³ For a full list of treaties signed and ratified by Albania at the United Nations regarding the war against international terrorism see: www. treaties.un.org/Pages/DB.aspx?path=DB/studies/page2_en.xml (12 July 2015).

⁴⁴ Albania signed and ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism in 2007. The country is also part of the Expert Commission Assessing Measures against Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing, of the Council of Europe.

In the context of regional partnerships, Albania has been active on a series of issues regarding terrorism, under the framework of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII), the Central European Initiative (CEI), the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) and Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).⁴⁵ In 2011 Albania signed the Declaration on Police Cooperation on Combating International Terrorism, which is a continuation of International Police Cooperation Initiative in the fight against terrorism. By signing this declaration Albania became a member of this initiative, together with Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia.⁴⁶ Along with its multilateral commitment, Albania has signed and ratified a series of bilateral cooperation agreements to combat terrorism with Bosnia-Herzegovina (2010), Latvia (2010), Macedonia (2005), Romania (2002), Serbia (2010) and Turkey (2008).⁴⁷

Albania has also intensified its institutional cooperation with the EU in the context of the integration process. Chapter 3 of Association and Stabilisation Agreement between the EU and Albania (2006) refers specifically to the cooperation in combating terrorism in Articles 82 and 84. Article 82 deals with cooperation to prevent terrorist acts, especially those of a cross-border nature. This cooperation includes exchange of information on terrorist groups and their support networks, with due regard to international and national legislation, and experiences on the tools, methods and training in the fight against terrorism.⁴⁸

In addition the EU Delegation to Albania and various accredited diplomatic representatives of European countries such as the British Embassy and the Swedish Embassy have supported Albania in different initiatives to deal with this challenge during the past 3 to 4 years. The US Embassy has supported a series of CVE projects, with a particular focus on intensive cooperation with the Albanian Muslim Community on a series of projects countering violent extremism. Furthermore the US ICITAP (International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Programme) and OPDAT (Office of Overseas Prosecutorial and Development Assistance and Training) programmes are involved in broader counter terrorism issues, policing and regional prosecution.

The OSCE Presence in Albania is engaged in CVE activities generally through the OSCE #UnitedCVE effort. They have had meetings with the Albanian Muslim Community and other stakeholders, but a more specific strategy has not yet been announced. Other international organisations operating in Albania, such UNDP, have contributed in efforts to tackle this phenomenon at both local and national levels by supporting initiatives and projects for institutional and non-state actors.⁴⁹

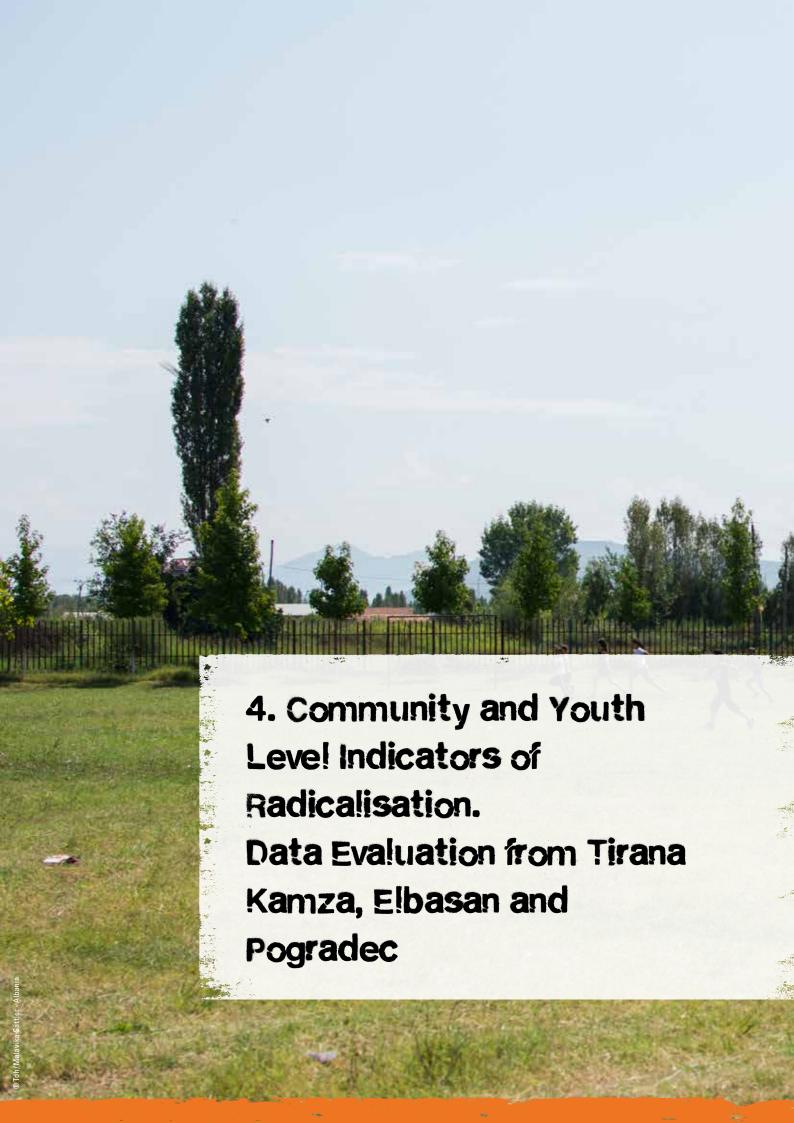
⁴⁵ CODEXTER (2014, November). Profiles of Counter-Terrorist Capacity: Albania. Council of Europe, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Permanent Mission of the Republic of Albania to the International Organisations Vienna (22 May 2014). Verbal Note. No. Prot. 304. www.osce.org/fsc/119814?download=true (12 July 2016).

⁴⁷ Ihid

⁴⁸ Council of European Union (May 2006). Legislative Acts and other Instruments. pp. 79-80. www.ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/albania/st08164.06_en.pdf. (20 July 2015)

⁴⁹ In this context OSCE has been particularly active with initiatives aimed at building capacities of state institutions to tackle all forms of violent extremism. See: www.osce.org/presence-in-albania (18 July 2017).



4.1. Data evaluation for the Municipality of Tirana

In 2017 the population of the district of Tirana, which includes the Municipalities of Tirana, Kamza and Kavaja, accounted for 30% of the whole population of Albania. With an average age of 33 years old it is becoming the youngest county in the country.⁵⁰ This study will mainly focus on two of the municipalities, the Municipality of Tirana and the Municipality of Kamza, which have a combined total population of approximately 870,000 people. They provide a sufficient coverage for the study and contribute to a general assessment of the situation. The population of Municipality of Tirana alone, after the new administrative-territorial reform,⁵¹ increased to approximately 750,000 inhabitants.⁵²

According to the 2011 Census the religious affiliation distribution in the district of Tirana is estimated to be 62.2% Muslims, 5.5% Catholics, 5% Orthodox, with the remainder divided in among other religions, atheists and those who prefer not answer⁵³ Religious affiliation in the Municipality of Tirana is 55.7% Muslims, 6.4% Orthodox, 5.4% Catholic with the remainder divided in among other religions, atheists and those who prefer not to answer.⁵⁴

The domestic migratory waves to Tirana have produced many socio-economic difficulties and essentially changed the age and religious composition of the population. They have substantially decreased the average age of the local population with most migrants coming mainly from the deep rural areas of northern Albania. According to official data, the largest group of migrants come from the district of Kukës, followed by those from Dibra.⁵⁵

4.1.1. Youth opportunities and social inclusion

Analysis of the youth opportunities and social inclusion in the Municipality of Tirana should take into consideration its singularity as the largest municipality in Albania, with a large and dense network of central and local institutional actors, with inter-related and, at times, overlapping duties and interests.

The Directorate for Youth was established in Municipality of Tirana in February 2015. Its remit is to produce, implement and coordinate youth policies and activities at local level, targeting individuals aged from 14 to 29.56 The annual budget doubled from 5 million ALL in 2015 to 10 million

⁵⁰ See INSTAT: "Population of Albania (2017)" www.instat.gov.al/media/372083/popullsia_1_janar_2017___.pdf (last accessed 10 July 2017).

⁵¹ Law No. 137(2014) on the New Administrative and Territorial Division of Local Governmental Units in the Republic of Albania has produced a new administrative organisation of the national territory, with 61 municipalities and 12 districts.

According to the new division, the Municipality of Tirana is composed by 25 administrative units which include: 12 previous neighbourhoods of Tirana, joined by Baldushku, Bërzhita, Dajti, Farka, Kashari, Krraba, Ndroqi, Petrela, Peza, Shëngjergji, Vaqarri, Zall-Bastari and Zall Herri. Meanwhile, according to this new law, the Municipality of Kamza was joined by Paskuqan, increasing its total area to approximately 37 km² and its population to 125,000 habitants. Overall, today this municipality is composed of the Administrative Units of: Babrru, Bathore, Bulçesh, Frukulturë, Fushë e Kërçikëve, Kodër-Babrru, Kodër e Kuqe, Laknas, Paskuqan, Paskuqan-Fushë, Paskuqan-Kodër, Shpat, Valias and Zall-Mner, www.kamza.gov.al (last accessed 20 November 2017)

⁵² Data from Local Office of Civil Status See: www.instat.gov.al/al/themes/popullsia.aspx (last accessed 10 July 2017)

⁵³ INSTAT data on religious affiliation is available only at district level. See Table 1.1.13 in INSTAT Population Census (2011). www.instat.gov. al/al/temat/censuset/censusi-i-popullsis%C3%AB-dhe-banesave/#tab2 (last accessed 23 November 2017)

⁵⁴ www.instatgis.gov.al/#!/l/prefectures/population/prefpop1 (last accessed 23 November 2017).

⁵⁵ See INSTAT: www.instat.gov.al/media/241762/migracioni_ne_shqiperi.pdf (last accessed 10 July 2017).

As it will presented below, especially for Kamza this is confirmed by an internal study conducted by the RED Kamza, on the geographical background and cultural traditions of students in the local schools. Most of them were coming from the northern areas of the country (for an accurate evaluation see the section on education below). Interview with Ms Ermioni Cekani Director, RED Kamza, on 26 October 2017.

⁵⁶ The staff of the Directorate is composed of 6 people. The previous structure integrated within a single Directorate Youth, Culture and Sports, and was considered unable to deal with the whole range of issues for a capital city with around 750,000 people. Interview with Ms Aspasjana Kërxhalli, Director, Directorate for Youth, Municipality of Tirana (18 October 2017). According Article 66(dh) of the New Law on Local Self-Government, among other duties of the local administrative units are also those related to the administration of all youth activities. See Law No. 139/2015, Article 66(dh).

ALL (approximately €79,000) in 2016-2017, while is expected to nearly double in 2018.⁵⁷

The TEN Centre is another youth structure and it was turned into a multifunctional youth centre by a decision of Tirana Municipality Council.⁵⁸ While the Directorate of Youth acts more on a policymaking level, the TEN Centre's main focus is to provide support for youth policies, to provide facilities for a wide range of cultural activities and to promote active youth participation, with a special focus on contemporary arts.

Local institutional capacities linked to social support for young people are spread across other directorates within the Municipality's structure (see Figure 1 on page 20). They work closely with the Directorate for Youth, the Directorate of Art and Culture, the Directorate of Cultural Heritage, the Professional Sports and Community Services Directorate and the Directorate for Environmental Policies — all of which have the duty to promote youth activities and social inclusion. ⁵⁹ The work of these structures with youth is also supplemented by a set of other directorates within the municipality, such as the Directorate for Local Education and Health Policies and the Directorate for Social Protection and Inclusion. ⁶⁰

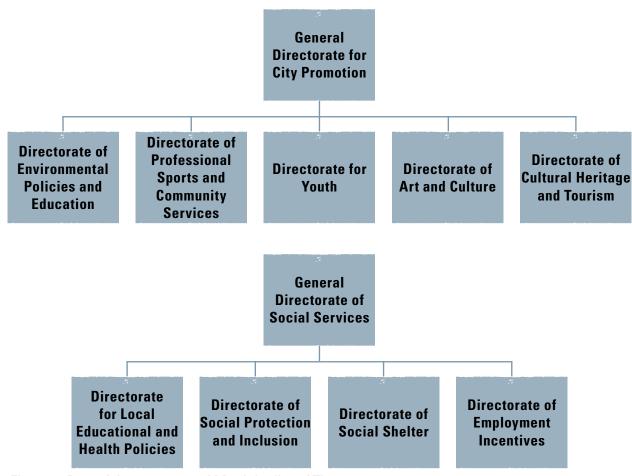


Figure 1: Part of the structure of Municipality of Tirana Source: www.tirana.al/organigrama/ (last accessed 20 July 2017)

⁵⁷ This amount only takes into consideration the official annual budget, not including support from various actors (businesses, donors, CSOs) for the needs of specific events. Interview with Ms Aspasjana Kërxhalli, Director, Directorate for Youth, Municipality of Tirana (18 October 2017).

⁵⁸ Tirana Municipality Council's Decision No. 47, 6 July 2016. Created initially in 2010 and reformed in 2012 and 2016, the TEN Centre has actually a staff of nine people and provides facilities for many kinds of youth activities.

⁵⁹ For more details see the structure of Tirana Municipality at: www.tirana.al/organigrama/ (last accessed 20 July 2017)

⁶⁰ Interview with Ms Anisa Ruseti, Director, General Directorate for Social Protection and Inclusion, Municipality of Tirana, 24 October 2017.

The Youth Advisory Board was established in October 2014 when the Tirana Municipality Council signed a cooperation agreement with civil society actors. The Board is composed of youth organisations, high school student representatives and representatives of the University Student Boards. As the Municipality of Tirana lacks a local youth strategy, the Board advocated for a local youth plan. At the time of writing the Municipality of Tirana still does not have a local youth strategy, a new local Youth Action Plan (2018-2020) has been drafted and awaits final approval from the Municipality Council. The action plan identifies the strategic priorities and objectives for the improvement of social, cultural and economic life of young people in Tirana, and details the main pillars of youth social inclusion in the Municipality.

Despite this dense network of local structures for initiatives and activities targeting young people in Tirana, until recently they have been mainly focused in the central urban areas of the municipality. They encountered some difficulties engaging with the suburban areas of Tirana, the areas where youth opportunities and social inclusion have been lacking during the last decade and a half.⁶⁴ While local representatives acknowledge this deficiency, they argue that this trend is being tackled through a series of initiatives under the framework of Tirana Art Fest (TAF). TAF gives a particular focus to the inclusion of young people from suburban areas in the Municipality's youth activities. As the main vehicle of social inclusion TAF promotes local young talent and consists of a yearly calendar with youth cultural activities.⁶⁵ TAF started in 2016 with 14 public high schools in Tirana and is aiming to expand in 2018 to reach to all the high schools in the Municipality.

The Multimedia Competition, with short films and/or videos prepared by youth, is another youth activity and is organised jointly by the Directorate for Youth and TEN Centre. This competition mainly features videos from youth individuals or groups targeting issues such as bullying.⁶⁶

From a central institutional perspective, the National Youth Service (NYS) was established by the Albanian Government in 2014, under the authority of the Ministry for Social Welfare and Youth. ⁶⁷ The mission of the NYS is to guarantee support for and inclusion of young people in all fields of public and social activities and it has a staff of about 20. ⁶⁸

The main pillars of NYS activities are based on the implementation of the National Youth Action Plan (NYAP) (2015-2020).⁶⁹ The NYAP features the following six objectives:

- i) improving youth participation in policymaking
- ii) stimulating youth employability
- iii) health, sports and environment
- iv) youth education
- v) social protection
- vi) culture and volunteering⁷⁰

- 62 Tirana focus group with young leaders (14 November 2017).
- 63 Interview with Ms Aspasjana Kërxhalli, Director, Directorate for Youth, Municipality of Tirana (18 October 2017).
- 64 This conclusion is supported by a focus group held in Tirana with young Muslim leaders (5 July 2017).
- 65 See www.tirana.al/tirana-art-fest/ (23 November 2017)
- 66 Interview with Ms Aspasjana Kërxhalli, Director, Directorate for Youth, Municipality of Tirana (18 October 2017).
- 67 As of September 2017, after the structural changes of the new administration, this body is under the authority of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth. See www.arsimi.gov.al
- 68 Each of them with a staff of four people. Staff in the central NYS offices in Tirana composes of eight more people. The NYS is on the process of opening nine other offices, up to 12, corresponding to one office for each district of Albania. Interview with Ms Enida Bogdani, former Director of NYS, 2017, 13 November 2017.
- 69 Council of Ministers Decision No. 383, date 6 May 2017.
- 70 See NYAP: www.un.org.al/sites/default/files/plani%20kombetar%20i%20veprimit%20per%20rinine%202015-2020_Shqip.pdf

⁶¹ The Youth Advisory Board was conceived to work as a permanent advisory body composed of young people for the Municipality Council, aiming at increasing their representation at local level, in all decision-making steps for policies targeting youth. For the purposes of this study there was no evidence of the work being done and actions taken since its establishment. See www.crca.al/sq/news-women-and-youth-politics/k%C3%ABshilli-bashkiak-tiran%C3%AB-krijon-bordin-rinor-k%C3%ABshillimor (last accessed 20 July 2017)

Apart from implementing the policies and programmes drafted by the respective ministry for youth policies, the NYS role is to coordinate the activities of Regional Youth Centres. By November 2017 NYS has opened three regional youth centres in Tirana, Vlora and Korça.⁷¹ These centres are responsible for developing youth cultural, artistic and sport activities, organising meetings and debates for young people, conferences, awareness campaigns and training courses and including youth in local social life, employment and decision-making.⁷²

Apart from the central and local institutional actors focused on issues of youth opportunities and social inclusion, there are also other actors, such as CSOs, many of which very active with intensive work at a community level. The Municipality of Tirana is home to the largest concentration of non-governmental organisations and civil society actors in the country, a section of whom are focused on youth activities. The CSOs active in Tirana are focused on:

- i) humanitarian relief actions
- ii) inter-faith dialogue and efforts to tackle religious radicalism
- iii) youth activities and social inclusion
- iv) Domestic Violence Referral Mechanism

4.1.2. Education system

The Municipality of Tirana has the highest number of pre-university educational institutions in the country. According to official data from the Regional Education Directorate for Tirana (RED Tirana) there are 60 high schools in the Municipality of Tirana with a student population of around 67,000 and 13 more high schools in the surrounding rural areas with a student population of around 25,000 making an overall total student population of around 89,000.⁷³ The total number of schools in the Municipality of Tirana is 128 (87 public and 41 private schools).⁷⁴ In line with the new law on local government⁷⁵ and the law on pre-university education of Albania,⁷⁶ the school infrastructure is under the administration of the local government unit, in this case of the Municipality of Tirana, and all the teachers and the other school staff including social workers and psychologists, are under the authority of the respective Regional Education Directorate.

Regarding education attainment the 2011 Census revealed that 31.4% of the population in the Municipality of Tirana⁷⁷ had completed primary and lower secondary education levels, a figure significantly lower than the national average of 52.1%. In addition the Census showed that 39.6% of the population had completed upper secondary education levels and 25.3% had a university and/or post-university degrees. The illiteracy rate for Tirana was 1.8% which is lower than the national rate of 2.8%.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Interview with Ms Enida Bogdani, former Director of NYS, 2017, 13 November 2017.

⁷² See www.kryeministria.al/al/newsroom/vkm/vendime-te-miratuara-ne-mbledhjen-e-keshillit-te-ministrave-11-qershor-2014&page=1 (last accessed 21 July 2017).

⁷³ According to latest data available from the RED Tirana there are 37 public and 23 private high schools in the city of Tirana. www. dartiraneqytet.edu.al/index.php/institucionet-arsimore (last accessed 8 July 2017). There are 13 more high schools are in the surrounding rural areas of the municipality. Data available at: www.dartiraneqark.edu.al/images/Drej_tetor_2016.pdf (last accessed 8 July 2017).

⁷⁴ Nevertheless this figure is dynamic, since it includes some schools working with only one shift, and some others with two shifts-providing school services until late in the afternoon. Interview with Ms Arjola Byzyku, Director, RED Tirana, 16 October 2017.

⁷⁵ Law No. 139/2015.

⁷⁶ Law No. 69/2012.

⁷⁷ This figure belongs to the period prior to the implementation of the new law on territorial divisions, which increased the population of this municipality to 750,000 inhabitants.

⁷⁸ See latest Census data (2011) at: www.instatgis.gov.al/#!/l/prefectures/population/prefpop1 (last accessed 12 July 2017)

The "Schools as Community Centres" model is a key initiative regarding social activities in schools administered by the RED for Municipality of Tirana and the RED for the district of Tirana. Both institutions have undertaken a number of projects within this framework of this programme which aim to create a social environment that promotes community engagement, inclusiveness and respect for diversity. ⁷⁹ Up until November 2017 14 schools under the administration of RED Tirana were participating in this communitarian model. ⁸⁰

"E-Twinning" programmes and modules represent an important instrument for youth activism and social inclusion. They provide students with increased opportunities to share experiences with their peers throughout Albania and Europe and to be in contact with other schools for projects and ideas boosting multicultural experiences. There have been some successful twinning and e-twinning initiatives in the Municipality of Tirana, such as the ones initiated by students at "Ismail Qemali" and "Asim Vokshi" High Schools and "Edit Durham" Secondary School. ⁸¹ The "E-Twinning Programme", if used effectively, can become a useful guide on how to safely use the internet. ⁸²

Research at the time of the study revealed no signs of religious extremism occurring or religious radicalism activities taking place in the school system under the authority of RED Tirana. This conclusion is based on the findings of the focus groups with young leaders and representatives from high schools in Tirana, 83 as well as from the interviews with official RED Tirana representatives. 84 There were only two cases of children wearing the burka in school. These cases were addressed through parental consultation and through the active engagement of teachers and school authorities including psychologists. 85

When it comes to capacities of teachers, such as teachers of social science subjects including history and sociology, and of other school personnel, such as psychologists and social workers, to understand the issue of religious radicalism, it was observed that both groups had low levels of knowledge on the issue. According to education authorities there is a lack of knowledge on the process which should be followed if cases of such behaviour appear within the school district. Bearents and school teachers and psychologists are important frontline actors dealing with youth and their behaviour.

Activities organised by schools and CSOs mostly focus on increasing awareness about violence and bullying in schools in general, as well as inter-cultural activities.⁸⁷ In the Municipality of Tirana there were no cases of activities which aimed to raise awareness about religious radicalism or about the role religious harmony and coexistence plays as part of the Albanian identity.⁸⁸ It is important to note that, according to the law on pre-university education (Law no. 69/2012) REDs are responsible for all the extra-curricular activities and control all programmes and projects implemented in the school system.

⁷⁹ For a detailed list of activities, see: www.dartiraneqark.edu.al/index.php/sporti-ne-shkolla (last accessed 12 July 2017).

⁸⁰ Interview with Ms Elta Islami, Director, Directorate of Local Education and Health Policies, Municipality of Tirana, 24 October 2017.

⁸¹ Focus group with young leaders, activists and representatives from the Students' Councils of Sami Frashëri, Qemal Stafa and Besnik Sykja High schools (14 November 2017). Interview with Ms Arjola Byzyku, Director, RED Tirana, 16 October 2017.

⁸² See: www.dartiraneqark.edu.al/index.php/etwinning (last accessed 12 July 2017).

⁸³ Focus group with young leaders, activists and representatives from the Students' Councils of Sami Frashëri, Qemal Stafa and Besnik Sykja High Schools (14 November 2017). Focus group with young Muslim leaders in Tirana (July 5, 2017).

⁸⁴ Interview with Ms Arjola Byzyku, Director, RED Tirana, 16 October 2017.

⁸⁵ Interview with Ms Arjola Byzyku, Director, RED Tirana, 16 October 2017.

⁸⁶ Interview with Ms Arjola Byzyku, Director, RED Tirana, 16 October 2017.

⁸⁷ Interview with Ms Elta Islami, Director, Directorate of Local Education and Health Policies, Municipality of Tirana, 24 October 2017.

⁸⁸ Focus group with young leaders, activists and representatives from the Students' Councils of Sami Frashëri, Qemal Stafa and Besnik Sykja High Schools (14 November 2017). This was also confirmed by Ms Arjola Byzyku, Director, RED Tirana, 16 October 2017.

The Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth is preparing to implement a pilot programme on the "The Development of Religions in World History". This programme, following consultation with teachers, mainly those teaching citizenship classes, is anticipated to be piloted in the coming period in three schools of Tirana. It is being developed by the Albanian Institute for the Development of Education.⁸⁹

"H. Mahmud Dashi" Madrasah plays an important role in religious education in Tirana. This institution is under the supervision of AMC, which is the only body entitled to open pre-university educational institutions of the Muslim religion. All programmes for religious courses at all education levels of the Albanian Madrasahs are approved by the AMC.

4.1.3. Economic underdevelopment and unemployment

According to official statistics the unemployment rate for the Municipality of Tirana is around 24.3% of the working force and the youth unemployment rate is over 48%. 92 In the suburban areas of Tirana, where there is a high level of informality and many practical difficulties in obtaining accurate data, the unemployment rate is considered to be significantly higher. According to the World Bank the poverty level for the whole district is 12.7%. 93

When it comes to employment opportunities for young people, there are some initiatives at local and central level. The Directorate for Employment Incentives is responsible for this at municipality level and has two main strategic objectives: social business and business internships. Since 2016 a programme to support social businesses has been in place. Following an open call for expressions of interest the municipality finances ideas for social businesses up to 500,000 ALL (approximately €3,950) followed by training and business plan support. In May 2017 the Municipality of Tirana launched an initiative to support six months paid internship for young people in local businesses. This programme was preceded in 2016 by another programme for paid internships in some of the Municipality structures. The municipality structures in the support of the municipality structures.

Employment initiatives targeting youth in Tirana has been a key focus during the last decade, with limited success. Recently there have been some initiatives from the central government to tackle this issue, one of which is the National Employment Internship Programme initiated in 2014 by the Office of the Prime Minister and coordinated by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth. Since its start this programme, targeting mostly young people aged 21-26, has managed to employ more than 200 individuals.

When it comes to vocational training in the Municipality of Tirana, there are a number of professional courses which are based on the National Strategy for Employment and Skills (2014-2020) and

⁸⁹ Interview with Ms Arjola Byzyku, Director, RED Tirana, 16 October 2017.

⁹⁰ See www.medresejatirane.com/sample-page/ (last accessed 25 August 2017)

⁹¹ See www.kmsh.al/al/komuniteti-mysliman-i-shqiperise/medresete/ (last accessed 25 August 2017).

⁹² According to official data from INSTAT: www.instat.gov.al/al/themes/tregu-i-punës.aspx?tab=tabs-5 (30 June 2015).

⁹³ World Bank Group & INSTAT. "Profili i Varfërisë dhe Pabarazisë në Shqipëri" (eng. "Profile of Poverty and Inequality in Albania") (2016), p. 78-79

⁹⁴ Another initiative of Tirana Municipality regards the Fund for Women Entrepreneurs. See: www.gazeta-shqip.com/lajme/2017/05/29/bashkia-e-tiranes-projekt-per-praktikat-e-punesimit-te-te-rinjve/ (last accessed 20 July 2017)

⁹⁵ According to Ms Aspasjana Kërxhalli (Director, Directorate for Youth, Municipality of Tirana) nearly half of them became permanent employees after the completion of their internship in the Municipality. Interview, 18 October 2017.

⁹⁶ Supported also by the UNDP Albania. www.praktika.sociale.gov.al/ (last accessed 23 November 2017).

administered by the Regional Directorate of Public Professional Education. These courses target young people and aim to support them in specialising in high demand professions in the labour market.⁹⁷

4.1.4. Local governance and community safety

Community safety means a safe environment from a multitude of threats, varying from economic and environmental challenges to threats from terrorism. 98 Violent extremism has been only recently added to the list of long-standing challenges. 99

There is a general lack of information and understanding of the National Strategy for the Fight against Violent Extremism from institutional actors as well as from civil society actors. Most of the actors interviewed for the purposes of this study, had little or no information about the National Strategy or the Action Plan that follows it. They also showed little understanding about the issue of violent extremism or of their contribution in tackling it.

At local level there is no specific mechanism for tackling the issue of violent extremism. This is because local priorities have been poverty and social vulnerabilities of specific groups. The Municipality of Tirana is now in the process of drafting a local action plan for countering violent extremism, which will be integrated with the other strategic objectives of the General Directorate for Social Services. This action plan will be the first step towards the establishment of a Local Safety Council with the participation of a wide range of local and national actors, dealing with a wide range of security challenges. The Municipality of Tirana has only recently engaged in activities directly linked to the issue through its membership in the Strong Cities Network which it joined in 2017. In addition a person was appointed in 2017 who is in charge of dealing with the issue of violent extremism at local level. The security of the se

The level of understanding of municipal representatives on the issues of violent extremism remains low. There have been no training programmes specifically targeting these people to improve their understanding and capabilities. This study was unable to identify any programmes in the Municipality of Tirana to support vulnerable or at risk youth from violent extremism in the designated suburban areas of the municipality.

The Municipality of Tirana has used community policing for the past couple of years with positive results.¹⁰⁴ According to a study by OSCE, community policing can be an effective strategy to help reduce crime, tackle violent extremism and enhance wider community safety. If implemented in its own right and with adequate planning and preparation, community policing can also make a tangible and durable contribution to wider strategic efforts to prevent religious radicalism.¹⁰⁵ Having a better knowledge of the communities and being able to rely on partners within communities

⁹⁷ This is based on the National Strategy for Employment and Skills (2014-2020), www.drfpp1.wordpress.com (last accessed 18 July 2017).

⁹⁸ For more see Allan Collins. Human Security. In Contemporary Security Studies. Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 139-154.

⁹⁹ As specified in the National Strategy for Fighting Violent Extremism (2015) and Action Plan. www.punetebrendshme.gov.al/al/legjislacioni/plane/strategjia-kombetare-per-luften-kunder-ekstremizmit-te-dhunshem-dhe-plani-i-veprimit (last accessed 10 July 2017)

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Ms Anisa Ruseti, Director, General Directorate for Social Protection and Inclusion, Municipality of Tirana (24 October 2017).

¹⁰¹ Interview with Ms Anisa Ruseti, (24 October 2017).

¹⁰² See: www.tirana.al/bashkia-e-tiranes-dhe-osbe-seminar-me-40-te-rinj-nga-ballkani/ (last accessed 20 July 2017).

¹⁰³ Interview with Ms Anisa Ruseti, (24 October 2017). She has been recently appointed as the person in charge of coordinating efforts in multiple levels to deal with the issue.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example: www.policia.al/policimi-ne-komunitet-programi-sherbime-komunitare/ (last accessed 20 July 2017).

^{105 &}quot;Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Community-Policing Approach", OSCE Guidebook, OSCE Secretariat, Vienna, 2014, pp. 79-80.

will improve the ability of the police to reach individuals or groups that are otherwise difficult for the police to approach. This is particularly true if the individuals or groups are distrustful and/or marginalised, or if they generally avoid contact with the general public.¹⁰⁶

Tirana File

- I. Activities reported
- 1. OSCE and Strong Cities Network Conference on violent extremism
- 2. Institute for Democracy and Mediation

Round tables, workshops and conferences on violent extremism — presentation of reports, trainings and raising awareness on national and local level

3. Albanian Institute for International Studies

Round tables, workshops and conferences on violent extremism — presentation of reports, trainings and raising awareness on national and local level

4. Bedër University

Presentation of reports, trainings and raising awareness on national and local level

5. **High schools** (in coordination with Regional Education Directorate)

A series of intercultural activities have been undertaken to eliminate violence and bullying, but not directly focused on violent extremism

6. UNDP

Round tables, workshops and conferences on violent extremism – presentation of reports, trainings and raising awareness on national and local level

7. Albanian Media Institute

Conference on violent extremism – presentation of a report on the issue

8. BIRN (Balkan Investigative Report Network)

Workshops on offline and online violent extremism in the media

9. Act for Society

Implemented the "No Hate Campaign", raising awareness on religious tolerance

10. Albanian Muslim Community

Round tables, workshops and conferences on violent extremism — presentation of reports, trainings and raising awareness on national and local level

11. Albanian Helsinki Committee

Sub-granting scheme on countering violent extremism for CSOs, supported by the EU Delegation in Albania

- II. Map of potential local actors and capacities
- 1. Municipality of Tirana, Youth Directorate

Six individuals engaged in the coordination of youth activities

2. TEN (Youth) Centre

Seven individuals engaged in the coordination of youth activities¹⁰⁷

3. Municipality of Tirana, other structures

Tourism Directorate, Art and Culture Directorate, Professional Sports and Community Services Directorate, Directorate of Environmental Policies and Education, Directorate for Local Education and Health Policies and Directorate for Social Inclusion – indirectly linked to youth empowerment initiatives, activities, etc. The overall human resource number is more than 50 people.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p. 87

¹⁰⁷ Article 1, Tirana Municipality Council's Decision No. 47, 6 July 2016.

- 4. Local law enforcement agencies (community policing).
- 5. Two Local Education Offices

Ten individuals

- 6. State Social Service and Local Social Service
- 7. State Employment Service Regional Tirana Office
- 8. National Youth Service Regional Tirana Office
- 9. Heads of Local Administrative Units 24 individuals
- 10. CSOs in Tirana¹⁰⁸
 - i) Humanitarian organisations Gjysmëhëna Shqiptare; Hëna; Kryqi i Kuq; Mirënjohja; Qatar Foundation
 - ii) Domestic Violence Referral Mechanism organisations
 Advocacy Centre (Qendra Avokatore); Centre for Community Development Today
 for the Future; Centre for Human Rights in Democracy; Private Shelter
 - iii) Inter-faith dialogue and CVE active organisations

 Act for Society; Albanian Helsinki Committee; Albanian Institute for Democracy and Mediation; Albanian Institute for International Studies; Albanian Media Institute; Albanian Rehabilitation Centre for Trauma and Torture; ALTRI (Albanian Institute for Legal and Territorial Studies); ANNTARC; Beyond Barriers; Credible Voices Albania
 - iv) CSOs focused on youth activities and social inclusion ARSIS, FOKUS, Save the Children, SHKEJ, Terres des hommes and World Vision

4.2. Data evaluation for the Municipality of Kamza

Following the new Law on Administrative and Territorial Division of Local Government Units Paskuqan was incorporated into the Municipality of Kamza and the total area of the municipality increased to just over 37 km². The population of the Municipality also subsequently increased to around 125,000 inhabitants from the 90,000 inhabitants registered in the 2011 Census. The municipality is now composed of 14 Administrative Units: Babrru, Bathore, Bulçesh, Fushë e Kërçikëve, Frutikulturë, Kodër e Kuqe, Kodër-Babrru, Laknas, Paskuqan, Paskuqan-Fushë, Paskuqan-Kodër, Shpat, Valias and Zall-Mner.109 It has the youngest population in Albania and has an average age of about 27 years. During the last two and a half decades it has seen the sharpest population increase in the country. According to the 2011 Census, 75.9% of the population in the Municipality is Muslim. The majority of the population in Kamza originates from northern Albania and has moved to the area over the past two decades, during one of the most intense migratory waves the country has witnessed in its recent history.

¹⁰⁸ This list is not exhaustive.

¹⁰⁹ See www.kamza.gov.al (last accessed 20 November 2017)

¹¹⁰ See INSTAT: "Population of Albania (2017)" www.instat.gov.al/media/372083/popullsia_1_janar_2017___.pdf (last accessed 17 November 2017).

¹¹¹ These data are approximate, considering that 13.8% of the population declined to answer the question about religious affiliation, while 5.5% more declared themselves believers, without specifying any religion. See INSTAT: http://instatgis.gov.al/#!/l/prefectures/population/prefpop1 (last accessed 24 November 2017).

¹¹² According to official data, the larger group is constituted by individuals coming from the Kukës area, followed by those from Dibra. See INSTAT: www.instat.gov.al/media/241762/migracioni_ne_shqiperi.pdf (last accessed 10 July 2017).

As it will presented below, especially for Kamza this is confirmed by an internal study conducted by the RED Kamza, on the geographical background and cultural traditions of students in the local schools. Most of them were coming from the northern areas of the country (for an accurate evaluation see the section on education below). Interview with Ms Ermioni Cekani, Director, RED Kamza on 26 October 2017.

4.2.1. Youth opportunities and social inclusion

The Municipality of Kamza, since its establishment, has not developed youth-oriented policies and structures which in turn has led to opportunities and social inclusion for youth in the municipality being limited. Local and civil society representatives have argued that youth activities have not been in the focus of local government.¹¹³ There is no youth strategy or action plan in place and the only artistic and cultural activities available for youth are those organised at the Cultural Centre of Kamza.¹¹⁴ Local institutional actors, acknowledging this institutional gap, are aiming to develop a youth strategy and action plan in 2018, and then to harmonise it with the overarching Development Strategy for Kamza.¹¹⁵ It remains unclear if a role and a voice will be given to local youth and civil society organisations and other non-institutional actors during the drafting of this strategy which is at an early stage at the moment.

Youth policies within the municipality's structure are situated in the Directorate for Education, Sports and Youth. This a new directorate was established in 2017 to replace the former Office of Education. It has with limited human capacities being composed of only four people, an Office Director, a Head of Office and two specialists for sport affairs and education. There is no coordinative body or individual in charge of youth activities and social inclusion in the municipality's structure. In depth research into the municipality budget for the last eight years since 2010 showed that the municipality did not have a dedicated budget for youth activities, initiatives or programmes.

Other local institutional bodies linked to providing social and economic support for the poorest and more vulnerable groups include:

- i) The Directorate for Economic Support and Social Welfare is responsible for providing the economic and welfare support for the poorest groups in the municipality. It has three field offices in Kamza, Paskuqan and Bathore with a total of 11 employees.¹¹⁸ There are a total of around 2,200 families in the municipality in either poor economic conditions, or affected by domestic violence issues and orphan children. While the percentage of children and young people receiving economic support is relatively small at less than 20%, there is a worrying increase in the number of reported cases of domestic violence against women. In October 2017 alone the number of reported cases was 16.¹¹⁹
- ii) The Directorate for Media and Information was created in 2012 and since June 2017 it is responsible for all cultural activities and events in the municipality. These had previously been the responsibility of the Directorate for Education, Sports and Youth. They are implemented through the Cultural Centre of Kamza. The Cultural Centre is a multifunctional centre dealing with all aspects of the cultural life in Kamza including youth activities and has eight staff.

¹¹³ This conclusion is based on the interviews with local government representatives: Mr Ardian Peka, Mr Ervin Doda, Mr Astrit Vata, Mr Qemal Çejku; as well with representatives of local CSOs: "ATA" Centre and "Global Care" Centre.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Mr Ardian Peka, Specialist, Directorate for Education, Sports and Youth, Municipality of Kamza, 1 November 2017.

¹¹⁵ The Working Group is composed by Cabinet Director, a representative from the Directorate of Coordination, Development, Projects and Foreign Relations and from other structures of the Municipality. Ms Valentina Baja, Director, Directorate for Coordination, Development, Projects and Foreign Relations, Municipality of Kamza, 1 November 2017.

¹¹⁶ Since 2015 this office is also responsible for pre-school education, duties transferred by the new Law 39/2015 on Local Self-Governance. Interview with Mr Ardian Peka, 1 November 2017.

¹¹⁷ See the Budget Section of the official webpage of the Municipality of Kamza. www.kamza.gov.al (last accessed 23 November 2017).

¹¹⁸ Interview with Mr Astrit Vata, Director, Office for Economic Support and Social Welfare, Municipality of Kamza, 1 November 2017.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Mr Astrit Vata, 1 November 2017.

¹²⁰ Interview with Mr Ervin Doda, Coordinator for the Right to Information, Directorate for Media, Municipality of Kamza, 1 November 2017.

¹²¹ Interview with Mr Ervin Doda, 1 November 2017.

iii) The Directorate for Coordination, Development, Projects and Foreign Relations is also involved in youth-related policies and social inclusion activities in the municipality. It has a staff of four and is mainly responsible for the coordination and implementation of projects and partnerships with international actors and donors. Some of these projects are related to youth activities in Albania and others involve facilitating the participation of various youth groups in activities abroad. This office has been particularly active with the Europe for Citizens network of municipalities, which has a particular focus on encouraging youth activism as a way to escape isolation and social marginalisation. Between 2014 and 2016 some of the youth-oriented projects targeted youth criminality, youth legal support and civic engagement. Under this project a series of youth activities were organised, which aimed to improve youth participation in activities such as policy-making, youth civic engagement and lobbying.

This directorate does not have a dedicated budget for youth activities. It has been particularly active raising funds for youth-oriented projects and also targeting some of the most marginalised groups in the municipality, such as young people from the Roma and Egyptian communities, although with limited success.¹²⁴

Cooperation between local government and civil society actors in Kamza has been small scale and sporadic during the last years. Cooperation between local and central government has encountered many difficulties. This has contributed to the relatively low number of youth activities and has limited the social and economic opportunities for youth in Kamza.

There is a limited number of civil society actors, from humanitarian and poverty relief organisations, to community-based organisations and other civil society actors dealing with youth and human rights in the wider Municipality of Kamza area.¹²⁶

4.2.2. Education system

The Regional Education Directorate for Kamza (RED Kamza) covers a wide area and has three administrative units, for the Municipality of Kamza, the Administrative Unit of Paskuqan and the Administrative Unit of Zallher. Until the early 1990's there were only two schools in the wider area of Kamza. Within its broader area, there are now 29 schools, including seven high schools, 20 secondary schools and two "mixed" schools. The student population is about 26,000 and there are 1,209 staff including school directors, teachers, secretaries, psychologists and social workers. Most schools are facing difficulties due to the growing number of students each year and operate a two shift system during the day. This trend is attributed to the population density of the area, to the constant demographic inflows and to higher birth rates compared to other areas of Albania. Regarding education attainment the 2011 Census revealed that 62.2% of the population in the Municipality of Kamza had completed their primary and lower secondary education which is above the national average of 52.1%. In addition 27.9% of the population had completed their upper

¹²² See the Organisational Structure of the Municipality, at: www.kamza.gov.al (last accessed 23 November 2017).

¹²³ Since 2014 15 people participate annually in exchange programmes with municipalities in EU countries. Interview with Ms Valentina Baja, Director, Directorate for Coordination, Development, Projects and Foreign Relations, Municipality of Kamza, 1 November 2017.

¹²⁴ Interview with Ms Valentina Baja, 1 November 2017.

¹²⁵ Interview with Ms Valentina Baja, 1 November 2017.

¹²⁶ A full list of organisations is provided in the Kamza File section below.

¹²⁷ This term refers to schools with mixed classes, from secondary level and high school level.

¹²⁸ Interview with Ms Ermioni Cekani, Director, RED Kamza, 1 November 2017.

¹²⁹ See www.instatgis.gov.al/#!/l/prefectures/population/prefpop1 (last accessed 23 November 2017)

secondary education; and 5.6% had a university and post-university degrees which is substantially lower than the national average of 11.8%. The illiteracy rate for Kamza is 2.2% which is lower than the national average.¹³⁰

The Kamza area is home to a diversity of traditions and cultures from many areas of the country, this diversity is reflected in the pre-university educational system. A study by RED Kamza to understand the cultural and geographical backgrounds of school students found that 24% of the total number of students came from the Dibra region, 23% from Kukës, 17% from Tirana and 10% from Burrel.¹³¹

The "Schools as Community Centre" model has been in place in Kamza since 2014. It has been limited by the fact that most schools are using a double-shift system which prevents the conduct of a full afternoon calendar of community programmes. The model has been applied in six schools in total, in two secondary schools and four high schools. According to local education officials in the schools where the model was applied, it was successful in engaging parents. Parents have been particularly active in the "100 Vjetori", "Ali Coka" and "Ahmet Zogu" schools in Bathore.

Schools in Kamza have not been particularly active in E-Twinning programmes and there have only been two successful cases. These programmes involved CSOs, World Vision and ATA Centre, and included afterschool activities for children with limited abilities, or other inter-cultural activities with Students' Councils. 132

The annual "My Teacher, My Model" initiative is an important youth engagement activity in the schools. The joint initiative of RED Kamza and Students' Councils involves an election for the best teacher. The process was administered fully by students who elect the "Best Teacher of the Year". 133

Local education actors identified the need to increase the capacities of school teachers, psychologists and social workers in the Kamza area to deal with new issues, such as violent extremism. This study was unable to identify any initiatives, undertaken by either central or local, state or non-state actors, to increase teachers' capacities to deal with violent extremism. Up until November 2017 the number of school psychologists was eight and this is due to increase in 2018. Local actors raised concerns about some religious foundations operating in the area of Laknas (Valias). These foundation are offering afterschool programmes and school materials to children without the school consent. The foundations had refused contact with school officials or RED Kamza. Cases have been reported by local teachers involving children being transferred from deep rural areas such as Zallher – Kallmet and Qenam to the school of Laknas (Valias).

¹³⁰ See latest Census data (2011) at: www.instatgis.gov.al/#!/l/prefectures/population/prefpop1 (last accessed, 12 July 2017)

¹³¹ This research was mentioned by Ms Cekani in an interview. See interview with Ms Ermioni Cekani, Director, RED Kamza, 1 November 2017.

¹³² For each school applying this model there is a teacher coordinator (with dedicated hours). Interview with Ms Ermioni Cekani, 1 November 2017.

¹³³ Interview with Ms Ermioni Cekani, 1 November 2017.

¹³⁴ Interview with Ms Ermioni Cekani, 1 November 2017.

¹³⁵ Interview with Ms Ermioni Cekani, 1 November 2017.

4.2.3. Economic underdevelopment and unemployment

According to the 2011 Census the unemployment rate in the Municipality of Kamza was around 49.3% of the working force, which is significantly higher than the national average unemployment rate of 29.3%. The youth unemployment level for the same year exceeded 68.3% which again was higher than the national average of 52.9%. 136

Employment opportunities for young people in Kamza are scarce. There are about 200 big enterprises operating in Kamza, compared to only three around a decade ago. They are mainly engaged in the services sector, followed by the production, transport and building sectors.¹³⁷ This study was unable to identify any local government initiatives to integrate young people into the local economy, or to increase their entrepreneurship capacities through trainings, targeted internships in local businesses or local institutions. This study was also unable to identify any coordination or programme between local and central government to promote youth employability in an area with a significant unemployment rate as compared to the national average. Regarding vocational trainings there are some CSOs which have a community approach that have undertaken some initiatives but with limited success.¹³⁸

4.2.4. Local governance and community safety

Community safety is closely linked to education and the participation of youth in the local safety structures. It aims to raise awareness about a common understanding of community issues. Research found that the approach of local institutions towards community safety in Kamza is lacking. This study was unable to identify any such initiatives in the wider Kamza area and this concern was also raised by local youth actors.¹³⁹

Grassroots organisations are increasingly uncomfortable about the increasing presence of religious radicalism, especially among young people, in the area of Bathore during the past five to six years.¹⁴⁰

Kamza File

- I. Activities reported
- 1. **High schools** (in coordination with Regional Education Directorate)

 Some intercultural activities have been undertaken, but not directly focused on religious radicalism and violent extremism
- 2. Cultural Centre of Kamza
 Cultural activities have been undertaken
- II. Map of potential local actors and capacities
- 1. Municipality of Kamza, Directorate for Education, Sports and Youth Four individuals

¹³⁶ According to official data from INSTAT www.instatgis.gov.al/#!/l/prefectures/population/prefpop1 (23 November 2017).

¹³⁷ See "Operational Plan for Local Development", Gender Alliance for Development, UNDP and State Minister for Local Issues, Tirana: February 2016.

¹³⁸ Interview with Ms Evis Stafa, Director, Global Care Albania, 26 October 2017.

¹³⁹ Interview with representatives of the youth organisation ATA, Kamza, 27 October 2017.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Ms Evis Stafa, 26 October 2017.

- 2. Directorate for Coordination, Development, Projects and Foreign Relations
 Four individuals
- 3. Directorate for Media and Information Five individuals
- 4. **Cultural Centre** (under direction of Directorate for Media and Information) Eight individuals
- 5. Local law-enforcement agencies (community policing)
- **6. Local Education Offices** 5 individuals
- 7. State Social Service and Local Social Service
- 8. Regional Employment Office of Kamza
- 9. Civil Society Organisations for Tirana³
 - i) Humanitarian organisations Qatar Foundation; World Vision
 - ii) Community-based organisations Global Care Albania
 - iii) Inter-faith dialogue "Ardhmëria" Organisation
 - iv) Youth-oriented organisations
 ATA Centre; Centre for Human Rights in Democracy; ECJA Centre; Gender Alliance for Development; Hope Centre; New Day

4.3. Data Evaluation for Municipality of Pogradec

4.3.1. Youth opportunities and social inclusion

From a youth mobilisation perspective, the Municipality of Pogradec has recently adopted a youth strategy. This provides the overall vision for the social inclusion of young people not only within the City of Pogradec administrative areas, but also for the wider municipal territory, reorganised under the new law on territorial reform. Among its objectives this strategy aims to provide increased equal opportunities for youth, to foster peaceful coexistence and religious harmony among various youth groups, and to develop or to improve the level of access to education in the rural areas of the municipality in such areas as Leshnica, Mokra and Starova (or Buçimas).

The Directorate for Youth, Culture, Tourism and Sports overseeing the implementation of the youth strategy within the municipality. Its main task is to contribute to increasing youth opportunities, employment, market research, career development assistance for young people and their inclusion in socio-cultural activities.

Despite the adoption of the local youth strategy and the establishment of a local employment office, employment programmes specifically targeting youth at local levels are lacking. There is no

¹⁴¹ The Strategy cannot be found on the official webpage of Municipality of Pogradec and it was not provided by the Directorate of Youth, Culture, Tourism and Sport to the study. Therefore it was not possible to assess its efficiency or compare it to the other youth plans or strategies. According to Mr Leka, its adoption falls under the direct competences of the Mayor. (Interview Mr Dorian Leka, Office Director, 6 July 2017).

¹⁴² Law No. 115/2014, 31 July 2014, www.qbz.gov.al/botime/fletore_zyrtare/2014/PDF-2014/137-2014.pdf (last accessed 3 July 2017)

dedicated budget for youth activities within the municipality budget. Funding for such activities is integrated within the broader budget for cultural, touristic and sport activities, for a total of around 2,300,000 ALL (approximately €18,000.)¹⁴³

In the rural areas of this municipality, the areas which are affected the most by religious radicalism and violent extremism, children and young people do not have access to psycho-social activities in either schools or community centres. During this study there was no mobilisation activity for youth except for one activity which was organised by AMC in collaboration with the US Embassy and the regional Mufti Office. This study was unable to identify any opportunity for young people, especially those from rural areas, to exchange views with other young people living in different contexts or cities, besides some very rare and unorganised common sport activities.

4.3.2. Education system

Regarding education attainment according to official data, 33.2% of the population in the Municipality of Pogradec have completed upper-secondary education and 9.8% have attended university or post-university education.¹⁴⁴ There are two main public high schools and two more private ones in Pogradec and there is at least one local high school and one secondary school in virtually every other administrative unit representing the rural areas.¹⁴⁵

During the study a few initiatives were taking place in some of the high schools in the city which involved talking to children and young students about violent extremism. These initiatives were aiming to broaden their perspective on what religion is and how it can be manipulated for non-religious purposes. They were mainly conducted by high school teachers in coordination with the Regional Education Directorate for Pogradec (RED Pogradec). One such initiative was being carried out by "Unë Gruaja" a local CSO.¹⁴⁶ This study was unable to find initiatives taking place in any of the high schools or secondary schools in the administrative units in rural areas.

The interviews and focus groups revealed that teachers were only able to provide limited information about this issue. The knowledge of teachers themselves is limited to widely spread information and there were very few activities being held aiming to improve their knowledge about violent extremism. There is a pressing need to improve teachers' knowledge on the issue through intensive trainings, especially for teachers working with young vulnerable individuals in the rural areas most affected by violent extremism.¹⁴⁷

As previously stated the "Schools as Community Centres" model has only achieved moderate success in cities with schools with well-established traditions. The model lacked the necessary human and technical capacities, especially in the rural areas of Pogradec, to be implemented on a daily basis in after school programmes. In order for this model to work in Pogradec and for schools to transform into community centres, according to officials in RED Pogradec and the Municipality, there needs to be greater human capacities and more areas available which are appropriate for activities such as sports, games and reading.

¹⁴³ An important part of this amount is dedicated to office human resources. (Interview with Mr Dorian Leka, 6 July 2017).

¹⁴⁴ This means that data about educational level for this municipality are comparable to the average values of the country. Data are only available from national CENSUS of 2011. See for more: www.instat.gov.al/al/census/census-2011/t%C3%AB-dh%C3%ABnat-sipas-gargeve.aspx (last accessed 6 July 2017)

¹⁴⁵ Data obtained from RED Pogradec.

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Mr Sotiraq Mangeri, Head of Qualification and Quality Sector, RED Pogradec (6 July 2017).

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Mr Sotiraq Mangeri (6 July 2017).

Until now there are no integrated activities between high schools in rural areas with high schools closer to the city, which contributes to the further isolation and socio-cultural marginalisation of these schools. Integrated activities in schools might help to build socio-cultural bridges and lower artificial barriers between youth of these areas. Although officially 30% of the municipality's calendar of youth activities is dedicated to rural areas, there is a total lack of interest from young people, teachers and local actors to take part in them.¹⁴⁸

It is important to also deal here with the issue of the religious education for local imams and clerics. This is the responsibility of the AMC which has undertaken a series of initiatives to improve the level of religious education of young clerics and is also working on early identification signs of violent extremism. With the aim of improving the level of religious education, AMC and local religious representatives ensured young clerics, aged between 14 and 25 years old, attended a series of intensive three months long courses about violent extremism and core democratic values.

4.3.3. Economic underdevelopment and unemployment

Pogradec and its wider surrounding region suffer from high rates of extreme poverty. The municipality has a population of around 61,000 inhabitants¹⁵⁰ and suffers from low investments in key sectors, such as tourism and agriculture. This has been the case for agriculture particularly which counts for nearly 50% of the working force and it has been a sector which has not been able to generate enough income for the local population due to many issues concerning land ownership and the lack of infrastructural investments.¹⁵¹ An increasingly high number of young people have chosen to migrate to Greece and other destinations.

The extreme poverty rates are exacerbated by high unemployment. According to official data the average overall unemployment rate is 39.3% and the average youth unemployment rate is extremely high at 64.8%. This is one of the highest rates of youth unemployment in the country, where the official national average unemployment rate for young people both for men and women aged 15-29 is between 28-29%. 152

As some of the interviews revealed, the radicalised individuals who joined the war in Syria only had primary education. According to unofficial contacts and verifications from their families, undertaken by local religious leaders, most of these individuals mainly went to Syria for economic reasons, which might classify these cases as religious or ideological mercenarism.¹⁵³

4.3.4. Local governance and community safety

When it comes to the capacities of local institutional actors in Pogradec to fight violent extremism, there is an institutional gap to deal with the issue. There is no key contact point, in either an office, directorate or sector, in the municipality, and there is no specific office coordinating activities, initiatives or the overall approach at local institutional level. Also responsibilities over religious

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Mr Dorian Leka. Youth Director, 6 July 2017.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Mr Dardan Canellari, Head of the Administrative Unit of Çërrava (7 July 2017).

¹⁵⁰ According to the 2011 Census, of the Albanian Institute of Statistics INSTAT. www.instatgis.gov.al/#!/I/prefectures/population/prefpop1 (last accessed 7 July 2017)

¹⁵¹ Interview with Mr Dardan Canellari, (7 July 2017).

¹⁵² Official CENSUS of population (2011) vis-à-vis actual official data from 2016. Albanian Institute of Statistics. www.instat.gov.al/al/themes/tregu-i-pun%C3%ABs.aspx?tab=tabs-5 (last accessed 7 July 2017)

¹⁵³ Interview with the Mufti of Pogradec. 7 July 2017.

issues are spread over several units within the municipality's structures.¹⁵⁴ This situation has remained the same even as the issue of violent extremism became more publicly recognised and has been intensively debated among institutional and policy-making actors. The deficiency at the municipal level was reinforced by the fact that after the change of political leadership following the 2015 local elections, the new administration found no footprints of previous projects or initiatives countering violent extremism. This shows a remarkable lack of institutional memory at local level.¹⁵⁵ The frequent changes of human resources at local municipal level inhibits building upon accumulated experience and grassroots community access to countering violent extremism. Countering this phenomenon requires the constant training of municipal staff and continuous building trust with local communities in a mid or long-term period.

An inconsistency among the interested actors interviewed for the study was also observed about when the issue of violent extremism was first raised. Local actors had different opinions about when this issue first become publicly known among the wider community in Pogradec. Some argued that this issue first became publicly known five to six years ago around the time of the Arab Spring, while others argued that they only became aware of the issue around one to two years ago. This can help to explain why many actors are still reluctant and hesitant to reply in face-to-face interviews about the issue. This was evident in the different opinions of the Mufti of Pogradec who stated that he only knew about the issue one to two years ago and institutional representatives and from the local Municipality and the Office of Education who stated that they already knew about the issue almost since the 2012-2013 period. Media reports prove that the issue has being publicised since 2012.¹⁵⁶

The Youth Strategy developed by the Municipality of Pogradec includes a community security component, which is reflected in the periodical meetings for the evaluation of Domestic Violence Referral Mechanism. This mechanism has been in place in the Municipality of Pogradec since 2009 and has also raised awareness about some cases linked to violent extremism. The most important challenges it has faced is the exchange of information and finding a common approach of all involved actors through a better sharing of information.

The main challenge to countering violent extremism among young people in Pogradec is effective inter-institutional cooperation. Although there have been some cooperation between local government actors, religious community leaders, police and the local Prosecutor's Office, it has mainly been formal in nature. In most cases it did not result in concrete initiatives and cooperation with activities and projects in the field, particularly in the more isolated and rural areas where violent extremism has been more present.¹⁵⁹ There have also been difficulties regarding the collaboration between local and central government which has mainly been due to the lack of coordination and financing. This is also reflected in the relations between local government and Offices of Education when it comes to proposing, coordinating or undertaking common initiatives to fight religious radicalisation issues among youth.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁴ Interviews with institutional actors revealed that responsible units at the Municipality of Pogradec are: Directorate for Youth, Culture, Sports and Tourism, Project Directorate and Directorate of Economic Assistance and Social Support.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Mr Arjan Merolli, Head of Project Directorate, Municipality of Pogradec.

¹⁵⁶ As results by an article of "Panorama" about the locality of Rrëmenj in Pogradec: www.panorama.com.al/salafizmi-ne-shqiperi-a-mund-te-gjallerohet-ekstremizmi-fetar-te-ne/ (last accessed 2 July 2017).

¹⁵⁷ For more information see: www.punetebrendshme.gov.al/al/k-k-a-t/aktivitete-te-njesise-antitrafik/mekanizmi-kombetar-i-referimit-implementim-efektiv-ne-nivel-lokal (last accessed 2 July 2017)

¹⁵⁸ Different institutions use different forms of data gathering. Interview with Mr Dorian Leka, Director, Directorate of Youth, Culture, Sports and Tourism, Municipality of Pogradec, 6 July 2017.

¹⁵⁹ There have been two meetings organised by local government on violent extremism during 2016-2017. Another meeting was organised by the local religious leaders with the participation of representative from US Embassy in Tirana and AMC (followed by some activities with young individuals in some of the rural areas). Another meeting was organised by the CSO "Unë Gruaja" on issues of religious radicalism. Interviews with Mr Dorian Leka, ibid. and Mr Arjan Ferolli, ibid. 6 July 2017.

¹⁶⁰ There is a total lack of investments for the more vulnerable rural areas of Pogradec, affected by religious radicalism and violent extremism, especially in the deep rural areas of Mokër, Çërravë and Buçimas/Starorë. Interview with the Head of Çërrava Administrative Unit. 7 July 2017.

Another institutional obstacle when dealing with this issue in the deep rural areas of Pogradec was the delay in electing village representatives. This is closely connected to the challenges encountered during the implementation of the new law for territorial reform. This caused a series of difficulties in reaching out and reporting issues and problems, including those related to violent extremism to local government. This situation is further aggravated by the fact that none of those people who were interviewed knew about the Local Public Safety Councils model. These councils are a very important soft-security and all-inclusive mechanism, which were foreseen in the new law, and already established in some municipalities dealing with the same issue.

Pogradec File

- I. Activities reported:
- 1. Municipality of Pogradec

Two meetings were held in 2016-2017:

- i) First meeting with wide participation of regional institutions
- ii) Second meeting with civil society

Meetings served as a starting point for common initiatives to fight violent extremism. They were not followed by any regional or local CVE initiative.

2. Directorate of Youth, Culture, Sports and Tourism

One local activity (National Pride) with wide youth participation from the two public high schools in Pogradec: visit to important cultural sights

3. Local TV

One local debate on violent extremism was broadcast in 2016 with the participation of Muslim, Protestant and Orthodox religious leaders, municipality representatives and other local actors

4. High schools

A series of activities have been undertaken on eliminating violence, but not directly focused on violent extremism

5. Local CSOs

Unë Gruaja has carried out one activity with teachers to raise awareness on the issue

- II. Map of potential local actors and capacities
- 1. Municipality of Pogradec, Directorate for Youth, Culture, Sports and Tourism
- 2. Municipality of Pogradec, Project Office
- 3. Regional law-enforcement agencies (community policing)
- 4. Local Education Office

Three persons

- 5. State Social Service and Local Social Service
- 6. State Employment Service Local Pogradec Office
- 7. National Youth Service Regional Office
- 8. CSOs in Pogradec

Twenty three organisations registered in total. Three active organisations identified: Gruaja Intelektuale; Unë Gruaja; Vëllazëria Rome dhe Egjiptiane.

9. Heads of Local Administrative Units

Thirteen in total, six in Pogradec and seven in the rural areas

4.4. Data Evaluation for the Municipality of Elbasan

4.4.1. Youth opportunities and social inclusion

The analysis of youth opportunities and social inclusion in the broader district of Elbasan does not only includes local institutional capacities, but also the extent to which other civil society actors are engaged in the whole territorial space of the new municipality, established after the territorial reform. With regard to local governmental structure and institutional arrangements, even in the case of Elbasan there is a widespread division of responsibilities to implement activities, initiatives and youth projects among a number of directorates, such as the Directorate for Educational Policies, the Directorate for Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Sports and the Art Centre. This decentralised institutional approach is also used when dealing with religious issues. As of now there is no focal point or municipality structure exclusively engaged with either religious issues or with violent extremism.

The annual budget of the Municipality of Elbasan in 2017 included an annual grant of about 42,000,000 ALL (approximately €334,000) for the Youth and Sports Programme. Considering that the overwhelming majority of this budget goes to sport activities, it is unclear the exact amount allocated for youth activities. This is compounded by the lack of a youth directorate or a local youth strategy in the municipality which are able to address the challenges youth face, including those related to isolation, marginalisation and lack of opportunities, all of which are recognised as underlying causes and drivers for violent extremism.

In the wider Elbasan area there are a considerable number of civil society actors and organisations. There are nearly 30 active CSOs of which 10 organisations are linked to religious issues. The majority of these CSOs are focused on a range of youth issues and topics, and are promoting youth activities, with particular focus on preventing violent extremism among youth. Albania FM, a radio station mostly targeting the local Muslim community with socio-cultural and informative programmes, also exists in Elbasan.

As the findings of the focus groups showed that some of these CSOs have extended their recent activities into the rural areas of the district and are organising "Open Days", debates and other awareness campaigns or meetings with local youth. In 2015 in Përrenjas, for instance, during some meetings between CSOs and local high school students, the issue of the lack of employment opportunities was raised. This gap was being rapidly filled by the expansion of anonymous and unlicensed so-called "religious institutions", housed in rented apartments throughout this small town. The same situation was also observed in Cërrik during the same period. In the same period.

To preventing the diffusion of religious radicalism among youth requires specialised knowledge to identify behavioural changes in youth, such as self-isolation, lack of tolerance and drastic discourse changes. This knowledge should be transferred to frontline civil society actors, working at grass-root level, as well as to education employees who deal with youth on a daily basis.

¹⁶¹ This budget line had a drastic decrease as compared to 2016, while prior to 2016 youth activities are not presented separately in the municipality's budget (2008-2015). According to official data from Elbasan Municipality. See www.elbasani.gov.al/sq-al/Bashkia/Pages/Buxheti.aspx (last accessed 4 August 2017)

¹⁶² See www.elbasani.gov.al/sq-al/Qyteti/Pages/ojf.aspx (last accessed 4 August 2017)

¹⁶³ For example in the Administrative Units of Bradashesh, Labinot-Fushë and Labinot-Mal. Elbasan focus group findings, 10 July 2017.

¹⁶⁴ This information is based on the focus group held in Elbasan on 10 July 2017.

4.4.2. Education system

There are a large number of pre-university education institutions in the District of Elbasan. According to the Regional Education Directorate for Elbasan (RED Elbasan) there are 33 high schools with a total student population of nearly 10,000. 165 According to the 2011 Census only 29.9% of the population in the Municipality of Elbasan had completed their upper-secondary education and 10.8% had a university or post-university level degree. The average illiteracy rate for this district is 3.5%. 166

Based on the "Schools as Community Centres" initiative the RED Elbasan has a work-plan which specifies the aims, standards, actions and implementing actors over the long-term period and encourages schools to engage in afterschool activities and extend their duties to reach for local communities.¹⁶⁷ The main goals of this initiative include:

- ensuring youth social, emotional and health wellbeing
- community engagement and development
- inclusiveness and respect for diversity
- common decision-making
- increasing opportunities for exchanging experiences and best practices among all the involved schools
- engagement of civil society actors

The "Schools as Community Centres" initiative indicates the non-governmental partner organisations that will be part in it. It specifies the schools, up to 16 high schools and secondary schools, which are part of the initiative, not only in the city of Elbasan, but also in Belsh, Cërrik, Kosovë, Labinot, Shalës and Shushicë. This study was unable to identify any indicators or footprints in place to measure the success rate and practical implementation of the initiative. Nevertheless the designated goals are very important as direct and indirect tools when facing violent extremism, especially since they contribute to the creation of bridges with local communities. They also work as an important form of inclusiveness of other actors, such as CSOs.

Between 2013 and 2017 a series of projects were carried out in high schools and upper secondary schools in the District of Elbasan and covered topics such as the "safe use of internet" or "online e-twinning" with other schools in Albania or abroad. Addressing these topics contribute indirectly in efforts to prevent youth radicalisation by raising awareness among youth about the safe use of internet or by building bridges between young people in the urban and rural areas of the country, and contributing to reducing the social isolation of young people in these areas. The sustainable long-term solution to violent extremism is to include young people in various activities and to promote religious harmony and co-existence among them.

¹⁶⁵ From which 16 high schools (12 public and four private), three professional schools, two public social-cultural schools and 12 joined high schools (11 public and one private). The latest data belong to the 2014-2015 academic year. www.darelbasan.edu.al/index.php/statistika/664-raport-statistikor-per-fillimin-e-vitit-shkollor-2014-2015 (last accessed 12 July 2017)

¹⁶⁶ Data are only available from national 2011 Census. See for more: www.instat.gov.al/al/census/census-2011/t%C3%AB-dh%C3%ABnat-sipas-gargeve.aspx (last accessed 7 July 2017)

¹⁶⁷ The detailed plan can be found at the RED Elbasan webpage www.app.box.com/s/0oq3vg91wvjouida597h (last accessed 6 July 2017)

¹⁶⁸ See www.app.box.com/s/dw385f2jrgzwd7m9xdqs (last accessed 6 July 2017).

¹⁶⁹ See www.darelbasan.edu.al/index.php/projekte?start=10 (last accessed 6 July 2017).

During the last two and half years a series of activities have been organised by local CSOs in some of the schools in Elbasan. These activities have focused on promoting religious harmony, raising awareness among young students about the risks of violent extremism as well as organising social and cultural events in collaboration with schools and RED Elbasan.¹⁷⁰

An important part of the religious education of the Muslim youth in Elbasan is played by the local Madrasah "Liria", who operate under the supervision of AMC.¹⁷¹

4.4.3. Economic underdevelopment and unemployment

According to official statistics the overall unemployment rate for the district of Elbasan is 32.1% and the rate of youth unemployment for the 15-29 age group is considerably higher at 54.6%.¹⁷² However considering the high level of informality in the labour market and the inaccuracy of data especially for deep rural areas of this district, the unemployment rate is likely to be significantly higher. According to the latest World Bank data the district of Elbasan is one of the top three districts with the highest level of extreme poverty in Albania.¹⁷³ During the past few years the high levels of unemployment, the lack of investment and opportunities and a series of other difficulties linked to the economic development of these mostly agricultural and very isolated areas of the district, has contributed to increase the number of individuals living in extreme poverty. In addition these areas have a significant majority Muslim population. Among young Muslims poverty and the lack of proper religious education have accelerated the number of those embracing radical ideologies.

Data pertinent to radicalised individuals in the district of Elbasan reveal a number of individuals who had embraced extremism during the last couple of years were mostly concentrated in rural and isolated areas such as Mollas.¹⁷⁴ Linking this to these individuals' low levels of education and the nearly total lack of religious education in these areas, enables a better understanding of the increase of extremist groups in the deep rural areas of Elbasan.¹⁷⁵ This long-term trend indicates the failure of policies to stimulate economic development and address poverty, as one important driver for the increased presence of violent extremism and ideological mercenarism.¹⁷⁶

There is a lack of employment programmes in Elbasan specifically targeting young people despite the existence of a recently approved employment strategy and action plan for the Municipality and the creation of local employment office. Youth employability is a particularly pressing issue in the rural areas of Elbasan. This is especially so following the territorial reform, which reorganised the district, expanded its geographical territory and increased the population to 210,000 – a figure that has been constantly increasing during the past 5 years.¹⁷⁷

The study was unable to find any local employment programmes targeting young people or investing in youth throughout the entire Municipality of Elbasan. Enabling young people to enter the labour

¹⁷⁰ Data available from the focus group held for this purpose in Elbasan on 10 July 2017.

¹⁷¹ See www.medresejacerrik.com (28/08/2017)

¹⁷² See INSTAT data available at: www.instatgis.gov.al/#!/l/prefectures/population/prefpop1 (last accessed 10 July 2017).

¹⁷³ According to this report the municipalities of Durrës, Elbasan, Kamza and Tirana had the highest rate of poverty, as compared to the average rate of Albania's population. World Bank Group & INSTAT. "Profili i Varfërisë dhe Pabarazisë në Shqipëri" (eng. "Profile of Poverty and Inequality in Albania") (2016), p. 15.

¹⁷⁴ Data available from the focus group held for this purpose in Elbasan on 10 July 2017.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Mr Agim Duka, Mufti of Elbasan, 10 July 2017.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Mr Indrit Abdijaj, Elbasan, 10 July 2017.

¹⁷⁷ According to the most up-to-date data of the Municipality of Elbasan. www.elbasani.gov.al/sq-al/Qyteti/Pages/levizjademografike.aspx (last accessed 4 August 2017).

market, or creating specifically designated programmes to aid their reintegration in the labour market, for example through so-called "smart specialisations", might increase their employment opportunities.

4.4.4. Local governance and community safety

Although local actors and stakeholders in Elbasan are aware of the risk from violent extremism, they do not perceive it as a threat compared to other local challenges, such as poverty, unemployment and corruption.¹⁷⁸ The Municipality of Elbasan has only recently starting to deal with the issue of violent extremism after some cases involving individuals from the district of Elbasan who had participated in the conflicts in Middle East became known to the public.

Local representatives intensified their joint efforts only after the Albanian Government approved the National Strategy for the Fight against Violent Extremism in 2016.¹⁷⁹ Local representatives stated that there had not been any studies on violent extremism in the district of Elbasan, including its surroundings and rural areas, which explored the causes and drivers of this phenomenon. Such studies might help to build upon sound local strategies against it.¹⁸⁰

Apart from widespread poverty, another difficulty to countering violent extremism rests in the fact that it has occurred in areas where the institutional presence is partial or totally lacking. After the territorial and administrative reform the newly formed municipalities had to change their approach, bringing their previous experience in the management of urban areas to deal with the challenges in many rural areas.

Regarding community safety, since October 2016 the Municipality of Elbasan, with support from the OSCE Presence in Albania, has been pioneering a new initiative in communitarian security by establishing a Local Safety Council (LSC). The LSC is a consultative mechanism for local security issues, it collaborates with the police and other security institutions on a range of issues including violent extremism. It meets every two months and is composed of central and local institutions. It is chaired by the Mayor of Elbasan and also includes the Chair of the Local Council, the Director of Police for Elbasan District, the Chair of the District Court and the Regional Director of the State Social Service as well as representatives from local civil society including from religious communities, ethnic minorities, youth organisations, local media and the business community. The LSC has held two meetings, since it was established, and it has dealt with among other issues with steps to prevent violent extremism, strengthening community security and collaboration with civil society actors.¹⁸²

Although a wide range of local institutional measures, especially after 2016, testify to a high local sensibility to this phenomenon there was a lack of attention during previous periods, especially from 1990 to 2000, when first signs of violent extremism became apparent. Local representatives acknowledge that the issue has only become part of the local policy-making agenda after the approval of the national strategy against violent extremism.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁸ This conclusion is based on the interviews and focus group findings from Elbasan.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Mr Ervin Saraçi, Deputy Mayor, Municipality of Elbasan, 10 July 2017.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Mr Ervin Saraçi, 10 July 2017.

¹⁸¹ Decision No. 121, date 24/10/2016 of the Municipality Council of Elbasan. Local Safety Council bases its activities on the Law No. 139/2015 "For the Local Self-Governance", Article 29/1; on the Law No. 108/2014 "For the State Police", Articles 11/3/d and 78/2; and on the "National Strategy for the Fight against Violent Extremism and the Action Plan". Also see the Statute on the Constitution, Responsibilities and Functioning of the Local Safety Council, Elbasan Municipality.

¹⁸² Interview with Mr Ervin Saraçi, Deputy Mayor, Municipality of Elbasan. 10 July 2017.

¹⁸³ Interview with Mr Ervin Saraçi, 10 July 2017.

Recently the Municipality of Elbasan signed a Collaboration Agreement with CSOs. This is a strategic document that enables collaboration between them, with special emphasis on the promotion of youth initiatives, monitoring the respect for human rights, fight against corruption and religious issues including violent extremism.¹⁸⁴ This increased collaboration between civil society and local governmental institutions in Elbasan might serve as an incentive for CSOs to start to behave as "agents of changes", working to identify early signs of violent extremism in isolated areas where institutional presence is lacking.

Elbasan File

I. Activities reported

1. Mendimi: Online daily newspaper

This project, based on an informative website with articles on violent extremism, mostly targets young people. Its main goal is to raise awareness on this topic and clearly separate religion from extremism and terrorism

2. Centre for Inter-Religious Collaboration

An activity was organised in 2016 with the Alexander Xhuvani University in Elbasan which included an open discussion on inter-faith dialogue, raising awareness on issues of violent extremism

3. Muslim Intellectual Forum

A series of activities have been organised including:

- i. study with 100 students of the Alexander Xhuvani University about violent extremism. The findings were disseminated at the start of the 2017-2018 academic year. Preliminary findings show a remarkable lack of religious knowledge, prompting students to identify as radicals all those that publicly claim to be Muslim believers (or because of their external look)
- ii. training with local imams on the issue
- iii. training workshop with Muslim women in 2016 about the issue, since they are very isolated but hold an important position in their families

4. High Schools

Open Days in a number of high schools in Elbasan, Cërrik and Përrenjas. Discussions and awareness raising campaigns on religious radicalism, violent extremism and moderate religious doctrines

5. Institution of Mufti in Elbasan

In collaboration with AMC and the US Embassy in Tirana, has organised a series of activities against religious radicalism and violent extremism in Elbasan, Belsh and Cërrik. Youth initiatives have been their main focus. Part of these activities has also been training sessions and workshop with local imams on issues of radicalism, extremism and communication

6. Peace March

This activity is organised every year in Elbasan to promote inter-religious dialogue and peaceful coexistence, with the participation of religious leaders, local representative, civil society and the wider local communities

¹⁸⁴ See www.elbasani.gov.al/sq-al/Lajmet/Pages/oshc.aspx (last accessed 4 July 2017).

7. Tjetër Vision

It undertook a three month project in 2015 with the Institute for Democracy and Mediation on religious radicalism and violent extremism which aimed to strengthen religious co-existence and harmony. It specifically targeted the high school in Përrenjas

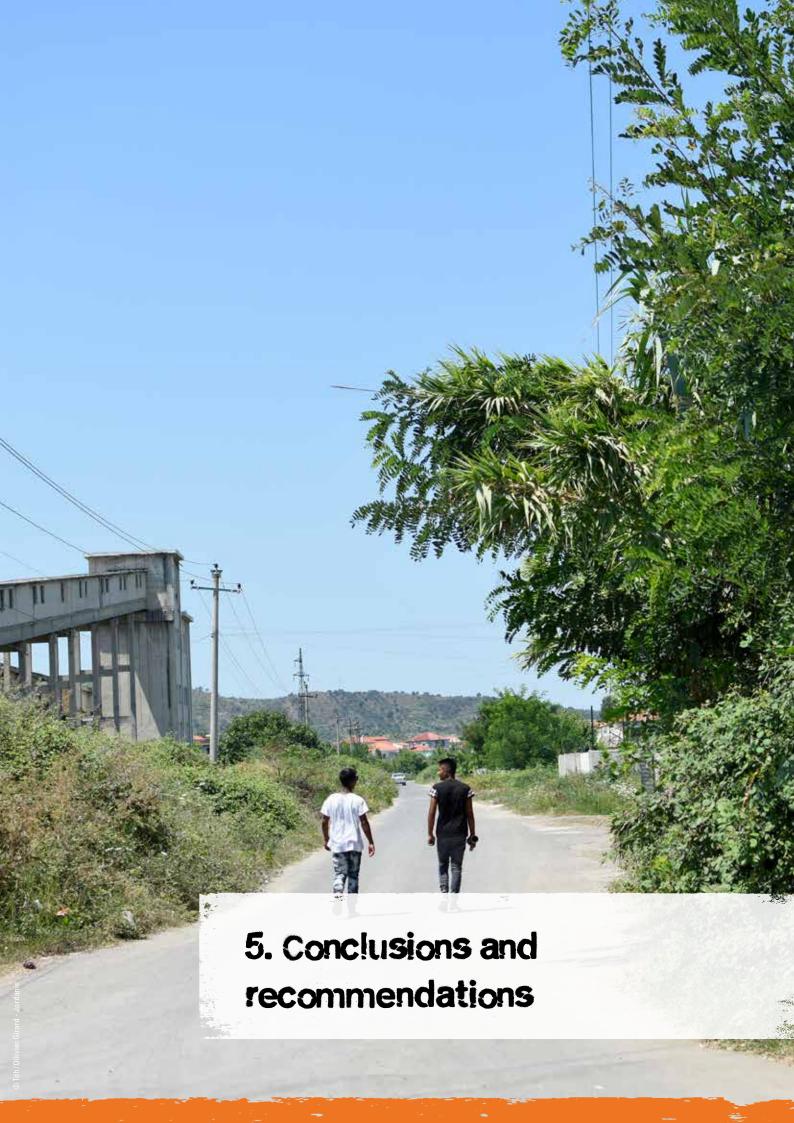
8. Albania FM Radio

It has undertaken a series of activities against violent extremism and religious radicalism. Since June 2017 it has launched some radio-spots promoting religious harmony and against any kind of extremism. It has also launched a series of radio debates about the risks of violent extremism

9. Youth Camp

The Centre for Inter-Religious Collaboration and the Institute for Democracy and Mediation organised the 2016 Youth Camp in Saranda for young participants from all religious groups and universities. Participants were engaged in a series of educational activities for the duration of the youth camp

- II. Map of potential local actors and capacities
- 1. Municipality of Elbasan
- 2. Regional Education Directorate of Elbasan
- 3. Regional law-enforcement agencies (community policing)
- 4. State Social Service and Local Social Service
- 5. State Employment Service Local Pogradec Office
- 6. National Youth Service Regional Office
- 7. CSOs in Elbasan
 - i. Albania FM
 - ii. Centre for Inter-Religious Collaboration
 - iii. Mendimi Newspaper
 - iv. Muslim Intellectual Forum, Elbasan
 - v. Tjetër Vizion
 - vi. World Vision, Elbasan



5.1. Conclusions

5.1.1. Youth opportunities and social inclusion

Young people in the four target areas of this study face a series of challenges, linked to the lack of youth opportunities and social inclusion, low levels of education, high rates of unemployment and poverty and low levels of religious education.

From an institutional viewpoint, the Municipality of Tirana has established a number of structures linked to youth activities and inclusion opportunities which are supported by network of other institutional actors. The Youth Directorate which focuses exclusively on youth activities is in place. The municipality also operates the TEN multifunctional youth centre which has a year-long calendar of youth and social activities. Youth related institutional structures are also in place in the Municipality of Pogradec with the Directorate for Youth, Culture, Tourism and Sports which has a broader remit. In Elbasan the responsibilities to implement activities, initiatives and youth projects is divided among a series of directorates, including the Directorate for Educational Policies, the Directorate for Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Sports and the Art Centre. In Kamza the study was unable to find any local structures dedicated to youth and social inclusion activities.

It is important to note that there is limited financial capacity to support youth activities and social inclusion at local level. Dedicated local annual budgets for youth activities are low in general compared to the overall budget of these local institutions. They fluctuate from 10 million ALL (approximately €79,000) in the Municipality of Tirana, to 2.3 million ALL (approximately €18,000) in the Municipality Pogradec. There are no dedicated budgets for youth activities in either the Municipalities of Kamza or Elbasan.¹85

The lack of dedicated youth structures at local level, especially in the Municipalities of Elbasan and Kamza and to a lesser degree in the Municipality of Pogradec, has also resulted in a lack of youth strategies and action plans. However the Municipality of Tirana is expected to launch a Local Youth Action Plan for the upcoming period from 2018 to 2020. The study was unable to find any strategies for the Municipalities of either Kamza or Elbasan which could contribute to youth social inclusion and an increased participation of youth in local policymaking processes.

However local youth actors have been active in the Municipalities of Elbasan and Tirana and have concluded agreements and memorandums which aim to raise their voice in local decision-making processes. Such efforts were not found to be evident in either the Municipalities of Kamza or Pogradec, indicating either the:

- i) inability of youth-oriented CSOs to coordinate their efforts and promote their interests at local level
- ii) scarcity of youth CSOs active in these areas or
- iii) lack of political will to make these local youth CSOs part of local decision-making processes

¹⁸⁵ These are the dedicated youth budgets and other activities for 2016-2017. In the case of Elbasan, there is a dedicated yearly budget for "youth and sports", but the overwhelming majority of the grant goes to sport activities.

¹⁸⁶ In the case of Pogradec, while there is a local youth strategy in place, it was not possible to assess it, as it was not provided by the respective directorate, and it was not available online.

5.1.2. Education system

Education is another helpful component to assess youth capacities at local level. Data analysis from the four targeted areas revealed a rate of pre-university education participation which was above the national average. The illiteracy rate in the Municipality of Pogradec is the same as the national average and the illiteracy rate in the Municipalities of Tirana and Kamza is below the national average. The Municipality of Elbasan has a concerning illiteracy rate of 3.5% which is above the national level.

The "School as Community Centres" model is in place in all four targeted municipalities, but is only being implemented in a limited number of schools. Implementation has been limited in the Municipalities of Tirana and Kamza are mainly due to the operation of double shifts in many schools, which has limited the time and space for after-school activities by other actors. There is not a lot of awareness regarding the advantages and benefits of such programmes for the local communities. In addition children and young people do have some limited access to psychosocial activities in schools close to urban areas, but these activities need to be extended in the suburban and rural areas of these municipalities.

Some schools in the targeted areas have undertaken initiatives such as "twinning" programmes. These programmes are considered important tools to boost children and youth experiences and contacts outside of their own local community. Some schools, especially those with a long tradition, are actually implementing or have recently taken part in "e-twinning" initiatives with international peers. These initiatives contribute to overcoming geographical and/or social marginalisation of young people and should be promoted in the future.

Teachers and school psychologists in the targeted areas have very low levels of knowledge about the process and perils of violent extremism. Parents, school teachers and psychologists are important frontline actors dealing with youth and their behaviour. The study was unable to identify any targeted interventions to boost their understanding of the issue in either the Municipalities of Kamza or Tirana. In the Municipalities of Pogradec and Elbasan there have been very few activities in this direction which have been focused mainly in central urban areas.

Generally schools in the targeted areas do not have activities for students promoting inter-faith dialogue, inter-religious harmony and peaceful co-existence, except some recent cases of some schools in the Municipality of Pogradec and Elbasan.

5.1.3. Employment opportunities

One of the biggest concerns in all the targeted areas is the increased unemployment rates which are higher amongst young people. With general unemployment rates in these areas being above 30% and youth unemployment rates being more than 50%, these areas offer very limited economic opportunities. The employment outlook in the Municipality of Tirana is only slightly better with its overall unemployment rate at 24% and youth unemployment at 48%.

High levels of unemployment, the lack of investment and opportunities as well as a series of other difficulties linked to economic development, especially the Municipalities of Pogradec, Elbasan and Kamza which each have important agricultural populations, all contribute to the increasing number of individuals living in extreme poverty.

In general none of the targeted municipalities have employment programmes specifically targeting youth. The Directorate for Employment Incentives in the Municipality of Tirana is responsible for employment opportunities and it has two main strategic objectives: social business and business internships. In Tirana employment initiatives targeting youth has been a key focus during the last decade but with limited success.

Vocational training in the Municipality of Tirana is offered through a number of professional courses, based on the National Strategy for Employment and Skills (2014-2020) and administered by the Regional Directorate of Public Professional Education. These training courses target young people and aim to support them to specialise in high demand areas in the labour market. Since these trainings target some of the poorest groups, it is important to increase their participation by lowering the bureaucratic barriers to registration, and increasing support to youth after the completion of the courses as well as coordinating closely with CSOs working with these vulnerable target groups.

In the Municipality of Elbasan, despite the existence of a recently approved local employment strategy and action plan, youth unemployment still remains one of the biggest challenges for institutional actors. The study was unable to identify any local employment strategies or action plans in either the Municipalities of Pogradec or Kamza, despite the existence of Directorates for Employment Incentives in both municipalities.

5.1.4. Local governance and community safety

Local actors and stakeholders in the targeted municipalities lack awareness of how to deal with violent extremism and consequently they are not well-equipped professionally to address these challenges. They do not perceive the issue as much as a threat as compared to other local challenges they face such as poverty, unemployment and corruption.

In addition local actors have not developed a thorough understanding of the National Strategy for Fighting against Violent Extremism and its Action Plan. As a result they were not aware of their duties and responsibilities under this strategy to coordinate with other stakeholders at local and central level. There was awareness of these duties and responsibilities in the Municipalities of Elbasan and Pogradec since efforts were intensified from the beginning of 2016. The level of awareness regarding violent extremism in the Municipality of Kamza remains low.

The Local Safety Council model is a positive example for community safety. It has been established in Elbasan and is a pioneering initiative of communitarian security. The LSC is a consultative mechanism for local security issues which can be used to build cooperation among all relevant institutions on a number of local security issues, including violent extremism.

In 2017 the Municipality of Tirana nominated a focal point for countering violent extremism to coordinate local efforts. This was directly linked the municipality's membership of the global Stronger Cities Network. It is now drafting a local action plan for countering violent extremism, which will be implemented by the General Directorate for Social Services. This action plan will be the first step towards the establishment of a Local Safety Council.

The Municipality of Pogradec adopted a Local Action Plan against Violent Extremism in 2017 which will help to coordinate all local efforts to tackle and prevent violent extremism and include the participation of central and local actors as well with important CSO contribution. The municipalities of Tirana, Elbasan and Kamza all lack such an action plan.

5.2. Recommendations

This study makes the following recommendations:

Youth opportunities and social inclusion

- i. Dedicated youth related structures should be established in the Municipalities of Elbasan and Kamza. Not all local institutions have established specialised youth structures, in charge of youth activities and initiatives. When in place, these structures can have an important impact on preventing the spread of radical and extremist religious ideologies.
- ii. Local institutions should provide more financial support including dedicated budgets for youth and social inclusion activities.
- iii. Local institutions should develop local action plans for youth, and/or local youth strategies, to increase youth participation at local level. These should be complementary and enable local institutions to coordinate their actions with the National Youth Action Plan (2015-2020).
- iv. Participation of youth-oriented CSOs should be increased at local level. Building cooperation and trust between local institutions and youth oriented CSOs working as grass-root "agents of change".

Education

- v. The "Schools as Community Centres" model should be empowered, especially in the suburban and rural areas of the target municipalities. This will boost community-based and CSOs activities and promote cooperation between these actors and local government.
- vi. Schools should be encouraged to participate in twinning and e-twinning programmes with other schools in Albania and abroad. These programmes will help overcome the geographical and/or social isolation and marginalisation of youth.
- vii. School activities to raise awareness about inter-cultural dialogue and promotion of school and youth activities on inter-faith dialogue should be encouraged.
- viii. The capacities of teachers and school psychologists to understand violent extremist behaviour should be improved. This is an important component of early prevention.

Employment opportunities

- ix. Young people should be enabled with skills to enter the labour market or designated programmes specifically for young people to increase their employment opportunities in the future should be developed. A good example is through the so-called "smart specialisations".
- x. Incentives for vocational training, especially for young people from the more isolated areas of the four municipalities, should be provided. These incentives are a way to tackle longterm unemployment and help young people enter the labour market.

Local governance and community safety

- xi. The understanding and capacities of municipal representatives to deal with the issue of violent extremism should be developed. The level of understanding of municipal representatives on the issues of violent extremism remains low and there have been no training programmes targeting this category and improving their understanding and capabilities. Building their capacities would be an important step towards a better understanding of the local challenges and ways to cope with them.
- xii. Local stakeholders should be better informed about their duties and responsibilities under the framework of National Strategy for the Fight against Violent Extremism and its Action Plan.
- xiii. The National Strategy for the Fight against Violent Extremism and its Action Plan should be better coordinated with other strategies, such as the National Youth Action Plan (2015-2020). While National Youth Action Plan does not foresee violent extremism as a challenge, it can serve as the necessary strategic framework, in coordination with National Strategy for the Fight against Violent Extremism and its Action Plan to undertake a series of youth-oriented initiatives.
- xiv. The Local Safety Council model of Elbasan should be developed in the other targeted municipalities. The LSC model should be developed along with a Local Action Plan against Violent Extremism building up on the experience of Pogradec.
- xv. Local institutions should establish local "focal points" on religious issues. These focal points should be in charge of coordinating all institutional activities in this regard, in close cooperation with local civil society actors and with an elevated knowledge on violent extremism. Their trainings should be done in collaboration between specialised civil society actors and central institutions.
- xvi. Central and local institutions should collaborate with the civil society actors as well as with AMC on trainings for children and their parents and online network safety. The lack of coordination between civil society actors and national or international donors has resulted in the overlapping of initiatives and activities in the targeted areas. It is important to include local NGOs and civil society actors in more social and sport activities, designated to bridge the gap of isolation between them and other contexts.



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Madrasa

Elbasan: www.medresejacerrik.com
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